

## **NIGERIA**

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Charles O. Cecil	1962	Experiment in International Living, Ibadan
Charles J. Montrie	1962	International Relations Officer, Washington, DC
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William Beverly Carter, Jr.	1966-1969	Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs, USIS, Lagos
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Benard Lavin	1970-1971	Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Lagos
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W. Garth Thorburn	1973-1977	Agricultural Attaché, Lagos
Donald B. Easum	1974-1979	Ambassador
Harry A. Cahill	1975-1978	Economic Counselor, Lagos
Samuel B. Thomsen	1976-1979	Cultural Attaché, USIS, Lagos
Robert J. Kott	1976-1979	Nigeria Desk Officer, Washington
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Kathryn Clark-Bourne	1977-1979	Political Counselor, Lagos
William C. Harrop	1977-1980	Deputy Director, Bureau of African Affairs, Washington, DC

S. Douglas Martin	1978-1980	Economic/Commercial Counselor, Lagos
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Parker W. Borg	1979-1981	Country Director, West African Affairs, Washington
Theodore A. Boyd	1979-1981	Branch Public Officer, USIS, Kano
Stephen Low	1979-1981	Ambassador
Carl C. Cundiff	1980-1983	Economic Counselor, Lagos
George G.B. Griffin	1981-1984	Commercial Counselor, Lagos
Nicolas Robertson	1981-1984	Office of African Affairs, West Africa, USIA, Washington, DC
Leon Weintraub	1982-1984	Political Officer, Lagos
Christopher E. Goldthwait	1982-1986	Chief, FAS Office, Lagos
Robert Rackmales	1983-1985	Principal Officer, Kaduna
Thomas R. Hutson	1983-1985	Regional Consular Officer, Lagos
Keith L. Wauchope	1984-1986	Deputy Director, Francophone West Africa, Washington
Claudia Anyaso	1984-1986	Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS, Lagos
Joyce E. Leader	1985-1988	Political Officer, Lagos
Princeton Lyman	1986-1989	Ambassador
David Blakemore	1987-1990	Deputy Chief of Mission, Lagos
Nicolas Robertson	1988-1991	Cultural Attaché, USIS, Lagos
Leon Weintraub	1990-1992	Nigeria Desk Officer, Washington
Nicolas Robertson	1991-1993	Office of African Affairs, USIA, Washington, DC

Bruce F. Duncombe	1991-1993	Economic Counselor, Lagos/Abuja
Helen Weinland	1991-1994	Consul General, Kaduna
Tibor Peter Nagy, Jr.	1993-1995	Deputy Chief of Mission, Lagos/Abuja
Claudia Anyaso	1993-1997	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Abuja
Leonard H. Robinson, Jr.	1994-1997	Private Law Practice, Washington, DC
Lawrence Cohen	2000-2002	Economic Counselor, Lagos
Leon Weintraub	2000-2002	Deputy Director, West African Affairs, Washington
Claudia Anyaso	2002-2006	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Abuja

**RUDOLPH AGGREY**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1951-1953)**

*Rudolph Aggrey, whose father came to America from Ghana at the turn of the century, grew up in an international home, with frequent visits from persons from Africa. He entered the USIS in 1951. His career included posts in Nigeria, France, Zaire, Senegal, Gambia, and Romania. He was interviewed by Jack O'Brien on August 13, 1990.*

AGGREY: So when it came time for me to say yes or no to whether I would submit an application for the Foreign Service, as a staff officer, I could find no one to help me say no and everyone to help me say yes. And finally, I opted for Lagos, Nigeria.

*Q: Now you were there from what period to what period?*

AGGREY: From 1951 to 1953, a little over two years on post.

*Q: Now that was a small post in those days. You had more than one title?*

AGGREY: Well, it was a small post. It was a consulate general. It was before independence. It was one of the pioneer USIA posts in Africa. And it had been a one-American post before I arrived. I arrived as a second American, shortly to be joined by a third, who was the secretary. But two months after I arrived, the public affairs officer, who was Brent Null, left to be transferred to Spain. And I was appointed as acting public affairs officer two months after my arrival in my first post. And I held that position for maybe nine months before another public

affairs officer arrived, who was Jack Jones.

**LEWIS D. JUNIOR**  
**Consular Officer**  
**Lagos (1951-1953)**

*Born in Kansas, Lewis Donald Junior entered the Foreign Service in 1950. Mr. Junior's various assignments included Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Mr. Junior was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 21, 1991.*

*Q: Where were you assigned first?*

JUNIOR: Lagos.

*Q: Was it called Nigeria then?*

JUNIOR: It was the Colony of Nigeria. It was on its way toward independence, under British tuition. But the consulate general in Lagos was different, although certainly not unique, in that we reported directly to Washington. We had no embassy, as such, to report to, so it gave it a somewhat different coloration. Not that anybody in Washington cared about that part of the world at the time.

*Q: What was the situation in Lagos and Nigeria at that time?*

JUNIOR: The British were making what then seemed to be, and in retrospect certainly was, a major, valid, honest effort to get out of Nigeria without leaving total chaos behind. The tribal tensions were something that they had to deal with most carefully, and they were trying to develop a governmental structure which would give them some flex and which would absorb a lot of that stress. And of course later on we saw that it didn't quite work, but it almost did, and the structure is still essentially there, accommodating the needs of the north, east and the west.

*Q: What was the staffing like? Who was in charge? How did it operate?*

JUNIOR: We had a staff of five or six Americans, two of whom were secretaries, one an administrative type, two vice consuls, and a consul general. The consul general was named Archie Childs, and he was one of those, happily few, persons who have been brought into the Foreign Service under the so-called Manpower Act. Other than being a nice man, he was totally unqualified for the job, and was succeeded later by another officer, by the name of Keeler, who was a professional, but not a nice man. However, he was certainly more competent than his predecessor, and the consulate general worked better under him.

*Q: What were you doing, you and the consulate?*

JUNIOR: As the junior consular officer, the vice consul, I did almost exclusively consular work:

visas, immigrant, non-immigrant, and passports, and other kinds of citizen services. Later on, I did some economic reporting and some political reporting. There was what we now call a USIS post there, with two officers, the second of whom was Rudy Aggrey.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

JUNIOR: Rudy was, for a good part of our tour there, my roommate, so we worked a lot together, and I benefited when I did political reporting from the fact that he was certainly a persona grata among practically all of the Nigerians in the political world.

I think it's worth noting as a sidelight here that , the American-born son of an of West Africa, a well-known educator here and in West Africa, was assumed by the major politicians, and minor politicians, to be loyal to West Africa and to Nigeria because his name was , and they had a long, hard battle to take on board the fact that his primary loyalties were to the United States. So my recollection is that he spent a good part of his time peddling backwards, trying to get out of their clutches lest he be co-opted into their political schemes.

*Q: Was there much consular work there for Americans? Because there wasn't the Nigerian immigration that later developed, was there?*

JUNIOR: There was a substantial volume of consular work. I'm sure that we didn't do it very efficiently, because these were the times when the Xerox machine didn't exist (there was some kind of a copier), and documentation was difficult; there was a certain amount of fraud that had to be checked out. Communications in the country were very slow, things got lost in the mail and so forth. So it took a number of man-hours just to process a non-immigrant visa. An immigrant visa, of which there were relatively few, took some days, man-hourwise.

*Q: What was the atmosphere like? Here was a country that was getting ready to become independent; and particularly in the earlier days, in interviews I've had with people who served in Africa, they found that they really had very little contact with the black population, and this sort of thing was frowned upon often by the head of the post and certainly by the British colonial authorities. How about this in Nigeria at the time?*

JUNIOR: It's a mixed bag. It would have been very easy to have had minimal contact with the Africans, with the Nigerians, but fortunately the senior vice consul was a man with one or two Foreign Service tours behind him, and he appreciated the fact that we were in a country in transition, and he quietly led us and his superiors to a greater degree of contact with people we identified as being those likely to emerge as leaders.

I can recall one evening when we had... leaders, plus two or three of the newly designated members of the Nigerian Supreme Court to dinner. The British sort of blinked their eyeballs at this, because even they, at that point, hadn't got around to deciding that these people were proper invitees into their parlors, so it was fairly progressive.

*Q: You sort of alluded to it, but what was your feeling towards the interests of the Department of State in whatever one was reporting, or just in an African post in general?*

JUNIOR: Remote. There was very little feedback that I could ascertain from Washington. We had our... whatever they called the CERP requirements at the time.

*Q: That's an economic...*

JUNIOR: Regularly scheduled economic reporting form. And if you didn't get one of your CERP reports in, somebody, a minor bureaucrat in the Commerce Department, would trigger a telegram sort of saying, "Where is it?" But when it came to charting out the British progress in establishing a kind of structure that might survive -- the problems among the various tribal groups and so forth -- I think if we had done half the reporting that we did, Washington would never have minded a bit.

*Q: There were no delegations coming around to see what was going on that you can recall?*

JUNIOR: So far as I can recall, there was never one congressional delegation, and very few others.

*Q: You were in Lagos from 1951 to 1953, and then you went to Palermo.*

JUNIOR: I was fired in Lagos.

*Q: You were fired in Lagos? Was that a RIF, a reduction in force? How did that hit you? What happened?*

JUNIOR: Well, I had been offered a staff job in Nigeria, and I had hoped that since I had done a decent job there, that they would see my sterling merits and offer me something else. But... I had adjusted to that... status, reluctantly, but not without great difficulty.

*Q: Well, I think it was pretty much the pattern, that the RIF went out and then, immediately, cooler heads prevailed, sort of put it back together.*

JUNIOR: I don't like people who have conspiratorial views on how things work, but I had a conspiratorial theory here. I can't fail to believe that the powers that be in Washington, specifically the Department, knew that they had to come up with the numbers to satisfy the Eisenhower pledge about cutting the ranks of government. But I also think that they could not possibly have failed to see that the newly passed Refugee Relief Act would require large numbers of the officers they were concurrently firing. But these guys didn't count, because they were under special legislation and would be "let go" when that expired. So I considered it was a total flimflam.

**HOWARD R. SIMPSON**  
**Information Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1956-1959)**



*Howard R. Simpson was born in 1925 and raised in Alameda, California. In 1943, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and served in the European Theater. He returned to the United States in 1945 and continued his education in California and Paris, France. Mr. Simpson joined the Foreign Service in 1951, where he served in Vietnam, Nigeria, France, and Algeria. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 10, 1994.*

*Q: For the record, these are reports that are written supposedly to tell you what a post is like but often they're also written to help explain why extra money should be paid to people going to them so that there's a built in bias to make it look more difficult than it is.*

SIMPSON: Well the post report on Kathmandu mentioned that you should bring Coleman lanterns and rat traps and as we had a new born child that didn't look too good. And the post report on Nigeria went to great lengths to talk about the Yacht Club and the Island Club and this, that, and the other thing. So anyway we ended up going to Nigeria.

*Q: You were there from '56-'59. What were you doing in Nigeria?*

SIMPSON: Well I was the Information Officer, there was the PAO, the Information Officer and the Cultural Officer and at that time Nigeria was still a British colony so it was a Consulate General in Lagos, and a lot of our work was just seeing that official American press releases and speeches and visitors were exposed to the Nigerian media and met Nigerian leaders in various fields. And we also produced a monthly magazine that was aimed mostly at students on education and culture and things like that. We contributed to what was known as the African newsreel which meant that each post in Africa was tasked to contribute footage on specific subjects that was produced in Washington and sent back to different African posts. And I directed a couple of features on that and traveled a lot. And Nigeria was a difficult country because you could see once again that things were not working out as well as they might. The Muslim north was one thing and you had the southerners, the Yoruba and Ibo, none of them really got along very well. And the army was a big problem because most of the combat troops were Muslims from the north and the officers were Yoruba or Ibo, much better educated and this was the beginning. You could see what might happen when independence came.

*Q: In the first place you came with obviously considerable baggage coming from Vietnam which was a colonial country going down the tubes. I mean how did that...were you sort of looking at things ala Vietnam in a way to begin with to see ...*

SIMPSON: I guess I was, because I'll tell you one thing, we had very grave doubts whether we'd done the right thing in coming back to the government when we got there because of the living. We'd moved 6 times within a one year period. The housing just wasn't available and we occupied these little government flats and had to move out and the heat was very rough. And having a baby was another thing. And there were, almost all the officers at the Consulate were bachelors, so my wife was on her own more or less. But one thing that I immediately noticed when I got there was that I made a lot of good contacts with the British, with the police, with the Army. And it became obvious that if anything was going to hold Nigeria together when independence came,

it would be the Army. Not only because it had the power and the strength but also because it had a cohesiveness that didn't exist among the various tribes. At least these people were serving together and if that could be strengthened then that would be something to build on and we made a great effort. This was probably a fall-out of the Vietnamese experience, doing some films on the army in coordination with the British and the Nigerians and showing these films. Not only to the army but to the general public: the fact that Yorubas, Ibos and Hausas could serve together, that sort of thing. And I think a certain cynicism was there too, watching the British prepare to depart, hating every minute of the thought, and hanging on to some of the old colonial traditions that we at the time, not only thought antiquated but, you know, so outdated.

*Q: What were some of these things?*

SIMPSON: Well there were things like the governor's house, the garden, the parties and all that where certain things were expected and women were suppose to dress in a certain way and you're suppose to arrive well before the time. Of course the Americans, well some of them, rebelled against this sort of thing. Some had a more tolerant attitude, you know, the sun sets on the empire and all that rot and why create a problem and a lot of the British, who could see more of the future, who could see Africa, well it didn't bother them too much and they didn't really take part. But there were some really hard back old colonial types who just didn't want to admit that it was all over.

*Q: When you went out in '56 was it an accepted thing that Nigeria was going to be independent that time as far as the British were concerned. Was there a sort of a time table?*

SIMPSON: Yes there was but I can't remember what it was exactly.

*Q: It was in the cards, did we have a Consul General there at that time? Do you remember who it was? What was sort of the attitude of, before you went out whatever briefing you had there. I mean were we looking upon this as, boy this is going to be fun, boy we're going to be in a sort of new nation and we're an ex-colonial group coming out there or was this: God we're a people sort of absorbed in a colonial atmosphere and whites getting certain perks.*

SIMPSON: I think there was a little of that when we first got there, some of the officers had a strange attitude, a sort of paternal attitude towards the Nigerians and a great sort of, you wouldn't call it an inferiority approach, but the British impressed them very much. Their uniforms and being king of the hill and some Americans, very few, but some, almost became as if they were British themselves. But that began to change after a short period of time and I think a new African specialist group was developing and coming out there and so you had people coming in who realized that a big change was taking place in Africa and we had better be in on the roller coaster as it got started. And that handled right, and I think a lot of these people were very naive, but they thought innocently at the time that Nigeria would be one of the great leaders of Africa, as a symbol of what could be done by Africans.

*Q: But what about contact with the Nigerians themselves how did this work?*

SIMPSON: It was fairly easy. Well particularly if you were working in information because you had the...automatically you immediately had the press contacts, a local Nigerian media. Then the social side, for instance there was still a British club in Ikoyi, it was called the Ikoyi Club and when I first got there you'd never see a black face. It was the usual thing, you know the parasols out on the lawn, and golf, and pints of bitter, all that sort of thing and the men in the bar, the women at tea. The Island Club was a Nigerian club where any non-Nigerian would have to submit his name and have Nigerian sponsors and all that. These were Nigerian lawyers and officers and people in business and that sort of thing. And if you were voted down, or voted against, you were white-balled not black-balled. This was a raucous, fun club because the lunches started at 12 and table after table were loaded with chilled Beck's beer in the large bottles and curry and palm nut stew. This luncheon would go on with all this chatter and discussions and there were a lot of good contacts made with Nigerians there because it was their ground. And of course there was a lot of back and forth between different American and Nigerian homes.

*Q: At that point, there wasn't as there were in some other places where the colonial power...I'm thinking of some of the francophones and some of the British colonies, you get the feeling that until the last minute, it was sort of a white only thing in which only the Americans were included. I mean you were able without a problem to get into the Nigerian...*

SIMPSON: There was no real problem and even the British had a wide spread of Nigerian contacts. Granted most of them were officials, chiefs and Emirs and things like that or officers that worked within the British civil service.

*Q: Were we playing any kind of a role other than just being there. Is their gate ready, I mean were people asking how did you do this or how did you do that, or was it a British system such that they automatically accepting that.*

SIMPSON: I think it certainly didn't come close to anything like Indochina. It was, I think the Nigerians knew what the Americans were going to, or at least they thought we were going to, play a large part in the new Africa and they hoped that they would play a positive role as far as supplying funds and banking setups, new openings in the world market. But the British in Nigeria in particular had already set up a strata of people who were well educated, who knew their way around, had international contacts. And from our side working information, we were helping for instance, I was giving lectures on American journalism that I found very popular because this was a new world to a lot of these people. And it was the British press influence there was very strong and a lot of it was tabloid.

*Q: You were saying that the British press influence was mainly tabloid. I mean the British press as a whole even today is not impressive.*

SIMPSON: No, and therefore a lot of Nigerians, particularly the younger ones starting in the media also knew and saw that they were going to have a lot of new opportunities and they wanted to broaden their knowledge outside the British era. To absorb and see what things were going on in the States whether it be radio or whatever. So there was always an open door as far as we were concerned and we had a lot of people, and of course we sent a lot of people to the States too, you know on study grants and things like that. That was a very popular program there.

*Q: Did you see, was there a venality in what was beginning to be the Nigerian press or was it in other words did you have to sort of buy your way into favorable treatment or...?*

SIMPSON: It wasn't too bad, I think that the British being still there there was enough control of law and police alertness. I'm sure it was going on but we didn't notice it that much. Lagos has always been, you know, you have your Lagos Mafia there, certain people control several businesses plus the newspaper plus the shipping company and all this sort of thing. And usually with a title of chief or whatever. But we didn't get involved, we didn't get into that too much. We were aware but we didn't...

*Q: Was there much interest in the press to what was happening in the United States? I mean this was still a difficult time. I mean we had Little Rock and the integration problems were really beginning to become apparent in the United States at that time.*

SIMPSON: Yeah, well I think that there was a lot of interest and they were trying to understand, it was very difficult for them to understand this. And therefore we made a special effort. We brought a lot of people over, no, not a lot, but we brought people over to try to talk of their own personal experiences, teachers, black leaders, sports figures. We'd discuss the racial problem in the United States and try to explain it so that these people would have a better idea what it was.

But there was that whole new thing of American officials flying into African countries that hadn't existed before. And showing a great deal of interest. And insisting that they be introduced to Africans and not just the usual colonial governor-general and his entourage.

*Q: What about Nkrumah who was just getting cranked up on what had been the Gold Coast and became Ghana. And was taking what we would consider a left-ward not left-ward but basically an anti-American course. Were you feeling any of that and was there concern about that?*

SIMPSON: Ghana was a sort of a model at that time. Everybody was talking about how...well when we wanted to get out of Lagos a little and stay in a decent hotel we'd drive up to Accra. I forget the name of the hotel, we'd stay in one of the hotels there and we'd have conferences and talk a lot with the people at the Embassy. I think a lot of people were saying that this was the new Africa. This was the way it was going to be. It was going to teach a lot of lessons. At that time things hadn't turned sour yet. And excuses, anytime things weren't quite kosher, then excuses were made...like you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs and all this sort of thing. It was seen as sort of a model for Nigeria in the future at that time.

*Q: Were there any other events that we might talk about in Nigeria before we move on?*

SIMPSON: We did this one film on the Nigerian army that I told you about and we traveled to the north and down. Myself and a Nigerian cameraman. And we traveled down through the center and to the south too. And that was interesting because it not only showed me the army but the strength of tribalism. And my contacts with the Nigerian colonial police also showed me the realities of juju and witchcraft and how important it is in that culture. This is something, this is interesting, because the new breed of American Foreign Service types coming out were all for

Africa. Africa could do no wrong and this was going to be a great new experiment. They didn't want to hear about the dark side you see, and as far as I was concerned they were doing the Africans a disservice when they acted like that. Because they were denying reality and as I say, juju doesn't have to be a negative thing but it has to be understood you know, if you're going to understand people. And a lot of incidences, not a lot, but simple things; like a cook that suddenly went to pieces and we finally found out that there was a bee following him everywhere he went, and this was because he thought a spell had been put out by so-and-so. And he wouldn't ride his bike anymore as he was sure that this bee was waiting for him outside and you know little things like that. And a friend of mine who was driving, one of our officers, was driving cross-country quite a ways and I told him to check in with me. Because there were a lot of road accidents with trucks driving like crazy down the middle of those roads, check in with me before the evening. And he went through an area known for a lot of ritual murders. They'd found 50 bodies without heads. And so he calls in real late that night and he was practically out of breath and I ask him what's the matter. And he relates this story. He came to this place and there was this car parked. And his driver stopped driving and said that's a ghost car. He told him don't be silly. All right just go, let's just go to where we're going. So they start out and he puts on the brake again and across the road there was a torso and intestines and what not, sort of spread across like that, an arm or whatever. And so I said what did you do then? And he said, oh I just got behind the wheel myself and drove like hell, drove out of there and I said, well, you did the right thing. And he said, what do you think? I said, who knows, but it sounds to me like a warning, like they don't want someone in the area or something like that. It certainly wasn't an auto accident. And he was one of the officers who criticized me, like oh you're being too hard. He didn't want to believe that this sort of thing went on.

**STEPHEN PATTERSON BELCHER**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1957-1963)**

*Stephen Patterson Belcher was born in 1916. He worked for the Civil Affairs Division of the U.S. Army and then the State Department before USIS was created. His assignments included Cairo, Paris, Tanzania and Lagos. He was interviewed by Jack O'Brien on September 29, 1988.*

BELCHER: When I arrived in Lagos in '57, I believe the Consulate General noted about 200 Americans arriving in the course of a year. With the move toward independence, this increased, until by the end of my tour, just about every plane had two or three Americans with suitcases full of money to dole out in this great, promising country of Nigeria, the bell-weather country of Black Africa (and its most populous), with the greatest hope for democracy because its tribes had learned to live with one another.

It was a perfectly wonderful post. Within about two weeks, I was on a first-name basis with almost everyone who counted. We used to have invitations for two or three parties a night. We'd be doing the highlife dance at Sunday brunches and then go on to lunches with dancing, and

continue in the evening. It was hard keeping awake at the desk during office hours, but the nightlife was exciting and productive. Also it was furiously interracial - determined it was going to make a good go of respecting other races - European, Middle Eastern, Asian or American. There was a drinking society called the Island Club which was a marvel of interracial harmony and good times. Oh, sometimes it was a little rough. Prime Minister MacMillan was visiting once and as he was going through the pool room, he accidentally nudged the elbow of a pool-player, who all but knocked him down. They didn't pay much attention to protocol. They did their own thing, their own way. But they were proud and on the move! It was a great country! And they were so grateful for any help offered or hand held out in friendship!

Back in Washington, they learned about this. When I wound up, I wanted to go back for a second tour to see it into independence in October, but there was a policy that white men couldn't survive two consecutive tours in Black Africa. Black Americans could, but not white. So I was to be replaced by someone who outranked me and USIS Lagos within one month of my leaving had twelve Americans assigned to it and the Branch posts were to become two-man posts. I had wanted the USIS posture to be that independence was not going to be like moving from night into day, but it was going to be Nigerians assuming responsibility for their own destiny. They were going to have to make their own decisions without reliance on outsiders.

But of course, those advisors and foundation representatives, with money kept coming. The money we threw at them was not very good for the Nigerians. Pretty soon there was graft of appalling proportions at the highest level and baksheesh was a way of life at the lowest. Nigerian relations with the U.S. soured. And as we know, there were a series of assassinations of fine men, and then the Biafran war arose, fought over tribal issues and access to money.

**SAMUEL CLIFFORD ADAMS, JR.**  
**Chief Education Advisor, USAID**  
**Lagos (1958-1060)**

*Ambassador Samuel Clifford Adams, Jr. was born in Houston, Texas in 1920. He received his Bachelor's Degree from Fisk University in 1945, his Master's in 1947, and his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1952. He served in the US Army from 1944 to 1946. His postings include Saigon, Phnom Penh, London, Lagos, Bamako, and Rabat, with an Ambassadorship to Niger. He was interviewed by William J. Cunningham on February 2, 2000.*

ADAMS: I went to Nigeria, and that was very interesting because I was the only one that the British government would agree to assign there.

*Q: Is that so?*

ADAMS: Yes. I don't remember exactly what it was but all I know is that in Nigeria I used to travel all over the place even then. I am sorry I am so confused by it. It's just been so long.

*Q: It's been a long session.*

ADAMS: No, no, it was just a long time ago.

*Q: Well, it was a long time ago, too.*

ADAMS: There should be some accounts of all the stuff.

*Q: Well, you were the chief education advisor to the AID mission in Nigeria from 1958 to 1960.*

ADAMS: Yes, he was. I know it was a very difficult thing, trying to get the people even in Great Britain to agree, because I had to have approval of London to get assigned to Nigeria.

*Q: You say it was difficult?*

ADAMS: It was not for me.

*Q: Why not for you? The U.S. was having difficulty getting people there because, at that time, it was still quite some time until Nigeria's independence. The British held on in Nigeria for a long time.*

ADAMS: On the day that I left Nigeria, all the things we were supposed to do, we had done. We had arranged I don't know how many contracts. We made this university arrangement, this special thing, that I think led to the petroleum exploitation in Nigeria.

*Q: That was in Biafra.*

ADAMS: Yes. All of those things, I mean, were things to which we were linked in some kind of way.

*Q: When you went there, was it a very large mission, or was the U.S. mission just a few people? We had a consulate general in Lagos at that time.*

ADAMS: Yes, and we also had an AID person.

*Q: Were you attached to him?*

ADAMS: Yes, but I was the one who traveled to the Cameroons, the Ivory Coast, and Liberia.

*Q: Of course, you had French so you could go to the francophone areas as well as all of Nigeria.*

ADAMS: These were assignments. I wasn't just going for fun.

*Q: Yes, of course.*

ADAMS: I don't know exactly what was the reason why, for example, I went to Liberia. I don't

know what we were doing in Liberia but for some reason I was up there at the time when there were members of the U.S. Congress doing something. It was that kind of stuff. I got exposure to the Ivory Coast, too. What's the man's name who used to be head of the Congo?

*Q: Do you mean Mobutu?*

ADAMS: Yes, I knew him personally.

*Q: You knew Mobutu? Really! Let's see, 1960 was the independence of the Congo, I believe. The Belgians left. Did you ever meet Patrice Lumumba?*

ADAMS: Who ever was there, I must have met him.

*Q: Yes, but you did know Mobutu?*

ADAMS: Sure. He used to come to Washington.

*Q: Oh, yes, he came many times. Lagos was more or less the base of operations for developing U.S. relations with most of West Africa in those days, and you traveled from there.*

ADAMS: Yes, but my main responsibility was initially in the confines of Nigeria. That was the time that they wanted to have independence occur. We needed to have a certain number of university contracts established and all kinds of stuff.

*Q: After Nigeria, you were made director of the AID mission in Morocco from 1962 to 1964.*

**ULRIC HAYNES, JR.**  
**Assistant to the Regional Director for West Africa, Ford Foundation**  
**New York (1960-1961)**

*Ambassador Haynes was born and raised in New York City and educated at Amherst College and the Yale University Law School. Before serving as US Ambassador to Algeria from 1977 to 1981, he worked with the United Nations in Geneva, the Ford Foundation in Nigeria and Tunisia, the State Department and the National Security Council in Washington, D.C. After his ambassadorship, Mr. Haynes continued to be heavily involved in business and academia. The Ambassador was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2011.*

*Q: How was the Ford Foundation? What was that job in?*

HAYNES: I was the assistant to the regional director for West Africa, of their foundation development program. And they were doing work that was very similar to the United Nations Development Program. They were helping, in Nigeria, for example, the Nigerians to draft their constitution. And the Ford Foundation brought over some leading American jurists to help them



draft their constitution.

*Q: Well, I would have thought the Nigerians would have been more susceptible to a real constitution than some of the others. Is that true, or not?*

HAYNES: They were. Initially it worked pretty well; but, subsequent governments have been so plagued with corruption that the constitution has become almost irrelevant in Nigeria.

*Q: Well, then did you -- when you were with Harriman, were you with the State Department or were you sort of seconded from the Ford --*

HAYNES: I was seconded from the Ford Foundation.

*Q: Well, was there the debate at that time in the State Department about whether we'd recognize all embassies in all these countries? At one point we sent Lloyd Henderson on a tour of the area. I'm not sure whether this was maybe under Eisenhower.*

HAYNES: No. By this time, the decision had been made that each of these independent countries was to have an American embassy.

*Q: Yes. Some of the embassies we put up to begin with were really sort of storefronts. I mean it took a while to develop sort of an embassy infrastructure in the area.*

HAYNES: Well, it happened pretty rapidly. Because of Land-Lease, we were able to acquire some magnificent pieces of property in the former French colonies and British colonies for American embassy residences. They were really quite grand. And I know when I -- I'm jumping way ahead, but when I was ambassador in Algeria, the American embassy residence in Algeria is really a, a magnificent Moorish style palace dating back to the mid-19th century. And we acquired that property through Land-Lease moneys that were owed to us by France. That was pretty much the pattern throughout Africa. So in terms of the physical premises, the American embassies were quite grand and were choice pieces of property. In terms of staff and staffing those embassies, it's very interesting, and it's something that I continue to be very upset about with the State Department. There was a very conscious area to staff these embassies at the lower level, not at the ambassadorial level at that time, with African American Foreign Service officers. And that pattern exists to this day. It has been elevated to the point where most of the current and, and recent past American ambassadors to Africa have been African American. This comes from a stupid, misguided belief that "it takes one to know one." This practice forgets that we African Americans are Americans first, culturally, and know little or nothing first hand about the continent of our ancestral origin.

*Q: Yeah. And I assume that as with somebody of Italian background going to Italy, they're not received, you know?*

HAYNES: That's right! You're absolutely right. I'll give you an example. In certain parts of Africa, when -- well, particularly in Nigeria, it perplexed me how Africans accepted as their own some former British colonial officers who had, as it were, gone native, learned the language,

some of them even adopting tribal dress. I was perplexed because they were more warmly received than I was! And it suddenly dawned on me that what I thought was terribly important, and what my fellow Americans thought was very important -- that is, the color of one's skin -- was not of primary importance to Africans. What was important was the language you spoke, the culture you represented, did you eat like they did, did you dress like they did, did you practice their form of religion. That was far more important to them than the color of one's skin, and it remains true today. I have listened to -- I've watched Henry Lewis Gates, the African American scholar from Harvard, I've watched his public broadcasting television shows about Africa. And even he seems to be surprised when he refers to the African leaders that he's interviewing as brother. They look at him with shock, because to them he's not a brother. First of all, he doesn't -- he doesn't even look like them! Most of us African Americans are people of mixed race and obviously so to Africans. And by the time they realize you don't speak their language and you don't have -- you don't eat their food and you don't have their religion, I mean, brotherhood is something that's, that's not, not in the -- or in the forefront of their minds.

*Q: No, we, we --*

HAYNES: By the way, the State Department is still following this pattern. There is a disproportionate number of African American Foreign Service officers and ambassadors serving in Africa and in the Caribbean. I notice this too when we're sending a Chinese American or someone of Chinese American ancestry to China especially when that person does not speak fluent Mandarin. You cannot expect them to have a leg up just because they look Chinese. The department has a lot to learn. For example, there is only one American diplomat who I can recall who has served in a major European nation as an American ambassador, and that's Terence Todman, who was ambassador to Spain and ambassador to --

*Q: Denmark.*

HAYNES: Denmark, and also to Argentina, an important country. But in this day and age when we have an African American president, we haven't yet got one, not one African American ambassador (and never have had) in Britain, France, Germany, you name it. We did have one in East Germany. David Bolen way back in the Kennedy/Johnson area, as I recall. We had one in Romania. That was O. Rudolph Aggrey.

*Q: Well, we -- well --*

HAYNES: And of course we had one in Finland.

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: The former head of --

*Q: USIA.*

HAYNES: USIA, yeah. The journalist, Carl Rowan.

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: But I mean in this day and age? Not one African American career Foreign Service Officer or appointee is worthy of serving in France or Germany or England or any other major European post? What about it guys? Get off it. I am very, very upset with the State Department, and I'm very surprised that neither Barack Obama nor Hillary Clinton has been able to do anything about this matter.

*Q: So often the secretaries of state get so -- I mean they have so many things on their plate --*

HAYNES: Exactly.

*Q: -- that the, the personnel going to various posts doesn't rank very high in their priorities.*

HAYNES: This -- this was brought back -- I hate to use the expression. This was brought back in spades to Dean Rusk, when he was secretary of state, and his daughter married an African American classmate of hers.

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: And I'll never forget, the ambassador from South Africa apparently made some private remarks that were pretty disparaging about this inter-racial marriage. And Rusk met with him privately and dressed him down and told him, first of all, it was none of his business and second of all, we didn't follow the same apartheid policies that South Africa did. But the State Department has not been a very welcoming place for African Americans to make a career.

*Q: Well, later --*

HAYNES: I'm sorry, I'm -- I'm approaching scrupulously chronologically, but --

*Q: No, I appreciate it and I do want to get your judgment on these policies. With the Ford Foundation, were you concentrated on a particular country?*

HAYNES: Well, the foundation had offices all around the developing world. They had an office in Cairo for the Middle East, they had an office in New Delhi for Asia, an office I believe in Buenos Aires for Latin America.

*Q: Well, now during the Ford Foundation time when you weren't accompanying Harriman, what were you doing?*

HAYNES: I was in charge of the regional administration for West Africa. That was my main function as assistant to the director of the West African Office.

*Q: Did you find yourself concentrating more on a country or several countries than on others?*

HAYNES: Yes, the foundation constantly did more in the English speaking -- the former British

colonies.

*Q: Well, did you find that you were a competitor with the British in this area, or was it cooperative?*

HAYNES: Oddly enough, there was more cooperation with the former colonial powers than there was with USAID, for example. It seemed to be a feeling in USAID that we were poaching on their territory.

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*Q: How about the Nigeria? Had there been a growing divide between the Muslim and the sort of Christian anonymous side or was that seen to be working well?*

HAYNES: Initially that was working well. The prime minister at the time (subsequently assassinated) was a very distinguished northerner. Tafawa Balewa was his name. And the governor general of Nigeria was Nnamdi Azikiwe, who had been one of the founders of the independence movement in Nigeria. So the reigns of government were very carefully divided to avoid tribal conflict and religious conflict. Such is not the case today. Nigeria's an absolute mess.

**VERNON C. JOHNSON**  
**Agricultural Officer**  
**Lagos (1960-1962)**

*Dr. Vernon C. Johnson was born in Mississippi in 1918. He graduated from Southern University in 1948 and later from the University of Wisconsin in 1954. He served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946. Working for ICA and AID, he was posted to various countries including India, Nigeria, Uganda, and Tanzania. He was interviewed April 12, 1994 by W. Haven North.*

JOHNSON: When I first went to Nigeria, there was a Food and Agricultural Officer but no director. I went in early 1960, before independence. Later a Mission Director came and the Mission began to be staffed. When the Kennedy Administration came to power, Nigeria and Brazil were the two countries in the world that were selected as special cases; money was earmarked in advance. The Mission knew exactly how much money it was to receive-a five year commitment of \$225 million. This ignited a scramble for projects.

My own position was unclear but I was told to assist the Food & Agricultural Officer. About a year later, I went to the Western Region of Nigeria to handle the agricultural work there. The country was divided into regions; thus we established a sub-mission in the North, one in the East, and one in the West. Each regional entity developed its own development package. The Mission grew very rapidly; I think by 1964-65, it was considered the largest Mission in the world approaching 500 working people including contract personnel-university contracts, contracts for technical schools, and hundreds of direct hire people. AID's presence was pronounced

throughout the country.

It is difficult to measure how much benefit came from this. As in India, we helped to establish agricultural universities. We went back to evaluate the universities a few years ago in 1988, and, while they were not functioning as productively as they might, the universities were still there; they were still being financed; they were still trying to generate agricultural research and carry on other university functions. On the other hand, it is clear that when AID phases out with a cut-off of funds and imported commodities, most projects deteriorate. Thus, we found old vehicle graveyards, abandoned laboratories, and frustration among faculty members..

*Q: What about the technical assistance apart from the university technical assistance; there was large program in that work?*

JOHNSON: Yes, there were technical assistance projects everywhere: in crops, education-every kind of school that could be assisted in Nigeria was assisted: elementary education, secondary education, college education, technical schools-all of this. There was a considerable health program where we gave assistance to rural clinics and hospitals; and to different elements of health; training and that kind of thing.

In terms of impact, if scale in terms of numbers meant anything, then AID should have come through with flying colors. And as I said, there are considerable elements of AID's presence there that remained, particularly in training and educational institutions of the country. There are hundreds, literally thousands of Nigerians who received training in the U.S., who are very bright people. The oil syndrome that came later tended to blot out real thinking about development because for a few years everybody thought that oil would do it all. Thus Nigeria had the handicap of an oil mentality... and, of course, it has gone through a number of political upheavals including a disastrous civil war. It is just now, I think, trying to straighten itself out.

*Q: How would you characterize the development policy or strategy of the U.S. at that time vis-a-vis Nigeria?*

JOHNSON: I think, the selection of development targets was O.K. For example, we assisted the agricultural universities and research stations. In retrospect, we tried to do too much within a limited time span. But the things that we were doing there were needed; whether or not we approached it right is open to debate. We know for sure that improving an economy on a sustained basis is far more difficult than constructing a building or a bridge. Control cannot be retained. Thus, we greatly underestimated the development problem.

*Q: Give an example apart from the universities?*

JOHNSON: For example, we had scientists at every agricultural research station-in Nigeria as in most other countries agricultural research was managed by the government. And every region had a major agricultural research station: Moor Plantation was the one in the Western Region, for example. We had ten or twelve people there, all scientists helping with agricultural research, trying to develop new varieties, new approaches to production, to cultivation, plant breeding, etc. In the Northern Region in the last few years when I was there-1988-crop production had

advanced significantly. I'm not sure whether it came from the regional research that we assisted, but there was significant research in vegetable production, for example; truck loads were coming from the North to the South; this was not characteristic during my time there. The livestock rather than being trekked down, as had been customary, were being brought down by rail or truck, and there was more emphasis on trying to up-breed livestock; this was one of our big projects there. So we got into many phases of development, and always agricultural training was significant. We had people in agricultural engineering, in agronomy, in soil science. And so it went, throughout the range of agricultural development. And all the time, we had our scientists working closely with the Nigerians.

*Q: How did you find working with the Nigerians?*

JOHNSON: Fine; I think in general Americans have no problems in working with the people they find in these countries. To the extent that problems arose, they were problems of frustration that stemmed from government practices, government operations, government directions, government weaknesses, lack of finance and this kind of thing. They could not do the things that a counterpart government needed to do.

*Q: Explain that a bit?*

JOHNSON: The host countries didn't have the resources. We anticipated, for example, that a host country would make a major contribution to each one of the projects. They were never supposed to be American projects; they were always Nigerian projects but frequently as in Nigeria and later in Tanzania, for example, the budget would be bare just when gasoline was needed to operate the seed farm. What do you do? You either cover some of their responsibilities or the project itself suffers. Also in the counterpart system, we anticipated that the government would always provide people as counterparts; that these people would work with our technicians there; and, perhaps, then come to the U.S. for further training. But, in many cases, the counterparts were so far below the capabilities of the U.S. technician there was not much of an exchange of ideas. Or, in some cases, counterparts who were supposed to be available might never be assigned. The counterpart system was never as helpful or as smooth as it was supposed to be. These are example situations that point out some of the flaws and weaknesses in our assumptions about dispensing economic assistance. And I think this is common to aid efforts almost everywhere: lack of resources, lack of trained people, lack of interest in some of the things that donors think are critical.

*Q: Were we pushing ideas that they weren't enthusiastic about or didn't want?*

JOHNSON: I'm not sure you could say they didn't want them; for example, in a country like Tanzania that I know a great deal about-I was there four or five years- they wanted almost everything but on their terms.

*Q: Let's stay on Nigeria and come back to Tanzania.*

JOHNSON: Okay in Nigeria, I think that for some of the projects there was less enthusiasm than for others. The university projects in Nigeria were granted great enthusiasm even at the top levels

of government such as the Vice-President. The prestige projects had governmental support, but for some other projects that was not necessarily the case. In Western Nigeria, for example, where large farms had been anticipated by the government, there was great support and a call on donors to get involved. We didn't think that these farms had much promise so preferences were evident on both sides.

*Q: By large farms, you mean plantations?*

JOHNSON: Yes, parastatal farms; there were several in the country on the scale of several thousand acres. Those never developed as sound economic enterprises in any of the countries that I recall; and so in Nigeria this was as true there as elsewhere. The government had great interest in highly visible projects and they called on us for assistance. There were some other projects that we preferred, let's say, in agriculture research, especially in the universities; we were trying to instill and install agricultural research within the structure of the universities. That had never been a practice in these countries and, therefore, they never gave it the kind of support that we thought was necessary at that time. Even in India, it took a while for such long maturing projects to reach payoff.

*Q: What about the idea of extension services?*

JOHNSON: The idea of a strong extension service was accepted, but it offered more employment than real support for production.. It was always a government operation from the Ministry of Agriculture and as much a political pay-off as an agricultural activity. Americans were much more prone to a strong extension program as a part of our triangle approach of research, teaching, and extension. Host countries gave support, but it was not with the enthusiasm that most Americans would have preferred.

*Q: And the emphasis on small farmer food production, was that important to the Nigerians?*

JOHNSON: Food production was not a highlight; I think Americans generated more support for research into food production than anybody had done before. For example, in Nigeria there was a cocoa research institute out at Moor Plantation which got most government support money in Western Nigeria. Those kinds of activities were better supported because they were pointed towards cash export crops. The three primary cash crops in Nigeria were: cocoa in the West, palm oil in the East, and peanuts in the North. This is where a great deal of the research funds had gone.

*Q: But why wasn't there much interest in supporting food production?*

JOHNSON: Well, food shortage had not been a significant problem; there had been very little famine in Africa; and there are widely consumed foods from the so-called "hungry crops" which in Africa are root crops: cassava and yams-heavy starchy crops. They were very easy to produce needing very little cultivation and management and very little capital. Though low in nutrition, these crops are ideal since the people are accustomed to them and seemed to prefer starchy foods of this kind. Moreover, being root crops, there were no major weather-related problems as you have in India where grain crops are the principal ones. If there is a prolonged drought in grain

areas, famine may follow. In Nigeria, for example, especially in the South where root crops were the critical crops, drought didn't wipe out the food supply. The colonialists were, therefore, never driven to emphasize food crops.

In Northern Nigeria, there was more of a food problem-but there was no great population pressure at that time, although Nigeria had more people there than any other country on the continent. The primary emphasis was simply not on food production as long as people had basic foods to eat. Thus, food production never worked its way into the financial and technical aspects of development in the country.

*Q: Did you have any impression of U.S. policy towards Nigeria and the role of the Ambassador and the embassy?*

JOHNSON: Of course, when the Kennedy years came and Nigeria was selected as a special case, this was a big plus. It was one of the two countries in the world that the U.S. was focusing on. Our focus turned to deciding on the right projects to finance. The idea was to bring competent people in and move the process along. We built houses for Nigerian and American technicians; we did all the things that were needed to accommodate the inflow of resources which, at that time, were greater, I think, than anything that had happened in Africa before. We were spending about \$45 million a year with a guarantee of \$225 million spread over five years. That covered a lot of project activities at that time. From that perspective I think the Nigerians looked upon us with great favor. We got along well with the several regional governments. Though in Northern Nigeria, the development project priorities change somewhat but, in general, everyone was enthusiastic.

*Q: Did you associate with the Peace Corp in Nigeria at that time?*

JOHNSON: Not a lot; the Peace Corp was just getting started. Sargent Shriver came to Nigeria in 1961 and one of their bigger groups was posted in Nigeria: school teachers and what not. But again the kind of small activities that are customary in the Peace Corp are not long lasting, except as through the training of people. There was little permanence. You can go to a village where a Peace Corp person was posted; the person is remembered, perhaps, 20 years later, but I don't think that you will find much else. Likewise those AID projects that took on similar characteristics also disappeared in the midst of poverty-based disinterest when AID is phased out. I think fewer open ended projects where AID is prepared to stay the course might be more promising in development than many projects that go five years only to phase out. This was the common practice in AID. It did not work to the advantage of the development process.

*Q: That's an important point. A question that I keep thinking about is: was there any significance although not a lasting impact, was there something accomplished during that period of a more short term character?*

JOHNSON: I'm not sure whether there is a measure that will indicate clearly what the level of accomplishment was. They are not things that one can measure well. Let me leave Nigeria for a moment to make this point: some countries of Latin America and the Asian rim were no better off than a lot of other countries twenty years ago. One could not have predicted where these



countries were going. In twenty years, however, they began to produce; their industry began to develop; their agriculture is better than it was ten years ago; they're feeding themselves; they're beginning to export. And thus, perhaps, just holding hands through the "bad" years may have been more beneficial than we imagined at the time.

Where as one may not be able to measure these things in Nigeria, without any doubt the quality of people in the country is far beyond anything we knew in my time there. The numbers of college graduates are indeed impressive-and they have more Nigerians in overseas training than ever before. It is a country that has rushed into the training but the capital needed hasn't caught up. Oil money has made a difference. In any case, the country is more modern; the roads are better; the universities are there; the high schools are better financed now. I think the country has progressed and advanced fairly significantly over time.

*Q: How would you relate that to any U.S. assistance?*

JOHNSON: Some of it can't be related. What you can say is that our emphasis on training was also desired by the Nigerians and supported by them to the extent they could support things. Some of the institutions are still there and functioning. Even the research stations are still going, although they have not advanced as they should. In the North, the Ahmadou Bello University is doing a lot of research. They have taken over all the research in the area. It is a better quality research than was true in the old days when the government was doing it. If you try to get a measure of what percent are better off in a country like this, I don't think you can assess the problem in that way.

*Q: But you are suggesting that U.S. influence through its development programs had a major influence in reorienting the research; more to food production. And generally increasing the numbers in education and agriculture..*

JOHNSON: Yes, extension in the North is now divorced entirely from the government and is affiliated with the university; this is true in other regions though not as well placed as it is in the Northern part of the country.

*Q: Apart from any particular activity such as soil conservation or well drilling or whatever, the influence of the U.S. engagement both in terms of people coming to the States and in Americans going to Nigeria, what other aspects?*

JOHNSON: I did briefly mention that there is a flow of goods over the country; now of course transportation has had a good deal to do with this. But I've seen truck loads of vegetables such as tomatoes coming from the North to South that was not true in our time. So I think commercialization is progressing. In fact, there is an up-beat in tempo of commercialization in the country. Whether or not it goes back to our extension and our agricultural training and this kind of thing, one cannot say with certainty.

*Q: Were we working on agricultural marketing?*

JOHNSON: We did some work on agricultural marketing; we did some work on trying to get

into food production more thoroughly than had been the case in the past. And more food was produced; and more food is being commercialized and flowing over the country. Prices are too high so the markets are imperfect. Meanwhile, there is certainly no doubt that some of the economic mechanisms were overshadowed by oil expectations. There seemed to have been opportunities that were not being pursued in the economy. This partially explains why prices were high.

*Q: After you were in the Western Region you moved to...?*

JOHNSON: I came from Ibadan back to Lagos to serve as acting deputy food and agricultural officer. And at that time Washington needed a person as deputy to the agricultural office in the African Bureau; there was an agricultural division in the Africa Bureau; Fran LeBeau ran it. Rather than keeping the job in Lagos, I had a chance to come back to the States for a time. So I came back and worked here for a couple of years.

**CECIL S. RICHARDSON**  
**Staff Aide**  
**Lagos (1961-1962)**

*Cecil Richardson was born in New York in 1926, and graduated from Queen's College. He served in the US Army from 1944 to 1947, and overseas from 1951 to 1952. Entering the Foreign Service in 1956, he was stationed in Dakar, Saigon, Lagos, Niamey, Paris, Accra, Brussels, Quito, Tehran, Lima, St. Paolo and Bahamas. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 5, 2003*

*Q: Yes, you were there for a year, about a year '61 to '62.*

RICHARDSON: '61 to '62, yes.

*Q: What were you doing there?*

RICHARDSON: I went there as the Ambassador staff aide. Oh, wait, how did I get to Lagos? While I was in Saigon, which obviously I enjoyed hugely, they called for volunteers for the posts that they were opening up in Africa. This was ... I think '60 was the big independence and there was our original plan, what I understand talking to people who have come out from State, was to have embassy in Abidjan and Dakar covering the hinter lands, but we suddenly became interested in accumulating UN votes to keep China out and so we started opening up in all these obscure places and they called for volunteers. So I volunteered, expecting to go to one of the former French territories in the interior of Equatorial Africa or West Africa. They sent me instead to Lagos. That was a bit of a disappointment because I had just come out of two French colonial posts and I figured another was natural. So that was a disappointment but the job was Staff Aide and there wasn't a hell of a lot to do as staff aide. So as I was also, getting to the political section, which at that moment didn't have a heck of a lot to do either, it was just the first year after independence and Joe Bennett was covering it very well.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

RICHARDSON: He went on later to be the Assistant Secretary for Africa. Who?

*Q: We'll pick this up later.*

RICHARDSON: Gosh, I remember Joe Palmer. I went to his funeral or I guess his memorial service several years ago. Oh, and then I doubled when the Consular Officer wasn't there. And it was the only of my 11 or 12 posts that I ever curtailed. There is a story in that, too, later on. I was disappointed, it wasn't a post I enjoyed.

*Q: Well, what was Nigeria like when you were there?*

RICHARDSON: Well, it was the first year after independence, '61. There were still officers in the bush, they had not become completely Nigerianized. I think I would like it even less today than I did then. The traffic was horrendous. The islands that constitute much of Lagos, because it's an island. Lagos island was joined to the mainland with one bridge, Carter Bridge. I didn't enjoy it. I didn't like it and I didn't particularly care for the people. They're pushy, which probably reflects my being American, Americans are pushy too. And there was a conflict, they weren't as accommodating as some other cultures are. Well, let me jump ahead 30 years, I retired in end of June 1991. In September a phone call comes to the house. I'm not home. My wife answers the phone. And it's CEA/EX asking if Mr. Richardson would be interested in going on TDY to Lagos. [Laughter]. It had my wife rolling on the floor with laughter. I went because I was interested in seeing how the place had changed, would have changed in all those years, since the oil money came in. The biggest change was that there were now 3 bridges connecting the islands to the mainland and the traffic was worse than ever.

*Q: The political section, the ambassador are really... There really wasn't much of a political movement at the time. Was it more that people were getting ready, just sorting out things?*

RICHARDSON: The people who had been the notable politicals in the last years of the colonial eras, like Mamadou Bello, the Global Voice of the North, were in charge. There hadn't been yet the military coup when I left, but it did not wait very long. There were no disturbances, there was no public demonstrations and street crime was not a problem.

*Q: What about social life?*

RICHARDSON: Oh, active social life both with Nigerian and the international community. To go back to this question of street crime because I was conscious of the difference having returned what 30 years later, '61-'91. We did things like an Englishman and I made a home movie and we needed a boat for it and there was a stranded fishing boat on a beach by Badugery near the Dahomey boarder. With our wives, we didn't hesitate to go out there and sleep on the beach at night so we would have a full day of sunlight the next day. That would be unthinkable today. After parties a couple of times, we went out, a few of us went out to the beach in Lagos to watch the sun come up. Unthinkable today.

*Q: Well, then. When you curtail. What do they do to you?*

RICHARDSON: I mean I didn't say I'm not going back. See I was interested in getting an assignment back to a French area. I should tell you why I was able to do this. I went on direct transfer from Saigon to Lagos and orders said do not pass by the United States, do not take leave. I'd been in Saigon almost two years. I was staff aid to the Ambassador those last 9 or 10 months, working 7 days a week. Wound up working even more those last weeks, sending off one ambassador, breaking in the new ambassador's aide, and organizing the reception for the Vice President. I was tired and Ambassador Durbrow suggested, "Since you won't take leave en route, why don't you sail to Lagos by ship?" So I went on the S.S. Cambodge from Saigon to Marseilles, three weeks. That was the best leave I've ever had of my life. I arrived in France refreshed. I left my wife behind in Saigon. She was flying, paralleling my trip, but sightseeing. The agency had said there was no room and I would have to share the cabin. Well, I ended up not having to share the cabin, but anyway she was content to parallel. So I was in Marseilles, full of energy, refreshed, relaxed, let's go let's do things, I said. My wife had gotten deadly ill in India and she was all washed out so our conditions were just the reverse of what they had been when I kissed her good-bye in Saigon.

Okay, so having gone to Lagos on a direct transfer, I was eligible for home leave after a year. I came back here to Washington and I went around trying to promote an assignment in the Maghreb, that is to say Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco. I was particularly keen on Algeria because flying one night out of Kano, Nigeria. We went across the Sahara and passed over Algiers in the dark, and its great harbor. There are roads around the lights like three strings of pearls, that's what they look like, the lights, the streetlights around the harbor. I fell in love with the place from 10,000 feet up. [Laughter]. And I wanted to get there. Well, PER remembered that I was interested in it. So I was home, at my in-laws and the phone rings and Jeff Frederick is on the phone and he said Cy, we remembered that you wanted a French-speaking post. Well, I hadn't asked for a French-speaking post, I asked for something in the Maghreb. Well, he had conveniently forgot that and he said so I think you'll be pleased to know you don't have to go back to Lagos, you're going to Niamey, which was not the Maghreb. Okay so I had shipped my Volkswagen from Saigon to Lagos and had driven it there for a year. I went back to Lagos, got in my car, and drove to Niamey.

**DAVID SHEAR**  
**Program Analyst, USAID**  
**Lagos (1961-1963)**

*David Shear was born in New York City in 1932 and graduated from NYU and Harvard. He served in AID projects in Nigeria, Tanzania and Senegal. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.*

*Q: This was in the IDI program?*

SHEAR: Yes, the International Development Intern program. I spent the next six months in Washington undergoing orientation.

*Q: What kind of an orientation did you get?*

SHEAR: Very mixed. Six months was really much too long for the substance of what we were being exposed to. We were sat down in some offices and told to read the manual orders, which we did. I also spent time in the AID message center, I remember, where we were told to look at the mail coming down the chute that was the heart, the nerve center of AID. Nevertheless, it was extremely useful to see the whole range of AID offices, to talk to people at all levels, and then to spend about three months on the Nigeria Desk. That was during the summer of 1961. I was scheduled to go to Nigeria in November, and our first child, Elizabeth, was born in October.

And to Nigeria I did go. Vince Brown was the desk officer; he was excellent at it, and he gave me a good opportunity to become active on the desk. I also found, to my pleasure, that working on the desk combined a lot of - I can't use the word talents, but perhaps competencies - I had developed. I liked to follow things through. I liked to write. I liked interacting with others. I liked to make presentations and to brief people. The desk was to me the nexus of interesting people absorbed in examining Nigeria as the recipient of a multi-year commitment. Arnold Rifkin, a figure at MIT, was one of the external principals in getting approval for that \$225 million U.S. commitment to Nigeria's first five-year plan. During that time I had the opportunity to meet with AID Director Joel Bernstein, and also with Haven North, who was the program officer.

*Q: What was your impression of AID at that time?*

SHEAR: I thought AID was probably establishing too many constraints on itself to be effective. It was really a fairly incoherent idea, but one which became increasingly clear after I got on the ground.

*Q: What do you mean by that?*

SHEAR: Except for providing capital goods through loans, AID's initial internal policies, if not regulations, kept it from providing any substantial commodities on a grant basis. As a result, it was very difficult to have the desired impact in terms of designing projects. The guidelines clearly allowed us to provide commodities that were essentially demonstration, but we could not cover recurring costs. Grants funded technical assistance in the classical sense, and training. We didn't have a full appreciation then of the importance of sustaining these efforts through some form of direct or indirect budgetary support which could be commodities, and not necessarily cash. Also, the 12-month program cycle - geared to the U.S. fiscal year - was too short, which bothered me for years in AID. It was very difficult to get technicians especially to focus on longer term planning and to look at root core problems. Even at that early time, these were not very clear ideas, but they troubled me.

*Q: Did you have an impression of a specific AID development policy or strategy at that time, or was it just "anything goes?"*

SHEAR: It's interesting that you mention that, because I find it hard to call up a development strategy other than to focus on certain sectors of interest (not in the way we think of it now. We had sectors of interest: education, agriculture and, to a more limited degree, health. But there was no clear strategic framework in which we were operating. And that may have been one of the problems that we had in Nigeria. Thinking back, the USAID Nigeria Mission probably had about as competent a group of people as I ever worked with in AID. Certainly this applies to Joel Bernstein and Bill Kontos in the director's office, and Haven North and others in the program office. In the education sector we had some quite outstanding people, but we were somewhat weaker in the agricultural area. There was at the same time a major, almost psychologically imposed, constraint. And linked to that was the belief that we as Americans could solve Africa's problems quickly; that they were essentially managerial and technical constraints. We had very little appreciation of the underlying political circumstances in Africa - cultural ones, which were such fundamental constraints. And we also didn't understand quite clearly - and one can't be too critical of this - the different characteristics of the physical environment in Africa; how fundamentally different those soils were in responding to various inputs for agriculture production. And we certainly didn't understand the depth of the ethnic differences that existed in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. We came in during the flush of Kennedy optimism, thinking that some money but mostly the technical application of our managerial skills could solve a lot of things. Conventional wisdom said that all Africa really needed was to be unleashed from the shackles of colonialism and it would just take off.

*Q: We'll go into that in more detail later. What was the situation in Nigeria when you arrived?*

SHEAR: Things were already quite tense. It was about six months after I arrived that Chief Awolowo, who was one of the leaders in Western Nigeria and a Yoruba political leader, was arrested. It was found that he had been receiving both money and arms from Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. Early on the situation turned into a constitutional crisis of great proportions, and during that time the riots began in Lagos. I remember coming out of the Ministry for Finance one day after getting a project agreement signed, only to hear loud thumping on the roof of the car. We had inadvertently driven into the middle of a rock-throwing melee between some rioters and the police, and had to drive straight across a park area in order to escape it. It was clear that there was a lot more tension than we had been initially aware of. I also think that the AID mission was somewhat insulated from Nigeria's political realities, and this may have been a fault of how the U.S. mission was run. It didn't seem to me, at least at my level, that we were sufficiently informed. It may have been different at more senior levels, but certainly we who were working in areas like project planning felt we did not have access to very good political information.

At the same time, the environment within the society of Nigeria was really fascinating. I also taught an evening course at the USIS on American history. My students were a really terrific group of young Nigerians who were terribly interested in American history, consumed with America. So there was a lot of pro-Americanism, and the firm belief that if Nigeria could emulate the American model rather than the British model, they could advance more rapidly.

*Q: What was your position and assigned function?*

SHEAR: My position was a very modest one; I was an intern and then program analyst. My main

function was really budget analysis and management. I was given some specific projects to oversee, but for the most part I worked on the overall structure of the budget, working with Don Miller, the assistant program officer, drafting agreements and seeing that they were executed within the constraints of our budget year. During that time I had an opportunity to travel to just about every corner of Nigeria (an enormously important experience for me. It gave me an appreciation of its diverse culture, which was wonderfully stimulating. Being in Nigeria, I described at that time, was like working in a "black Europe." The cultural differences were profound, and the background of the North quite different from the East or the Middle Belt, each having very strong values and the sense of their own historical culture. The art (both traditional and contemporary) was also very exciting. My wife, being an artist, gave us insights and access to elements of Nigeria's society that we might not have otherwise realized. Also, I thought that Ambassador Joe Palmer was exceptionally good. He displayed a very welcoming personality. I have no idea how effective were his analytical skills or even his ultimate diplomatic skills, but in terms of making those of us fairly low down in seniority at the mission feel welcome, both he and his wife were superb. During that time there was a visit by the first American astronauts to Nigeria, under USIS auspices. My wife Barbara helped mount the USIS exhibition. There was a general feeling that this was a new age dawning for both the United States and Africa, and as a consequence, a strong sense of optimism on the part of many people at fairly modest levels in the Nigerian society.

*Q: You talked about a Rivkin Initiative. What was the United States trying to do vis-(a-vis) Nigeria? What was our world policy or strategy?*

SHEAR: The strategy was, if I understood it, to show very strong support for Nigeria's five-year plan, and by doing so to show strong support for Balewa, the first President. He was a northerner and a Muslim in a country that was largely Muslim but with very large Christian and animist populations, so it was thought that he stood a good chance of keeping these diverse groups together. It was also an early opportunity to demonstrate a major transfer of U.S. resources to a newly independent African country. Under the old Development Loan Fund a major loan had been made to the Akosombo Dam in Ghana, just a year before Nigeria's independence. Ghana had achieved independence four years earlier. The Akosombo Dam was the first manifestation under the Kennedy Administration of strong support for African independence and related economic development. A major political message was clear: the United States was prepared to continue solidly promoting the decolonization of Africa and the birth of independent states.

*Q: What about the program itself? What were we doing?*

SHEAR: The program was essentially focused, and I think in many ways correctly so, on education and training. We helped to begin new faculties. I recall the University of Nigeria at Nsukka in the Eastern Region; the University of Lagos (education); Ahmadou Bello University at Kaduna (agriculture, veterinary medicine, and public administration) in the Northern Region; and the University of Ife (agriculture) in the Western Region. The emphasis on education was well placed. A very large participant training program to send Nigerians to the United States was initiated, and I think that also proved to be extremely successful. We were much less successful in the area of agricultural development. In my role as a budget analyst (and indirectly an allocator of funds), time and time again I ran up against projects that sought to transfer American

technology and practices to the agricultural sector to Nigeria, many forms of which I considered inappropriate.

*Q: Do you remember any examples?*

SHEAR: Yes, I do. There is a project in Bornu Province, in the north, for drilling bore hole wells for cattle. There is an artesian aquifer underneath the province, much of which is fed by underground water systems from Lake Chad, which it borders. The boreholes were placed without any due regard for the environmental impact, the movement of cattle or the number of animals that would be using them. In effect, we created a substantial desert north of Maiduguri and between it and Lake Chad.

*Q: How so?*

SHEAR: There was no system for controlling the cattle coming in. The bore holes, because they were artesian, just kept flowing, and so there was no way of controlling the flow of water to move the cattle from borehole to borehole, and no way of shutting off the water. As a result, multitudes of cattle flooded the area, and disrupted their normal patterns of migration and grazing. Because of the year-round availability of water, the foliage and grasslands were soon destroyed.

There were also attempts to bring in very large agricultural machinery, although I did manage to block a number of those initiatives. They just could not have been maintained in those environments. There was no local ability to service them. Many of the American agriculturalists who came to Nigeria had no tropical experience whatsoever, much less African experience.

We were more successful in the area of education because we were dealing with more traditional forms - business education, public administration and management, and the general administration of a university and its finances, students and faculty. There, obviously, a lot of our ideas (particularly those linked to land grant universities) were more appropriate. It was also significant that although we had the Development Loan Fund, I recall only one loan made in the two years I was in Nigeria (\$3 million for rails for the railroad in a northern part of the country). This, despite the fact that a very large amount of money was potentially available. It was difficult to frame a loan under the existing regulations. The Nigerians, probably wisely, did not want to incur a lot of debt, but it was probably less than the tangle of onerous and lengthy loan procedures.

One of the things that struck me then about Nigeria, in addition to the vitality and energy of its people, particularly in the south, was the agricultural richness of the country. One would travel in the southern regions of the country and see enormous forests, huge rubber plantations and extensive evidence of palm oil production. Nigeria at the time was the world's largest exporter of palm oil. The country later became one of the largest importers, if not the largest importer of edible oils in Africa. The whole agricultural sector, it seemed, could be the basis for a great deal of national development. The discovery of oil in Nigeria was in a sense a misfortune, because it really undercut some remarkable people, people like Bukar Shaib, who was the Minister for Agriculture. He later became Lake Chad Basin Commissioner. Even when I was there, just the



beginning influx of oil probably began to undercut commitment to the honest delivery of public services. Corruption, which had been clearly an element in society, became more rampant and much more accepted. But I just saw the beginnings of that.

**JOSEPH N. GREENE, JR.**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Lagos (1961-1963)**

*Joseph N. Greene, Jr. was born in 1920 in New York. Mr. Greene's assignments included Canada, Germany, Egypt, and Nigeria. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 12, 1993.*

*Q: How did you get the job in Lagos? You were there from 1961-63.*

GREENE: Along about October or November you begin to wonder what is going to happen next. Eventually I got a communication from Jim Penfield who was directing personnel in the Bureau of African Affairs. He said Joe Palmer had agreed to my coming to Lagos as his deputy. He remembered me from when I was working for Mr. Dulles. A lot of people were in the department when I worked for Mr. Dulles and I learned when you are wielding somebody else's power, they remember both of you.

*Q: You were in Lagos from 1961 to 1963. What was the political situation in Nigeria at that time?*

GREENE: Nigeria had become independent in 1960 and Joe Palmer had been transferred there as ambassador. He was one of the few Foreign Service Officers with extensive experience in Africa. Ghana had been independent for a year or two. The thought was that Nigeria was an African nation much more populated and more richly endowed with natural resources. It had to be good, we had to be sure it worked. We (meaning the Kennedy administration) wanted to be all the help we could. We had a significant AID mission. One of our discussions was about the American contribution to economic and social development of Nigeria.

I had never been to Africa. I had never been exposed to this before. I can remember helping the AID people compose ringing recommendations of why we should put a hundred million dollars a year into economic assistance as evidence of our faith in their success.

The Peace Corps came along and I recall Washington decided Nigeria had to have a big Peace Corps. They needed all the help we could give them, Washington thought. Joe Palmer was away when the final instructions came to ask the Nigerians. So I set it up with the Foreign Minister and talked to him for over an hour about the Peace Corps. But it wasn't an easy sell. He wanted racial quotas in our contingent. He felt he needed to be sure that we weren't imposing white people on black people. I replied that the whole point of desegregation in our country was that you don't draw that distinction. I told him if he insisted, he would be setting us back. It eventually sorted itself out. He also wanted to be assured that the people we sent would be qualified in the fields of

endeavor that they were there to help, like raising chickens or teaching English or simple sanitation in the villages.

We had a wide range of a couple hundred Peace Corps Volunteers. They were spread out all over the country. Their first indoctrination almost derailed the whole thing. It was arranged to take place at the University of Ibadan. We all warmly welcomed a plane load of people mostly in their mid 20s and early 30s, full of idealistic zeal. The Nigerian leaders didn't feel they needed so much help but they went along with it; it was hard to tell JFK no. During that training period at the university, Marge Micheltore wrote a postcard home in which she said they were having a great time and were getting use to life among the Nigerians -- some of them even went to the bathroom in the street. She mailed it at the university post office. Well, it found its way into the public domain and the Nigerian press made a lot of it. "We take a bath at home, we do not take a bath in the streets." They totally misunderstood what she was saying, deliberately or otherwise. But very deliberately, they tried to undermine the standing of the whole operation in the minds and hearts of the Nigerians.

I was sent to talk to the president of the university to see if I could calm things down there and learn how that postcard found its way out of the post office and into the newspapers. "Well, she must have dropped it on the way to the post office." I knew whatever else I did I had to get Marge Micheltore out of Ibadan. I put her in a car with my wife Kitty, and the driver, and sent them off to my house in Lagos. Just as they were leaving, an AP correspondent came along and asked if he could have a ride. He didn't know who the young woman in the car was. I told him he could have a ride if he never used the story. He didn't know what I was talking about so he agreed. He got to Lagos full of the story but honored his commitment not to use it until it was all out anyway. This was a real political hot potato and none of the Nigerian government would touch this. Joe Palmer took Marge to see the Governor General, one picture was taken of them together, and that was enough to calm the fire and save the Peace Corps in Nigeria. But Marge had to go home.

*Q: From what you are saying, there seemed to have been a real reluctance on the government's, the media's and everyone else's part about having this program. Was it that they just didn't want a bunch of do-gooder Americans?*

GREENE: It was part of the worldwide syndrome of "Yankee go home." We didn't intend to appear patronizing. But the fact is, the world, particularly in Africa and South Asia, saw the Peace Corps as more likely helping the spirit of the young American generation that was involved in it than helping Nigerians or anybody else. It was a very idealistic thing of President Kennedy and Sargent Shriver. They got a lot of steam behind it here in this country but it never rested terribly well with the recipients until much later when it provided targeted technical assistance.

Another thing Joe Palmer and I worried about was the unity of Nigeria, an important premise for the AID program. Mid way though my time there, came a memorandum from one of the INR specialists on west Africa. He expressed his view that tribalism in West Africa was far from dead. It was bound to again rear its head. In Nigeria there were three main states, Northern, Western and Eastern Nigeria. Each had half a dozen tribes. Palmer submitted that if we were

going to make a durable AID program, we had to figure out how to relate it to the reality of tribal conflict. Speaking only for myself, I came to see later my crystal ball was clouded by our enthusiasm. We wanted to help these people and didn't anticipate whether we could or should. I don't know what we would have done differently. At one point, in agreement with the ambassador, I went up to talk to the prime minister of Northern Nigeria; the Prime Minister of all Nigeria was also a Northerner. I talked about our premise of the unity of Nigeria and granted that the three states each had their own way of looking at local issues. But in the context of a nationality for the whole country, which they inherited from the British, we hoped we were right in premising our policy on continued unity. The Prime Minister was offended by the notion that we would doubt that. It turned out, however, that he was one of the greatest doubters of all. Civil War, as predicted, broke out in the 60s.

Q: *Was he assassinated?*

GREENE: The Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa was unity personified, whether rightly or wrongly. In the end, he was one of the first to get killed when war broke out. The power was in the tribes up north, one had to talk to them.

Q: *Was there opinion in the African Bureau, headed by "Soapie" Williams, that there was an ideological bent to the Peace Corps? Did you find you had to be careful about reporting back to Washington because maybe you saw things not so palatable? After all, the Kennedy people had a big commitment to this program.*

GREENE: I can never remember anywhere shrinking from telling it like I saw it. Sometimes, there and in other places, the staff and ambassador didn't always agree on what to say and how to say it. I didn't have that problem with Joe Palmer.

Remember, "Soapie" Williams, his appointment as Assistant Secretary for Africa was announced at the White House before the Secretary of State was announced. Kennedy wanted to make a showing that we were going to help Africans as part of the new frontier. So, yes, there was an ideological bent to it. But I never thought of myself as an ideologue. I can remember when Mr. Dulles asked me if I would be his Special Assistant. I told him I was honored and would like to try and help, but that he should recall that I was a career Foreign Service Officer, not a political person. My two predecessors had been highly politically motivated and I wanted to be sure he wanted someone who would work with bureaucracy. I don't remember ever fighting the proposition that we ought to be helping the Nigerians.

A couple of episodes may illustrate the extent of anti-American feeling and of my access to the people from my IDC days to help contain it.

There came a day when a mob went through the streets of Lagos, by the American Embassy, and threw rocks and broke all the windows on the street side. Joe was back in Washington trying to sell our program. I was in charge again so I called the Foreign Secretary, the highest civilian -- not the Minister for Foreign Affairs -- Lawrence Anionwu, whom I knew at the IDC. He came over to the embassy and I showed him the destruction. He couldn't believe their people would do that and offered to make it up to us. They were stuck with that kind of anti-American outburst.

We used to spend a lot of time thinking of things for the Information Service to put out to show that we weren't all that bad and wanted to be friends.

*Q: Why did they think we were bad, what was behind it? Was it general leftist business or was it our racial policies which were just beginning to be turned around?*

GREENE: I think it was a spin off of the anti-colonialism. It was difficult not to be tarred with the British brush. We certainly were in favor of Nigeria's independence, and we were on very cordial terms with the British High Commission. Occasionally, we talked privately about what to do. There was a perception in which the tribal conflicts were all part of the backdrop. The way to get at whomever was in charge was to get at the white people, particularly the Americans and British. The Americans were even a bigger target. They had gotten the British out of there for the most part and we were seen as the new colonists. It was vintage rabble rousing.

*Q: Was Nkrumah stirring things up? He was leader of a small country, Ghana, but his ambitions were bigger.*

GREENE: I don't remember feeling the crew in Ghana had much to do with the multi-tribal government in Nigeria. We had information outposts; we had a consulate in Kaduna, and consulates in Enugu and Ibadan and information reading rooms in both places. All that was pretty low key, but not so low that it didn't provide a focus for those who just wanted to embarrass our government. Joe and I traveled around and tried to show the flag. We didn't have big AID projects as we had in India. There was a lot of competition between the tribes in the government.

I learned a bureaucratic lesson while Joe Palmer was in Nigeria but out in the bush and unreachable. The political issue was the news that the Nigerian Ministry of Defense and Army had invited the U.S. Army in Germany to send a team to demonstrate some of their latest anti-tank guns. We hadn't known anything about this invitation, but two or three planes flew in to northern Nigeria loaded with the latest in cannons. They went out in the wide open spaces of northern Nigeria to demonstrate these. Had there not been an accident, the Embassy might never have known about it. As it happened, one gun crew chief had the misfortune of standing up in the driver's seat of his jeep just as the guy on the trigger end of the anti-tank gun mounted behind him pulled the trigger. The round went right through him and he didn't live very long. They couldn't do anything for him but they had an enormous problem on their hands. That was when they thought maybe the Embassy could help. Of course, we didn't have any status of forces agreement, and no one knew they were there. I decided to get the whole business out of there, immediately, back to Germany. That was done within a day. Once they were gone, I called the Foreign Secretary and said we had to square this. Anionwu had never heard of it. The Foreign Minister didn't even know they were there. They tended to take on the embassy and me in the turf battle that ensued between the Foreign and Defense Ministries.

It was an illustration of what the memo from INR was trying to tell us. It also illustrated that the number two has to speak for his boss, even when the boss is in the country. You have to be sure to get it right. Joe Palmer never faulted me on that one. But it is a good lesson for aspiring diplomats to learn. No matter the circumstance, when the ambassador is there, you are working

for him. When he isn't there and you are chargé d'affaires, you do the best you can to keep his philosophy alive and well.

*Q: At this point, we were in the very early days of dealing with African sovereign states. How did you feel the embassy was staffed for that task? It was much before we developed a corps of specialists. Was this a learning experience for us?*

GREENE: I wish I had been more sophisticated to appreciate how we fitted in to their scheme of things. To make sure what we wanted to do was doable. It is very embarrassing if it isn't, as we learned in India and in Nigeria. The young embassy was out to be the best friends the Nigerians had ever had.

**BERNARD FRANCIS COLEMAN**  
**Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1961-1964)**

*Bernard Francis Coleman was born in Washington, DC in 1913. He graduated from West Virginia State College in 1935, served in the US Navy, and worked extensively in public schooling including as principal in schools in Africa. Coleman joined the Foreign Service and served in post primarily in Africa in addition to serving as ambassador-in-residence in the US. Coleman was interviewed by James T. Dandridge, II in 2001.*

COLEMAN: Oh, yes, we got a lot to talk on Joe Palmer. So that's how I got to Nigeria, I left for Nigeria in February, 1961 and we traveled by air, Pan American, stopping in the Canary Islands, Portugal and Guinea and then down the coast to Nigeria, a very uneventful trip because we traveled in the DC 8 at that time.

*Q: Now do you remember who the Director of USIA was then?*

COLEMAN: I think its Edward R. Morrow who is (was) still director there. See, that was my first assignment there in '61, I stayed till '62 and then from '62 to '64 in Nigeria, I mean in Tanzania. Let me get this straight '62 to '64 in Nigeria and from '64 to '66 in Tanzania and Zanzibar where I was expelled in 1966 behind Carlucci.

*Q: Frank Carlucci, I want to get up to there, (but) before I get up there, let's go back to you're a-100 class. Were there any other blacks in you're a-100 class?*

COLEMAN: Not to my knowledge. Leaford Williams was in there. I'm not sure, no, he wasn't in there. Leaford was all the way up in Korea, some place; I mean some place in the Pacific.

*Q: Yes, he was in Seoul*

COLEMAN: Seoul, but I wasn't quite sure, I don't remember, well I don't remember any blacks

being in that class.

*Q: Anyway, he was in the consulate. Were there any other blacks that you remember in USIA that you came across?*

COLEMAN: Rudy Agree. I remember about Rudy, because I approached him about the job. Off hand I don't remember them.

*Q: There weren't that many.*

COLEMAN: Oh no, no, no, it wasn't that many and most of them were all in Africa and I could tell where everybody was when I got there. There was a woman whose gray hair, I can't think her name now.

*Q: You mentioned that you had an earlier interest in Foreign Service and you were interested at that time in getting into State. But, there was no interest from State, if I understood you, there was no interest in State to getting you on board.*

COLEMAN: No, No. They said they had some jobs as chauffeurs and things like that.

*Q: They didn't have anything for Foreign Service Officers?*

COLEMAN: No, no. I may suggest that (the) reason Ralph Bunche left State Department to go to the UN was because the salary was better and a lot more opportunities.

*Q: That was in the early forties when he went over to State.*

COLEMAN: Yes. Was it forty when he went there?

*Q: Right. He was on the US delegation, the delegation to San Francisco on the establishment of the UN later.*

COLEMAN: I remember writing him a letter about a job, and he said I would have to be appointed by the mission or by somebody from the State Department. So I let that go, I didn't save that letter; I should have saved that letter. But I did write to him that I was interested in the Foreign Service. You want something on Ralph Bunche?

*Q: Yes.*

COLEMAN: Ralph Bunche was a cigar smoker from way back. You never saw him without a cigarette and he was a sharp dresser. And he was an associate of Rayford Logan, what's the little man's name, the philosopher...

*Q: Dorsey, I am thinking.*

COLEMAN: You called his name, before. But he was really the brain of that group which was

up in Howard University at that time. So we were all except, Bunche was on the top floor, my office was on the top, Louis was on the top floor, we, three of us were there. And Dyson and the... was across the hall, and, not that Bunche, no what's the man's name, little philosopher who wore glasses... but, any way, I did not meet many black Foreign Service Officers while I was in State, no, I mean in the USIA.

*Q: Did you have any, you mention you wrote Bunche this letter, when you were interested in going into State and he came back and said you needed a nomination. Did you have any other contact with Bunche?*

COLEMAN: No, that's the only thing. I remember talking to him in the hall or his office and asking questions. And I wrote him. He was a very busy man, always on the move.

There is a man in New York that you ought to talk to on Bunche, George Sadler. I know that we were shocked when he died, but he was an inveterate cigarette smoker.

*Q: Well, we've got you in USIA and you came in at the entry level, I'm assuming there was no... well, was there a mid-level entry program?*

COLEMAN: Well, I was in the LR Limited Reserve 4 or 8 I don't know, I think it was 8, LR 8, I think that was.

*Q: As an entry level.*

COLEMAN: Entry level and it paid more than I ever made before. I was making \$8,750 a year so I couldn't turn it down and I wanted to be in Africa, so my first assignment was in Nigeria. And on that mission, there was one other black, Elsie, what's Elsie's name? She was in that mission with me and the young man I replaced was leaving, so there were only two Blacks in that mission and I came in as assistant cultural affairs officer.

The guy they sent in as a cultural affairs officer, he had never been in Africa, he was a GS-15, white. And the day he arrived in Africa, I met him with the station wagon to pick up his baggage and his family. He got on the front seat and said to me before we had gone 50 paces off the airport, "I understand you know a lot of people here." I said, "I know quite a few." He said, "Well, you got to introduce me to everybody you know." I said, "I'm not going to do that. There are 50 million people in Nigeria. You get your own," and he was my boss, so you know we never hit it off after that. I got his picture around here.

My wife, when my wife came (to Nigeria), we immediately took every newspaper that we could possibly find and began to read who was who and how the country was running and what was happening. And so we read the newspaper every morning before I went to work, local newspapers. And, as a result, I knew people on sight and if you believe me that I'm not lying that I could get to the president when (Ambassador) Joe Palmer couldn't get to the president, get to Zeke.

*Q: Now who was Palmer?*

COLEMAN: Joe Palmer was the ambassador who subsequently became director general of the Foreign Service and later became the assistant secretary for African affairs. So I spent four years as a cultural affairs officer and after I left Nigeria and I knew everybody. And I tried to stay but forces above me got me out of there because I was too popular.

*Q: What were the issues, bilateral issues, the major issues between the U.S. and Nigeria when you were there, as a cultural attaché?*

COLEMAN: As what?

*Q: Well, were there any concerns in the area of trade, economics, were there any political problems?*

COLEMAN: No. There did not seem to be any. With the mission you mean?

*Q: Between the U.S. and Nigeria.*

COLEMAN: No, Zeke being an Ibo and a Governor General and a graduate of the Lincoln University.

*Q: For the purpose of the transcription Zeke, the President...*

COLEMAN: Zeke was a Governor General of Nigeria, subsequently he became the first President of Nigeria and we became staunch friends.

*Q: His full name was?*

COLEMAN: Namdi Azikwee. He never came to the United States while he was in office because he was worried about his country and as soon as he stepped out of the country, they had a coup. Now, my wife and I would entertain every New Year's Day at our apartment. The white cap chiefs, the Irish discovered, were the titular heads of all the big families in Nigeria. So I found out who they were and I worked with them. If Joe Palmer had Cozy Cole and a group down there I'd invite them, I'd tell them get a group together and they'd bring a hundred people down there.

*Q: Cozy Cole was the musician, popular musician in those days.*

COLEMAN: Yes, yes, he was a very popular musician. And we had a balloon trick, you know, on their lawn and make balloons and stuff like that. Subsequently, there became a hitch between the ambassador and the PAO, whose name was Swim. And the chief of mission was always the ambassador, okay; I don't care who else is out there, military or anybody else. But the chief of mission is the ambassador, and they were constantly fighting the ambassador.

*Q: The PAO?*



COLEMAN: The PAO.

Now if I heard (about) something that I thought the Ambassador ought to attend, I would have told him, I didn't tell the PAO, because that was for the Mission not the USIA. The Nigerians would not go to their homes. And that's the God's honest truth. I have a big party when everybody shows up. Pete Swim couldn't get em there, the cultural affairs officer; he was dead, dead as a doornail.

And I did most of the entertaining for the Nigerians while I was there, they would come to my house. On New Year's Day, we'd invite them for chops on New Year's Day. And you see them coming down the highway, umbrellas just twirling in the air, twirling, and the drums beating and in marching (into) my compound where I lived in the apartment, and sit down and drink whisky and eat a chops. I got pictures all around here of that. And they would tell me things.

They'd invite me to the club in the middle of the day and I didn't drink any whisky in the middle of the day. And if I was going to the club, I would say "I won't be back," cause you know, I never let the staff say, "he's coming in drunk and did something." So I would go to the club and sometimes there would be a folder, in my name on it, sitting there. And I'd pick it up and go and Xerox everything in it and bring it back, with it (still being closed with) tape. They wanted me to know.

And, there was no place that I wasn't invited. I sat there one night and Asadame (he was the president of the senate) asked me to come to dinner that night. And, along with my wife, I went and we were the first persons there. We got there on time and then the room began to fill up. The chairs go round the room, nothing (is) in the middle of the room. And I looked up, all these politicians came in, and Speaker of the House and people I'd never seen before. And everybody that came in, they'd bring them over and introduce me to them. So, it kind of got hot in the collar, so I said to Asadame, "Prince, I think we ought to leave now." He said, "No, you're fine. You stay here." If CIA or the intelligence could have listened to what went on that night, somebody would have been made. We sat there and listened to them bring K. O. M'Bawie up, who had been expelled from the NCNC. He was thrown out. They brought him back that night and there were big speeches about it and everything. The only person I ever told was the ambassador. I didn't tell the rest of them people; they wouldn't know what to do with it.

Joe Palmer decided that I couldn't work in USIA, so one day he called me and said, "Barney, I'm going to put you, got an office for you in my embassy." And he physically took me out there and put me in the embassy because he didn't set well with USIA.

*Q: USIA was in a separate building,*

COLEMAN: Separate building. But I knew, having spent some time and having studied Africa, I knew there was something that had to be done. The white folks weren't going to do it, and I did it. I made friends with the peanut vendor, and I made friends with the president. I made friends with the taxi cab driver, and I made friends with the, somebody as the economic advisor, because one thing about an African, you never know who you're talking to. The peanut lady may be the cousin to this president. The taxi driver may be the father of somebody down there and you never

know who you're talking to. So, and you want to know how I got back in the State Department.

*Q: Well, before we get you back with Joe Palmer, who pulled you out of USIA, put you in the embassy.*

COLEMAN: Yes.

*Q: What are you doing? Are you special assistant to him?*

COLEMAN: No, no, no, I was just a cultural affairs officer.

*Q: You're still doing...doing?*

COLEMAN: That's right and he liked the way I worked because nobody else was doing anything. The press officers couldn't get anybody to come to their houses for dinner. They didn't know where to look for stuff. I had all the stuff being brought to me.

*Q: What about his political counselor?*

COLEMAN: Jerry Green was his counselor, he was pretty good, the women, they would come to his house for dinner. The embassy was different from USIA, let's say, put it that way. They didn't trust USIA and I got a picture over there; see that picture on the end, that's kid's Coca-Cola. I used to have twist groups on Friday night, they were doing the twist and I made everybody get a Coca-Cola. Those babies drinking Coca-Cola there. So where you want to go from there? Well, I finished my stint in Nigeria and they sent me to Tanzania.

**WILLIAM HAVEN NORTH**  
**Assistant Director of Program, USAID**  
**Lagos (1961-1965)**

*William Haven North was born in 1926. His assignments with USAID included Ethiopia, Ghana Tanzania, and Nigeria. Mr. North was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 18, 1993.*

NORTH: Yes. I was in Washington for only three years. I was asked by the director of the Mission in Nigeria, Joel Bernstein, to come to Nigeria and be the Assistant Director for Program. Nigeria was one of the African countries of major interest to the US at that time. It was the most populous country in Africa and portrayed to visitors a dynamic development situation. It fit into the Kennedy Administration's idea of a positive development situation deserving major support. It was at the time when USAID was being formed to respond to the developing world. He began the Peace Corps at the same time. I arrived in Nigeria in the summer of 1961 (about 9 months after Nigerian independence) and never worked so hard in all my life. We built up a large program very rapidly. I am not sure of this, but my sense is that before Vietnam, it was the largest US program for technical assistance anywhere in the world. Nigerian and Brazil had been

selected by the Kennedy Administration as the two major recipients of U.S. assistance.

One of the key features of the new USAID approach was the adoption of Long Range Assistance Strategies for selected developing countries that had democratic governments, national development plans, and were politically important to the United States. For these countries, USAID was prepared to make long term multi-year commitments of assistance-an unusual break from the pattern of year-by-year commitments. In early 1961, the U.S. agreed to provide a multi year grant of \$225 million for development activities in support of the Nigerian Government's newly adopted national development plan. (See Wolfgang Stopler's book "Planning Without Facts" about his work as advisor to the Nigerian Government on development planning.) This Long Term Assistance grant was a mixed blessing from my experience working with the Government on determining the uses of the funds. We still had to make annual budget submissions as part of the process of obtaining Congressional appropriations. While the grant provided a useful framework for planning our development assistance program, it was a constant bone of contention with the Nigerian officials over what assistance activities should and should not be attributed to the grant-particularly when we put forward ideas for projects they had not envisioned. Generally, we sought to downplay the fact of the long term grant once the initial political impact had been achieved and focus on the projects. It took several years for the full amount to be drawn down and I don't believe anyone ever made a final accounting. My role as Assistant Director for Program was, under the direction of the Mission Director and in close collaboration with heads of the Mission's technical divisions, to lead the program office staff in the preparation of elaborate program strategies linking development goals, program objectives, and project targets in a hierarchical presentation and taking into account the activities of the Government and other donors. I recall one massive submission of some 500 pages of analysis and project detail (in those days project justifications-project papers today though much simpler) were included in the annual budget submission, known as E-1 sheets). I'm not sure anyone in Washington ever read it .

At that time there were only four states (called regions) and the Federal Government-now there are 23 states, I believe. These states were relatively independent in their development activities. As a consequence, the USAID program evolved into, in effect, five separate programs each about the size of a country program in other parts of Africa. This situation caused enormous complications in working out project plans and agreements in those instances where we sought to maintain a national perspective and strengthen national cohesion-one of the program's policy objectives. Each project agreement required, for example, the signatures of the technical and planning ministries in each region and the Federal Government with all the negotiation complexities and obligation deadlines that go with such agreements. Over time as the program evolved we observed the various regional programs and staffs taking on the coloration-becoming local advocates-of their region and the weakening of the national perspective. I recall in 1965 an extended and tension filled debate among the regional program directors, the heads of the technical divisions and myself with the Mission Director on his ideas for decentralizing program operations with essentially four separate USAID Mission programs and a federal country-wide program. We were caught up in the stream of Nigeria's evolution and the tensions of regional separatism that led to the civil war. The four regions with each one combining distinctive and dominant ethnic, economic, and political systems were unmanageable.

The program that we created in a very short space of time-1961-1965- was concentrated in the areas of education and agriculture and several infrastructure projects, private investment promotion and industrial development, and low cost housing finance.

In higher education at the time of Nigeria's independence (1960) there was only one university- the University of Ibadan and two or three post secondary colleges of arts and sciences. Sir Eric Ashby, a prominent British educator and his Commission had just completed its report on higher education that concluded that Nigeria did not require more than three university level institutions.

Out of that report and the interests of Dr Azikiwe, President of Nigeria grew our involvement in the creation of the University of Nigeria in the Eastern Region. Dr. John Hanna, who was President of Michigan State and later became USAID's administrator worked very closely with President Azikiwe in developing the concept of the University of Nigeria much like a land grant type of institution with a continuing education program, a community service orientation, and broad curriculum in contrast with a classical British university. The British Council of Higher Education was also involved in the tripartite planning arrangement. The Nigerians financed most of the buildings, by in large, out of the considerable sums the Eastern Region had from its cocoa earnings. We provided the technical assistance, including for a time the vice-chancellor, and helped create a university from the ground up.

That was just one university project that we initiated during that period; there were many others. We had a contract with the University of Wisconsin to create the agriculture school at the University of Ife and a number of agricultural training centers. We also contracted with the University of Wisconsin to develop six teacher training colleges in the northern region of Nigeria. We had a contract with the University of Indiana to work on a communications/education program in the University of Ahmadou Bello; a contract with the University of Pittsburgh to develop an Institute of Public Administration in the Northern Region, at the same university. There was also a major contract with the University of Kansas to develop an agricultural college, a veterinary college, and a research program in the Northern Region also at the University of Ahmadou Bello.

We had a contract with NYU in public administration in the western region. A contract with the University of Western Illinois in the Western Region for the Ibadan Technical College. We had a contracts with the University of Ohio for teacher training colleges in the north at Kaduna and in the Western Region in Ibadan. Then there was a contract with UCLA to help build an Advanced Teacher Training College near Lagos, which later became the College of Education in the University of Lagos. (This was in collaboration with the UNDP and the Ford Foundation.) UCLA was also involved in starting the Port Harcourt Comprehensive High School in the Eastern Region. There was a contract with Harvard to start the Comprehensive High School in the Western Region at Aiyetoro. The comprehensive high school idea, well known in the U.S., was an example of efforts to transfer an American "technology" to an environment that was not prepared for it; it was probably too complex to manage and ran counter to the traditional patterns of secondary education at that time; however, I do not know what happened to these schools. Finally in agriculture, there was a contract with Colorado State to develop a system of agricultural technical schools, training programs and extension services in the Eastern Region. In

sum, it was a huge program of American institutional involvement in developing Nigerian education during the 1960s. Also to accelerate the preparation of Nigerians to take over teaching and research at these agricultural universities, several hundred Nigerians were sent to the U.S. for their graduate degrees, in addition to the ASPAU program mentioned earlier.

Apart from the agricultural universities, the USAID program included a number of projects in agricultural development such as well drilling, soil conservation, maize research, extension service training, rubber development and many other very specific direct technical assistance activities.

The program also included a major contract with Arthur D. Little for a series of activities in industrial planning and industrial project assessment, investment promotion, and small enterprise development. These were some of the first US assistance projects in micro-enterprise development. Private investment promotion was also an important program priority at the time.

Infrastructure projects included the Calabar-Ikom road, the Ibadan Water System, Northern Nigeria Teacher Training Colleges, a telecommunications planning project, and hundreds of houses for use of USAID technicians in the field and Nigerian project staff. Housing was a major bottle-neck to expanding the technical assistance program. We also provided technical assistance to the national census office-an area of extreme political sensitivity.

There was no program in the health. The Mission Director, along with a lot of other economists, in those days, said that health was not priority, did not contribute to economic growth, although subsequently it has become the major area of US assistance.

The Program Office staff and I were heavily involved in the planning, negotiating, and coordinating of these activities which were well underway by the time of the first coup in January 1966. Each one of the projects that I have mentioned has its own interesting story in its successes and failures, along with its intertwining with political and economic events in the country. I have described the range of activity to illustrate what took place at that time.

In a later visit to Nigeria, I was asked what happened to "all that money; we see no evidence of it today." It was my impression that the questioners did not know where to look; moreover, many of the projects like salt in water dissolved into the local scene and became invisible, although the flavor continued. Development is a dynamic process; facilities, institutions, and programs need to continue to grow and evolve along with the changing setting or they die. The USAID program in the early 1960s, I believe, responded to the critical needs at that time and laid the foundations for considerable development activity that took place later, although the civil war, the distortions of the oil bonanza, and subsequent economic crises were extremely disruptive to development processes.

There certainly was considerable corruption, but I don't recall that it was a major issue at that time except for the census; petty corruption was, of course, common. However, our procedures were excruciatingly demanding much to the frustration of Nigerian officials. There were problems of nepotism, perhaps, more than anything else that contributed to the tensions over the control of the federal government. A population census at that time, which we were assisting,

was to be used both to determine how the parliament was structured, but also how federal revenues were to be allocated. The census was never issued because its findings were so divisive, i.e., if valid. There were many accusations of corruption in the census taking processes.

While we had a number of good friends at the personal level whom we enjoyed, we found official Nigerians very strenuous to work with. They were exceptionally aggressive, outspoken, provocative and very entrepreneurial in manner-like many Americans, although this varied by region. Yet despite these characteristics, we had an excellent rapport with the government officials and were able to accomplish a great deal-largely because, I'm sure, we were on the same wavelength on development priorities. Life in Lagos, in particular, owing to the crowds and severe congestion, the pushiness of the local drivers and those on the street, the breakdown of the power and telephone systems and other services was very demanding and tense.

My USAID and Embassy co-workers were on the whole a top notch group. Because of my position and the Program Office's work on program strategies and economic assessments, I worked closely with Embassy staff and came to know the Ambassadors well, particularly Joseph Palmer and Elbert Matthews. They were both men of exceptional competence and integrity. I developed the highest respect for their leadership and, no doubt, subtly learned from them. This respect grew when I was associated with them during the Nigerian civil war-Matthews as Ambassador to Nigeria during the war and Palmer as the Assistant Secretary for Africa. My USAID colleagues were also very able, but, as one can visualize, the pressures of deadlines and horrendous paperwork chores, the tensions arising from competition for resources and the complexity of the Nigerian situation were considerable with the Program Office in the middle. There were about 80 of us in the headquarters.

The only major issue I can remember in which we had a major difference with Ambassador Palmer and the Embassy, was the Nigerian government's interest in having a steel mill. I guess the Russians finally helped them build it. We were dead set against it and thought it was a disastrous project from an economic and technological point of view. The last thing we wanted to do with our aid money was get involved in that project no matter how politically attractive, but I think we did agree to provide a very high level executive from the US steel industry to come out and discuss with the Government the pros and cons of building a steel mill.

*Q: What is a direct hire?*

NORTH: They are US government employees rather than contractors. We had the major university programs that I just described, but at the same time we had numerous technical assistance projects staffed with direct hire employees. Up to that time, from Point Four program days into the ICA period, much of the technical work was carried out by US government employees. These were people who had a career with the agency coming from other government departments or newly hired. After my time in Nigeria, there was a major policy shift to reduce direct hire employment and shift to contract services. As a consequence, there was a major shift in the agency's style of operations. Over the years you hear people lamenting the loss of the USAID's technical capacity. Well, it started then when this major shift was made to terminate and discontinue the use of direct employment for technical assistance expertise.

I should add that during this time in Nigeria the Peace Corp program was building up. The Peace Corp staff and many of the volunteers had a rather contemptuous attitude towards USAID technical assistance personnel and repelled any form of cooperative relationships, for example, preferring to walk rather than accept rides in USAID vehicles traveling in the rural areas.

*Q: You were in Nigeria really before the oil hit it and had pretty disastrous effects.*

NORTH: Oh, yes, it was very disastrous in many ways...having that much money that quickly. During the last year I was in Nigeria, we had arranged for a study of Nigeria's balance of payments and economic trends. This resulted in a very interesting report that was written by two economists-Wilson Schmidt (deceased) of VPI and Scott Pearson, now at Stanford Food Research Institute and then a graduate student. The title of their report was "There's A Tiger In Their Tank". They had talked to oil company executives whose companies were doing a lot of drilling and exploration work in the Eastern Region; they extrapolated from that information the implications for oil revenues. This may not be entirely accurate, but it is my impression that this report gave the Nigerians their first indication of the tremendous scale of the oil resources that were available to the country and the implications for major revenue and income generations.

During the time when I was working in Nigeria, the country was largely self sufficient in food and a major exporter of agricultural products-principally cocoa, palm oil, groundnuts. Agriculture was a major industry and employer. However, when oil revenues began to flow, the Government spent and wasted enormous sums-in the billions-on construction and the support of the rapid growth in number of states with their concomitant demands for government facilities. This massive flow of resources into construction drew people away from farm production in the rural areas disrupting the country's economic base. Agriculture was de-emphasized, the university programs we had supported were underfunded; imports of food expanded exponentially. In recent times with the decline in oil revenues and the recognition of the economic disruptions that had occurred, there has been some return to agricultural development activity.

**WILLIAM E. REED**  
**Regional Assistant Director, USAID**  
**Ibadan (1961-1968)**

*Dr. William E. Reed was born in 1914 and raised in Louisiana. He received an undergraduate degree in agricultural science from Southern University in Baton Rouge. He completed a master's degree in 1940 at Iowa State University and earned a Ph.D. in soil science and chemistry from Cornell in 1945. He has served in Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia. He was interviewed by Henry E. Mattox on July 3, 1992.*

REED: I never got to Lomé. I was in language training for four or five months, and then President Kennedy indicated he wanted to concentrate on Nigeria.

*Q: I didn't know that. I don't remember anything about that. What was the reason?*

REED: For one thing, De Gaulle didn't want very much help done in Togo; he wanted to control that. De Gaulle was very much against Americans moving into the former French colonies. That was one reason. And then the president wanted to really concentrate on Nigeria, because it had such potential.

*Q: Because it was such a big country.*

REED: Big country and it had so much greater potential. There was much more money.

*Q: It still does have great potential -- unrealized.*

REED: Yes.

*Q: So then you went to Ibadan.*

REED: As a regional assistant director. Actually, at one time, I had as many as 125 technicians there, and that many families, so it was a big program.

*Q: In those days, we had a consulate general there, too, did we not?*

REED: Well, they didn't call it a consulate general. He was the consular officer.

*Q: Well, it was maybe perhaps just a consulate, then.*

REED: A consulate, that's what it was.

*Q: Later on, I think it was a consulate general. And now it doesn't exist; there is only a USIA office.*

REED: I think you have consulates general only where you don't have the embassies. Isn't that right?

*Q: No, you can have a consulate general that's attached to an embassy as well. In Paris, for example. And now in Ibadan there is only the USIA representative, no consular officer at all any more. You had 125 technicians.*

REED: At one time.

*Q: It's an important area. And Ibadan, unknown to many people, but of course well known to you, is a very big city.*

REED: Oh, yes, it was considered the largest city in Black Africa. But when I went there, of course I had Benin also under my authority...is it Benin State now?



*Q: Well, they change the names of the states so often. It probably is still Benin State.*

REED: Well, Benin was in the western region when I was there.

*Q: So you had all of the western region, then?*

REED: I had all the western region, including Lagos.

*Q: What was the main thrust of your AID effort there? Were you concentrating on agriculture, or concentrating on water resources, or...?*

REED: There were four areas: agriculture; education -- primary, secondary, and university education; we had also Arthur Delow's team on industrial development; and we had of course the Ibadan water supply system -- that was, I think, about a thirty-million-dollar project -- while I was there. We started a demonstration type of school for Iatoria, a secondary school. It was supposed to be different from the traditional type of secondary education. We had university contract teams, and about an equal number of what we called direct-hire contract employees. The first contract was with Ohio University; that was to improve teacher training. We had one with Western Michigan University to improve the technical training in the engineering and technical college. We had Harvard University to help with...it's kind of odd, but help with the Iatoria team. The contract was with Harvard University, but Harvard had a contract with a school system in Massachusetts that provided staff for that project. The University of Wisconsin had the contract with the university at Ife to help with the development of the college that developed at Ife.

*Q: The university at Ibadan had been there quite some years, but the one at Ife was set up while you were at Ibadan, I guess.*

REED: We didn't have any direct support for the University of Ibadan. The one at Ife was set up directly to help with the new university when it was moved. Prior to that, there was a university, I think they called it University of Ife, but it was located in Ibadan.

*Q: Yes, yes, that's true.*

REED: But we didn't provide any assistance to that university until it was moved to the Ife campus.

*Q: This a personal interest of mine. What kind of assistance did you provide to the University of Ife?*

REED: We provided a staff from the University of Wisconsin. All of the heads of the departments were from the University of Wisconsin.

*Q: So it was technical assistance in the form of people.*

REED: People, that's right. I don't recall, I can't be too sure of my facts, but I think we provided some assistance in providing for laboratories and for libraries.

*Q: Now continuing on your time in Nigeria, you were the assistant AID director from '61 to what year was that?*

REED: Sixty-eight.

*Q: Why, you were there quite a long time.*

REED: I wasn't supposed to stay that long. But what happened, the civil war broke out. My replacement wasn't permitted to bring his wife with him. And I was asked to stay on, I think, almost two years longer.

*Q: Your working relations there, and your personal life there also, must have been fairly pleasant.*

REED: It was very comfortable. One of the reasons that encouraged me to go there was I had two daughters that were in grade school then, about fourth or fifth grade, and the opportunity of placing them in better schools was one consideration. Another thing, while we were there, we provided support to build an international school. And I was one who had the responsibility for that project, along with the chief of education in Lagos. In fact, I was on the Board for the whole time I was there. At one time we had maybe 150 American children attending that school, the International School in Ibadan. Those children came from posts in several other countries in Africa.

*Q: Was your estimate of the future of Nigeria at that time quite optimistic because of oil...?*

REED: Very optimistic at that time, yes, because while we were there, the oil resources were being developed. The amount of oil exploration, the potential, increased. So that was a factor.

Also, the International Research Center was established in Nigeria at the time I was there. In fact, I don't think it would be immodest for me to say that I think I had some influence on helping Nigeria to get that center located in Nigeria. A member of the team that located that center was my major professor at Cornell, Dr. Bradfield. They made several trips to Nigeria while I was there. There were two places that they had to make a decision on. Of all the places, there were two places in the final. One of them was located in Brazil, in Latin America, and then, in Africa, it would be Nigeria. Kenya was considered, but they thought Nigeria, for Africa, was the number-one place.

**CHARLES O. CECIL**  
**Experiment in International Living**  
**Ibadan (1962)**

*Ambassador Cecil was born in Kentucky into a US military family and was raised at several military bases in the US and abroad. He was educated at the University of California, Berkeley and the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He entered the Foreign Service in 1966. A trained Arabic Language speaker, the*

*Ambassador served abroad in Kuwait, Dar es Salaam, Beirut, Jeddah, Bamako, Muscat, Tunis and Abidjan. He was US Ambassador to Niger from 1996 to 1999. He also had several assignments at the State Department in Washington, DC. Ambassador Cecil was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006*

*Note: Subsequently, Ambassador Cecil served as Chargé d'affaires of the US Interest Section of the Belgian Embassy in Tripoli, Libya from 2006 to 2009.*

*Q: Berkeley was a cauldron of political causes and protests and everything else at the time. Political science as a major has changed over the years. It's gotten very quantitative, and I think they've lost their way, but that's a personal opinion. What were you studying as a political science major at Berkeley?*

CECIL: My first course, of course, was just a general survey of U.S. government and how it worked. The professor, Peter Odegard, was an extremely engaging professor. The lecture hall probably had 600 students in it, but he held our attention from start to finish. He had so much insight and so many interesting stories to tell. I can't tell you at this point the titles of the courses I took, but I don't think they departed too much from what a poly-sci major would have to take. There was a course in comparative government somewhere along the way where we looked, I know, at the English form of government and the French and compared them to ours. My junior year I was invited to join the poly-sci honors program which was a great opportunity. There were about a dozen of us or so invited into a two year honors program where we worked very closely with two professors: Paul Seabury was one, and Richard Cox was the other. We got a lot of personal attention. This small group of 12 met once or twice a week during the junior year. Cox was especially adept at leading us through the Greek writers, especially Aristotle and Plato, and trying to make that relevant to today, and telling us things that we would never have probably seen on our own, taking us into levels of analysis that he said were almost impossible for the average reader today to do because there were so many things about intellectual thought and assumptions of 2000 years ago that had been forgotten, and unless you knew those things, you didn't fully realize everything that was here in these writings. That was fascinating. In my senior year, we all had to write a senior honors thesis. I came to campus in September of my senior year. I saw a notice on a bulletin board from an organization called The Experiment in International Living, headquartered in Putney, Vermont. It announced that they were going to open the coming summer—the summer of '62—their first exchange program in Nigeria. It gave a little bit of detail. It was four weeks with a Nigerian family, four weeks traveling around the country, a little bit of orientation in Vermont before going. It said it was a thousand dollars cost; maybe it was eleven hundred—one or the other—a thousand dollars as I recall it. At the bottom line it said, "Scholarships available to well-qualified applicants," and I thought "Wow! The opportunity to spend a summer in Africa!" But I didn't have a thousand dollars, and I needed to work every summer to earn money for the fall. I said to myself, "How can I become a well-qualified applicant in a few months?" You had to file your application in October or November, and they were going to make their selections in March or April, so I didn't have a whole lot of time to work on it. I thought it through and I said, "Well, my military family history qualifies me to represent this country fairly well." I pointed out in what I wrote in my application that I had lived in the four corners and the middle of the U.S. I lived in Massachusetts, Florida, California, and in Washington State. I was born in Kentucky, and my parents at that time were living in

Oklahoma City. My dad was on his last Air Force assignment. I said, "I really know this country, and I'm going to write my senior honors thesis on the role of Islam in Nigerian politics, and my professor Seabury, after considering two or three other topics said, "That sounds fine. Why don't you do that?" I wrote that thesis, and the Experiment said, "You're worth a thousand-dollar bet," and so I went off to Nigeria in June or July, whichever it was, in '62.

*Q: You didn't have to worry about ROTC?*

CECIL: They were very nice to me. I finished that program, and they offered me a regular commission, and they said, "If you want to go to graduate school, we'll defer your active duty." While I was applying to Putney for the summer scholarship, I was also applying to SAIS for a fellowship to come to SAIS and do a two-year Master's program.

They offered a two-year master's degree in international relations, and they required you to concentrate on a geographic area of the world, and they had some other requirements like two years of economics. I think the school is somewhat larger now than it was then but still limits itself to international affairs. In 1962 they were beginning to offer a PhD program as well.

*Q: Turning back to this Nigerian experience. Tell me about it.*

CECIL: There were about 11 or 12 of us in our group. Most like me were college graduates, just graduated. I mean, filling a summer before going on to other things. There was one member who was a high school teacher in his early 40's, and our leader was also a teacher about the same age of 40 or 45 or so. We were each assigned a Nigerian family to live with. We did that for four weeks. We came together once a week, every Wednesday, for some kind of a field trip to some site of cultural or historical importance, but otherwise, we spent the other six days of the week with our families and doing whatever seemed natural. I was placed with the most westernized of the 11 or 12 families. Sorry, I've forgotten how many it was. My host was the Archdeacon of Ibadan in the Anglican Church. He was British educated, and his wife was a well educated woman. I don't know exactly what her schooling was now. They were Yoruba, so I had four weeks in a Yoruba family but a very Anglicized, Westernized Yoruba family. The other member of my group who lived closest to me in Ibadan—we all went to Ibadan—the one who lived closest enough to walk to, lived in the most traditional of the 12 host families. His host was Chief Oshoba, who was a Yoruba chief. In that context, what chief meant was he was basically a kind of ward heeler in charge of a certain section of Ibadan. His family was very traditional. He had very little formal education. My friend Steve Monsma from Holland, Michigan, spent four weeks in that family and never did determine how many wives Chief Oshoba had. Couldn't tell. Normally we would have the morning with our family doing whatever seemed appropriate or was happening, and then after lunch Steve and I would get together and walk around Ibadan and explore. At the end of the four weeks, the group reassembled. Theoretically, in the Experiment in International Living's plan, you invite a member of your host family to accompany you on the next four weeks as a way of repaying your family for their hospitality. In our case, not a single member could or wanted to accompany us, so we group of 12 plus our leader spent the next four weeks touring. We went to the eastern part. In those days there were only three regions in Nigeria: the Western, Eastern, and Northern. We went to places like Port Harcourt where we actually had another five day home stay. Each of us went to an Ibo family for five days. I went to

the home of a barrister, Napo Graham Douglas, again, a very well educated, very Anglicized Nigerian family. He had a fantastic classical music collection of records. Then we went on to places like Calabar and Enugu where the University of Nigeria was just then being established, and then we went north by train to Kaduna and Kano....

*Q: I want to go back. You were in Nigeria before the Biafran War?*

CECIL: Right.

*Q: Did you get any feel about the Yoruba, the Hausa, the Biafran tensions, or was that very obvious to you or not?*

CECIL: The Biafran tensions—the origins of the Biafran War—were not obvious to me at that time. Even though it was an Ibo family that I stayed with in Port Harcourt we did not hear about tensions with the Western Region. We were oblivious to that. What we did certainly see and sense and hear a lot about was when we went to the north, the northerners, the Hausa, were very vocal. These were mostly Muslim, of course, in the north whereas the Ibo and the Yoruba are mostly Christian. The northerners filled us with examples of neglect by the southern-dominated government. Money was being spent on development in the south and not in the north. Northerners were discriminated against when it came to awarding scholarships and everything. There was a very clear picture given to us of tension between the Muslim north and the Christian south, but I didn't...at least now I don't recall having any inkling of what was going to happen in Biafra a few years later.

*Q: Did you find that your honors paper on Islam and on Nigeria was... Did this reinforce? It must have been quite useful to you.*

CECIL: It was very useful. It probably was about the best thing I could have done to prepare for the trip. Looking back on it, of course, it was terribly superficial. It was almost all based on whatever written sources I could find, and those were mostly magazine articles back then. There were a few Nigerian students at Berkeley. I was able to interview a few of them, but it was mostly a library project. But sure, it made me more perceptive and more observant in Nigeria.

*Q: Did you run across embassy people at all? Did you get any feel for that?*

CECIL: We had no contact in Lagos or Ibadan. There was a consulate at the time in Ibadan. Only in Kaduna out of curiosity, two or three of us one day walked to the consulate just to see it, and some nice FSO greeted us at the door and spent five minutes with us, but we didn't really have any business or any needs, so we just basically said, "Hello," and continued on our way. So no, no real substantive contact. I can tell you, though, that the Foreign Service seed was again planted in my mind in my Berkeley years because two of my best friends were interested in the Foreign Service, and they knew a lot more about it than I did. When someone, some speaker, from the Foreign Service came to campus, they made sure I went with them to hear him. One of them went on after graduating to join the CIA. The other one didn't follow that pattern. His father had a family business, and he worked for a while in the family business and then went into the Air Force to satisfy his military obligation, and then spent his life working as a civilian for

the Air Force in the post-exchange system. Those two friends first drew my attention to this thing called the Foreign Service, so it was latent back there in my mind.

**CHARLES J. MONTRIE**  
**International Relations Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1962)**

*Charles J. Montrie was born in 1923 and grew up in Michigan. He graduated from The University of Notre Dame in 1941 with a degree in accounting. After completing his duty in the U.S. Navy, he returned to Notre Dame for graduate work in economics and then went on to Yale. In addition to Nigeria, Mr. Montrie served in Israel, Panama, and Bangladesh. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on November 25, 1996.*

*Q: What was that mission?*

MONTRIE: It was typical of the Kennedy administration. They were going to make Nigeria a model development program by pouring money into a brave new five year plan that was going to achieve self-sustaining growth for Nigeria.

*Q: What was your particular role?*

MONTRIE: Arnold Rivkin, an agency lawyer, was in charge of it. It had Wilson Smith from the chamber of commerce who had I believe almost no experience with AID or development, and Merrill Gay foreign service officer. I thought the exercise was a total fiasco. I don't know what the mission's reaction to it was. I never talked with you about it. I remember Burt Gould saying it was very helpful. I couldn't understand why it was helpful.

*Q: What was the objective of the mission?*

MONTRIE: It was to review their five year plan so AID could pour in \$100 million a year for five years or something of that sort to make Nigeria a model of what AID was trying to do. When I arrived and started looking at what was there it was obvious that this allegedly promising plan was no plan at all - some abstract pie in the sky. In the meantime the government of Nigeria was looking at things like a proposed steel mill that somebody wanted to build but wanted Nigeria to put \$100 million into it with the equipment supplier-investors putting in something like \$3 million, but with the technicians saying this can't be a viable enterprise there. In the government, corruption seemed to be rife, with senior officials enriching themselves with enormous amounts of graft. The three regional governments seemed fairly independent of the central government. I wasn't really sure that the central government was in charge of much of anything except maybe foreign exchange. Or that the newly-independent country even understood what its development problems were.

*Q: Was this the Rivkin report?*

MONTRIE: There was a Rivkin report, but not along the foregoing lines. It was all rosy about how AID should forge ahead.

*Q: Did it have any particular development concept?*

MONTRIE: No we just reviewed the five year plan, had pleasant chats with a variety of government officials . Rivkin found everything was fine and recommended forging ahead.

*Q: This was the basis for the long range assistance strategy.*

MONTRIE: For Rivkin, yes. There was no Montrie-Gay minority opinion permitted in the report. Rivkin just would not brook any disagreement with his view. Why he was so sure that this was all such a good thing I don't know. I expect he knew that the White House, in the person of Walt Rostow, wanted to see AID get going with it. I'd be interested in hearing your view of all that.

*Q: That is not for now. There were no particular project recommendations of that sort?*

MONTRIE: No. Just put the stamp of approval on Nigeria's development effort.

*Q: This is while you were still in NESAs?*

MONTRIE: I was still in NESAs. I can't remember why Africa got hold of me. I don't think I knew anybody in the Africa bureau at that time.

*Q: The Africa and Europe bureau were still somewhat joined at that time.*

MONTRIE: That may have been the connection.

**NELSON C. LEDSKY**  
**Consular/Economic/Political Officer**  
**Enugu (1962-1964)**

*Ambassador Ledsky was born in Cleveland, Ohio and was educated at Case Western Reserve University and Columbia University. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1957, serving in Georgetown, Guyana; Enugu, Nigeria; Bonn and Berlin, Germany and in the State Department in Washington. In his various assignments he was closely involved in matters concerning the status of Berlin and West Germany as well as on the persistent Greece-Turkey conflict over Cyprus. Among his other assignments, the Ambassador served on the Department's Policy Planning Staff. Ambassador Ledsky was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 2003.*

*Q: In 1962, you were assigned to Enugu, Nigeria. Did you have any idea where Enugu was?*

LEDSKY: By the time I was assigned there, I knew where it was. This assignment also had a history. When I returned from Guyana, I was assigned to FSI for African language and area studies. I was a student in the first course given by FSI devoted to studying Ewe, a Ghanaian language, for four months, then four month of Ibo, spoken in East Nigeria. I was supposed to stay another four months to learn an East African language, but I didn't stay in FSI long enough for that. Sometime at the end of 1961 or early 1962, while in this area and language training program, I was informed that I had been selected to open a consulate in Enugu. By this time, I knew that Enugu was in East Nigeria because I was studying Ibo.

*Q: Why did the Department decide to open a post in East Nigeria?*

LEDSKY: Sometime in 1961, our embassy in Lagos recommended that posts be opened in the three region of Nigeria – North, East and West. In 1962, the Department approved the recommendation and one post was opened in Ibadan, one in Kaduna and one in Enugu. I think the embassy felt it could not give adequate coverage from Lagos. By the time I reached Enugu, an embassy political officer, Bob Bruce, had already rented office space, living quarters and in general had brought in the supplies necessary to operate a consulate. I got to Enugu a month or six weeks after he did.

The East region, with Enugu as its capital, was beginning to be important because oil had been discovered in the delta and companies were engaged in drilling and extraction work. This was in the area around Port Harcourt. Our commercial interests in the area grew by leaps and bounds. The area was the Ibo center, from which the Nigerian president at the time had come. So the East became one of the two most important regions of Nigeria. Enugu was the capital of the Eastern region.

Shell was the first oil developer, followed by British Petroleum and then EXXON, as well as a couple of other American companies. Most of the oil left Nigeria through Port Harcourt, which was becoming a boom town, where thousands Europeans lived and worked. It had a large Greek-Lebanese community, which had been there for many years, running hotels and shops and automobile dealerships.

*Q: When you got to Enugu, what did you find?*

LEDSKY: The town was a sleepy, two-road town. A railroad track ran through it. Right outside Enugu were some coal mines. So Enugu had also become one of the leading Nigerian industrial centers. I think one would have to describe it as rather primitive, but it had a European style suburb, which housed a lot of Brits and some other Europeans as well as Israelis. They were prominent members of the Enugu commercial community, running banks and other businesses. The British had been in Enugu for many years, long before it was designated as the capital of East Nigeria in 1960. A couple of airlines, such as KLM, were beginning to provide service. The Israeli presence really grew at about the time of my arrival. They ran retail stores; they built a lot of housing, a big hotel. They invested heavily in Enugu and the surrounding area.



By the time I arrived, the office space had been leased, as well as the house I was to occupy. The consul, who arrived sometime after we did, also had a house leased for him. Bruce leased a third place for a secretary-administrative assistant. By the end of 1962, the post had three American employees. By the time I left, another position for a junior staffer had been added.

My position once again covered the waterfront. I spent most of my time doing economic and commercial reporting. I also served as the AID liaison officer. That agency established a rather large operation in East Nigeria, it had something like 20 officers in Enugu by the time I left. I ran a small USIS library. I became involved in the establishment of an East Nigeria University about twenty miles from Enugu, a job that had been contracted out to Michigan State University by AID. That involved the building of a university community. I issued visas, particularly to students and Nigerian tourists. I did a lot of the administrative work. I even managed to do some political reporting.

Since this was a new post, there were myriads of administrative requirements that mostly fell to me. For example, we only had a one-time pad for sending classified cables. I used to sit in the communication center, coding and decoding messages which we received and sent through the local telegraph office. It took a lot of time to do these basic, routine administrative functions.

It should be said that in the early 1960s, Nigeria was the Kennedy administration's pet African country. We were visited by "Soapy" Williams, the assistant secretary for African Affairs. The ambassador, Joe Palmer, came to see us every two months. The AID director, Joel Bernstein, stationed in Lagos, came often. His deputy, Bill Kontos, also visited every six or eight weeks. All in all, the Eastern region was really taking off economically and commercially. So, we were in Enugu at the beginning of a boom and left just before it collapsed. I saw the best of Nigeria.

*Q: Did the embassy kept close track of what you were doing?*

LEDSKY: Yes, indeed. I used to visit Lagos periodically. We had a courier run about once a week and the duty fell to me about once a month. We took turns on this run. When in Lagos, I would work with the economic and political sections. We had a consulate in Ibadan, which was only 50-60 miles from Enugu. I used to see our consul general, Gordon, periodically. We became good friends. I used to visit Kaduna, and our staff there used come to Enugu, so we worked closely not only with the embassy but also with our colleagues in other posts in Nigeria.

I also participated in a couple of conferences held outside Nigeria – a consular conference, an economic conference. I went to all the meetings I could up and down the African coast, so I spent a lot of time on the road, which might seem somewhat odd for someone stationed in Enugu. I enjoyed that because it got me out periodically from a pretty dull place. One had to get some fresh air periodically. I shouldn't suggest that we sat around the house every night and week-ends. There was a pretty lively social life, particularly in the expatriate community, which was of considerable size. It sponsored a lot of activities.

Then there were the dinners and cocktail parties, which were often attended by the leading governmental officials. Enugu had quite a lively social life. I remember a Dr. Para, who had been trained in the U.S. as a physician. His wife was very charming; they had children, one of whom

went to school with Rebecca. I knew all the ministers of the Eastern Nigeria. They would come to our house. Some were still rooted in their tribes and had wives who could not speak English and who wouldn't attend. But in general, Africans and expatriates could be found mixing together in the social scene. Interestingly enough, the government hosted several social activities. It used to fund large, ostentatious dinner parties and receptions when high ranking visitors from Lagos, or other African states, appeared in Enugu. For a while during our tour, Eastern Nigeria was considered the progressive part of Nigeria. Therefore, we had lots of African leaders visit Enugu. After the Israelis finished their hotel, many of these official functions were held there. So, we didn't suffer from quiet evenings or week-ends.

*Q: Was there any discussion of Eastern Nigeria separating from the rest of the country?*

LEDSKY: There was some. Nigeria was a politically teeming country, with many schemes being bandied around. One was the possibility of separating Eastern Nigeria from the rest of the country. It was clear to me from the beginning that Nigeria was a country very divided by language, ethnicity, religion, all the issues that divide people. The people in Enugu were primarily Ibo; they all spoke Ibo and the educated folks also spoke English. Most were Roman Catholics, thanks to considerable missionary work in earlier times. That made the Ibo different from other tribal members in the rest of Nigeria. During my tour, the Ibos were part of the ruling governmental structure in Lagos. As I mentioned, the president was an Ibo. Many of the ministers were Ibo.

When I first arrived in Enugu, I sensed that the Ibo population saw itself as being on top of the world. It had powerful representation in the Nigerian government; its economy was expanding rapidly. So the Ibos thought that they would lead all of Nigeria and the other tribes would fall in behind them. The issue of separation began, really, after the elections in 1964, which were held after I left. It was then that the Ibos lost control of the country, with the Muslim North becoming the predominant political force. The split occurred soon thereafter. It was a tragedy, because most of the senior military officers were Ibos. Many of the educated class were Ibos; they were perceived as the intellectual elites. As it became clear that the elite would be relegated to secondary status, the split came soon thereafter. But this all happened after my departure. When I left, all was well in Eastern Nigeria. I was replaced by two or three people. Then the roof caved in, literally and figuratively. I heard that my house was bombed and completely destroyed. The European conclave near us was completely leveled. The consulate was closed. I was fortunate to have served in Enugu during a brief moment of glory for the region.

*Q: While you were there, was there any sign of anti-westernism?*

LEDSKY: Absolutely. There definitely was a strain of anti-westernism. It was there when I arrived and I gathered had been there for sometime. Anti-Americanism was not as noticeable as anti-westernism, but it was present. I am not sure that I ever put my finger on the cause. I have a couple of illustrations of this phenomenon.

I was in Enugu when President Kennedy was assassinated. There was a feeling in the community that Lyndon Johnson had been behind that action. Furthermore, the speculation was that the Johnson administration would be a murderous one. This view was not only stated at great length

in the media, but I think it was clearly the almost unanimous perception of the African population. The latent anti-Americanism, as well as the anti-westernism, was heightened by the assassination; it became a palpable factor, which remains to today.

There was always an anti-British sentiment stemming from the colonial days. The Ibos and the Yorubas generally felt that they had been oppressed by the British and other Europeans for at least 400 years. Before that, they had been subjected to the mercies of slave traders, who took them from their homes to Europe and the United States. So the hatred of the West and white people has deep roots going back many centuries. This sentiment was not seen in daily overt behavior but was detectable under the surface. Most of the Nigerians I dealt with had been western educated. The army and the whole civil service had been trained by the British. We gave extensive economic and technical assistance from 1960 on until the country fell apart in 1964. We have done a lot for the Nigerians and that still goes on today. We are their major market for their oil and other exports. We have, and continue to have, an extensive visit program, in both directions. But a level of anti-Americanism continues – under the surface; I interpret it as a continuing bitter resentment stemming from the days of slavery and the European colonization.

I should note that Nigeria was colonized in a very bizarre way. It was not like India, nor other British colonies. The British only touched the surface of Nigeria. They were only present on the coast and for a stretch of 150-200 miles inland from the coast. They had only a small presence and influence on the Muslim North, for example. In those areas, schools continued to use the tribal language as the basic teaching tool with English being a somewhat secondary language. There were areas of Nigeria which were left untouched by white people. There, the local languages were only oral; there was nothing written in those languages and therefore people were and are still discovering new attributes of those cultures.

So, Nigeria was both the most sophisticated and the most primitive country in Africa. These differing standards have had to live side by side.

*Q: Did the Peace Corps start a program in Nigeria while you were there?*

LEDSKY: The Peace Corps started while I was there. We had forty or fifty Peace Corps volunteers in Eastern Nigeria. They were managed somewhat separately from other Peace Corps programs in Nigeria. We had the Peace Corps administrator in Enugu; he worked in our office building. We had a Peace Corps doctor in Enugu to support the volunteers. All the volunteers themselves worked outside of Enugu, mostly in the rural areas. Most of them taught English; some worked on small business development in the villages. All lived in primitive conditions. I have stayed in contact with a number of them. Some joined the Foreign Service.

The program was a tremendous asset to the U.S. I used to visit the volunteers often, in part because they served as an entree to the village world. This was very important because most of the Eastern Nigerians lived outside urban areas, in agricultural villages. When I lived in Eastern Nigeria, there were 15-16 million people in the region. The area was huge and the volunteers were well scattered.

*Q: You mentioned your responsibility for managing the USIS library. Did it get used frequently?*

LEDSKY: I was in charge of the library at the beginning. Eventually, USIA sent out a director, Gill Kruter. Yes, the facility was well used. We had the advantage of language compatibility; English in Nigeria was the common language spoken by all the educated, even those with a limited education. They could all read English even if they didn't use it for communications purposes on a regular basis. A lot of the Nigerians were trying to leave their country for educational purposes to go to the U.S., to Europe and to Britain, so the library was very heavily used.

As part of my assignment, I was given plenty of opportunities to speak all over the region, particularly at the new University. I traveled regularly, probably one week out of four. The roads were adequate, 1 and ½ lanes paved, and I could travel by car almost everywhere in the region. I went to Port Harcourt to provide consular service to seamen on American flag vessels. I visited Kalibar, which was a non-Ibo city near the Cameroon border. I went to the Cameroons a couple of times in part to visit the hill stations that the British still maintained in the heights over the jungle. As I mentioned, there were AID projects all over the region. We had a chicken project in Abakaliki, run by an African-American who had been there for four or five years. He had developed a lively chicken business. I just mention these examples because I found my assignment far from routine or dull. I traveled a lot and was in the office only rarely.

I did enjoy my two years in Enugu. There were some bad moments, but overall I considered it a good and valuable tour. I used to have some nightmares that the Department would forget me and leave me in Enugu until retirement. This fear was particularly acute before air transportation was initiated and even after that, there were occasional strikes interrupting air flow. There were times when the roads to Lagos were washed out. Then I would worry about ever getting out. I think Cecile shared my concerns at times. But in retrospect, our tour in Enugu was a happy experience. The kids had friends. Rebecca was in the second and third grade; she attended an Anglican school. She did very well in this high discipline, British school. John went to a nursery school. I think the kids enjoyed Enugu. They had a big back yard with swings, a cat, a garden and a banana tree which provided them with food and entertainment.

There were some very primitive aspects to living in Enugu. We had to boil and filter all the water. We had two or three servants, mostly devoted to doing things that in the west would be done by machines. There also were shortages of such items as powdered milk, which made it sometime difficult to feed Jonathan. The house itself was not a model of modernity. We had no washer or dryer, so the clothes had to be hand washed and ironed because when hung on a line outside, they would attract insects which had to be picked off. We were sick quite a bit; I came down with hepatitis, which laid me out for about a month. I was almost evacuated to Frankfurt. Every family member got sick periodically. Fortunately, as I mentioned, the Peace Corps doctor was stationed in Enugu and we used his good services. The doctor and his wife were very nice to the whole American community; I don't know whether the rules of the day would have allowed the doctor to minister to non-Peace Corps patients but he did and for that we were all very grateful. We had a nurse in Lagos, who may have visited us once or twice. She could not have been very useful to our Enugu community. The doctor is the one that saved the day. He recommended that I be evacuated to Frankfurt, but I was very reluctant to leave the family for an extended period of time, so I just stayed in bed and eventually recovered. I think we deserved the

20% hardship pay that we got. Perhaps now things have improved. NDI has a program in Nigeria and that is not deemed to be a hardship. But in the 1960s, all the consulates deserved the hardship pay.

*Q: Was there any infrastructure in Enugu to support this influx of westerners?*

LEDSKY: The support services were provided by local tradesmen. They were more or less trained. AID had a couple of technicians on its staff to fix plumbing, electrical fixtures, etc., in American employee housing. But, usually, we went to the local availabilities and got ourselves a plumber or an electrician from there. These were Africans with some limited training, who set up their own shops. There was a growing African middle class. I remember the barber we used. He used to come to the house every other Saturday and cut my hair on the back porch. He had all the necessary equipment. He had been in Britain for a couple of weeks of training. So, all the trades were more or less covered by people with some experience. AID was engaged in assisting farmers to develop their businesses. All that added to the growth of a middle class.

I think the AID program was very good. I was very impressed. This was my second post where I worked closely with the assistance program. I was impressed by the caliber of the AID employees. The technicians working on agricultural matters were top notch. The educators, similarly, were very knowledgeable. The assistance program in Eastern Nigeria was run by a political appointee. He was a democratic politician from the Eastern shore of Maryland and had been appointed by the Kennedy administration. He was also very impressive, as were his bosses in Lagos. Bernstein and Kontos were two of AID's best administrators. The assistance program made a lot of sense to me. For example, we were trying to build a rubber industry, which in retrospect may not have been such a great idea, but at the time certainly seemed destined to become part of a vibrant world market. We were trying to build a more modern farming community by increasing the crops that Nigerians might grow, like cotton, cocoa, chickens. I would think that some of AID's efforts have endured. Some may have dropped by the wayside in response to changes in world markets.

I think we got considerable political mileage out of the AID program before Nigeria fell into internal strife sparked by the Biafran war. I speak here primarily of what I could observe in Eastern Nigeria. I can't tell you what parts of our early 1960s efforts have endured. I am sure much fell in the civil war, but I think some may well have survived. For example, the university is still there. At the time, our efforts were certainly appreciated. The Ibos, despite their anti-westernism, were grateful for our assistance efforts and began to see the U.S. in a different light. Many have come to the U.S. I find them in every other taxi cab in Washington and New York. I think the assistance program was a real plus for the U.S.

*Q: Is there anything else you want to mention about your Enugu tour?*

LEDSKY: You asked me whether I had any inkling about the developments that were to take place soon after my departure. I was one who had always insisted, from my arrival in the place, that Nigeria was not and would not be a "country" in the usual sense of the word. There were too many ethnic and religious divides and a "Nigerian identity" was never likely to develop. I did not think that over a longer run, it would hold together as a country and I still maintain that. I think

that the events and trends of the last few years are encouraging, but I think in the end, Nigeria will come apart. It cannot be held together and cannot be governed from a center. It must become a federation, at best. I know that efforts in that direction are being undertaken; the country has been divided not into three parts, but into dozens. It is essentially now a multi-state nation in an effort to recognize each community, which at the same time is dividing the southern part of the country in a way that allows the Muslims to govern the whole country. I don't think this will work over the longer term and I am quite gloomy about Nigerian prospects as a single, independent country. I think many individual parts of what is now known as Nigeria may well prosper as there is adequate human and raw resources to allow them to develop economically, but the efforts to keep Nigeria together are bound to be unsuccessful.

*Q: Was there any rhyme or reason for the borders that were drawn to make Nigeria?*

LEDSKY: They were completely artificial. There is no reason for the borders as they exist. For example, the Yoruba tribe is split – some live in Dahomey (now Benin), some in Nigeria. The border between Nigeria and the Cameroons is entirely arbitrary. There are perhaps some geographic rationales which provide a natural divide, but there are parts of the Cameroons that are English-speaking and parts which are French-speaking. A referendum was held in 1961 allowing the English-speaking part of the Cameroons to vote on whether they wanted to join Nigeria or join the French-speaking part. They voted for the latter. But that does not, I think, provide any logical support to where the borders were drawn. The same arbitrariness is evident on the northern borders.

**CLINTON L. OLSON**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Lagos (1962-1966)**

*Ambassador Clinton L. Olson was born in South Dakota in 1916. He moved to California when he was 15 years old. He attended Stanford University for his undergraduate and graduate work, but was called into active duty as a Reserve Officer in the U.S. Army in 1941 before receiving his MBA. In addition to Nigeria, Ambassador Olson served in Russia, Iran, Austria, Martinique, England, and Sierra Leone. He was interviewed on April 17, 1996 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: You were there until 1962. Then where did you go?*

OLSON: From 1962 to 1966. I arrived in Nigeria in the first days of the Biafran War and left four and a half years later in the last days.

*Q: When you went out to Nigeria, you had not been an African hand at all. Did you go to Washington first before you went there?*

OLSON: Yes, to check in.

*Q: What were you told? What was the attitude towards Nigeria? I'm talking about when you went out in 1962.*

OLSON: The attitude was that this was becoming the great country of Africa and it had the natural resources, the personnel, and the infrastructure to become a prosperous and developed country. That was the outlook when the war started.

*Q: When you arrived there, what was the relationship between your arrival and the war in Biafra? Had it started when you arrived?*

OLSON: It started shortly after my arrival.

*Q: Was the Embassy aware that this was budding?*

OLSON: Yes. They were having troubles with the Northern Nigerians, the so-called Hausas and with the Ibos who were the Biafrans. They only constituted about ten to twelve percent of the so-called area of Biafra. Biafra was a fictitious concept for the place called the Bight of Biafra, which the leader of the Biafrans, Ojukwu, decided was going to be his country. That included the Ibos and the Rivers Tribes. These people became essentially vassals to the Ibos. Ojukwu thought that the Ibos were the smartest of all the Africans. They may have been the most clever. He saw an opening and he thought he should be leader of an independent country.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador at that time?*

OLSON: Burt Matthews.

*Q: What was the Embassy's view as this generated? Was there much sympathy for the Biafran cause?*

OLSON: There was a lot of sympathy, but not for them as a separate state. A lot of sympathy for the Ibos because many had been attacked by the Northerners and had fled south to the area of so-called Biafra. The Ibos were very good at ingratiating themselves throughout the western areas of Nigeria.

*Q: What was the Embassy's view of the central government of Nigeria at that time?*

OLSON: Our view was very good. When I first arrived there, General Gowon had just removed the Ibos, who had been in charge of the government. So, other parts of the Westerners in charge of Nigeria were overthrown in a small revolution. The highest ranking Northern Officer still alive after that revolution, General Gowon, was only a Lieutenant Colonel. The ranking Northerner just sort of picked up a Gowon and said, "You ought to be Chief of State and the Commander of Nigeria." He was doing a great job when the war started.

*Q: During this war, what was some of the pressures on the American Mission there at that time?*

OLSON: One of the biggest pressures came from pro Ibo people associated with the State

Department and the Embassy. Our policy as enunciated time and time again was to support the unity of Nigeria and to not supply either side with arms and to stay basically neutral. The sympathy that was developed in the States as a result of propaganda got the religious groups and the Middle West and all over the country to support the Ibos.

*Q: I understand that you had the Protestants in the United States strongly for it, and the Jews strongly for it because Israel had connections with them. I suppose the Catholics, too.*

OLSON: The Catholics were the ones that really started it, because of the Holy Ghost, Fatherland is very active in the Biafra area. They're the ones that really got the ball rolling.

*Q: I found one of the more interesting manifestations of American problems in foreign policy was this mass support of the Ibo revolt by those that counted in the United States. It was also in the UK, too. The Beatles gave their concerts for them and all of the movie stars and anyone who was anyone was supportive.*

OLSON: Not quite so much in the UK as in the United States.

*Q: How did you all deal with this?*

OLSON: It wasn't easy, I'll tell you that. It was the end of a more promising side of my career because I was labeled - and rightly so - as the one who was holding Nigeria together. Even though I was not the Ambassador, I had been the continuity for all of these years.

*Q: There were two Ambassadors.*

OLSON: Yes, Bill Trueheart and Burt Matthews. They were both very good Ambassadors and fine guys. I seemed to have been by one that was designated to carry out the policy of keeping Nigeria together more than anything.

*Q: Did you have trouble with your own Officers?*

OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Can you talk about that?*

OLSON: There were one or two Officers that I had trouble with and that was because they were Catholics and very religious. They were sympathetic more than they should have been to the Ibo point of view.

*Q: How did this manifest itself?*

OLSON: By sending in reports that were not agreed to by the Embassy. The biggest I had in this was a breakdown of authority. I was the Supervising Consul General. The Consul in Enugu, which was the Biafra area, Bob Barnard, refused to obey my orders. I ordered him and the personnel at the post to evacuate, get out, get his automobile and all of his personal possessions out of the Biafran area and he refused to do it.



*Q: On what grounds?*

OLSON: On the grounds that the post and personnel were in imminent danger. I didn't get the support from the Department I should have gotten, which said, "We'll let this pass over. Don't go into it head on." I went along with that against my better judgment and then, low and behold, a few days later, Bob and some of the Officers at the Consulate went to the office and found they had no place to go to work. The Embassy had evacuated, lock, stock and barrel, without telling him.

*Q: You mean the Consul?*

OLSON: Ojukwu, head of the Biafran Government, moved the headquarters out and hadn't told the Consul. He was left sitting out there and had not gotten his car and his possessions out as I had ordered, and so it was all lost as the government troops moved in. I guess the State Department had to pick up the cost.

*Q: What about your Ambassador? Was it Trueheart by that time?*

OLSON: At that time, it was Matthews, but he left at the time this happened. Thus, it was left to me and that was alright with me. It was an outright case of insubordination.

*Q: Who was Assistant Secretary? Was it David Newsom by that time?*

OLSON: No, David wasn't there yet. It was Joe Palmer.

*Q: I think this is very interesting to develop this. You gave a direct order and the direct order was refused.*

OLSON: It wasn't carried out. Our communications were somewhat tenuous at that time.

*Q: What was your feeling - that Washington didn't want to make an issue of this?*

OLSON: Washington wouldn't support it at all. Washington felt that Barnard and the Consulate were probably right, but they didn't have the guys to come and slap me down.

*Q: Why did you want to get them out?*

OLSON: They could have been murdered. What happened was, Barnard and his staff left in one hell of a hurry for the part of Biafra that is still intact, and Biafra was starting to fall to pieces. They eventually had to get out by dugout canoes that took them over to our Consulate in the Cameroons. Jim Parker, Consul in Douala, Cameroons, carried out the evacuation of that group as the Federal forces overran that area. If they had stayed around, the chances were that they could have been murdered.

*Q: To follow through on this, were either you or Barnard called to reckon for this or not?*

OLSON: Barnard was called to reckon but, in the Department, people sympathized with him. The Department was indecisive as usual, particularly Joe Palmer, the Assistant Secretary.

*Q: Why would that be? You're not talking about the rational weight, but the sympathetic weight. Is that what you're talking about?*

OLSON: Yes.

*Q: But we had a major policy, which we continue to have and that is Africa is a network of tribal issues and once you start unraveling this colonial thing, be it rational, be it what they may, that's what we got and any messing around with it will just lead to absolute chaos. At the very top this was our policy.*

OLSON: We were so concerned to save their lives and get them out of there that we didn't quibble over it too much.

*Q: Was the weight of what happened in the Congo in your mind at that time?*

OLSON: It was in our minds in that the troops were pretty damn primitive. The Congo was on our mind also and anything could have happened. We didn't want to be responsible for the deaths of those people. Even more so, I ordered the Peace Corps to get out of there. The Director of the Peace Corps at that time was Jack Vaughn and he opposed this. There were 900 Peace Corps in Biafra at that time.

*Q: In the Biafran area?*

OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Good God.*

OLSON: They didn't do it. Jack Vaughn was arguing with me that these people were prepared to stay behind and pick up the pieces. They had this silly theory in the back of their heads that the Peace Corps people could be useful by staying behind and supporting what was left. Well, they didn't understand Africa, I can tell you. Barnard and the group left and immediately Ojukwu's forces had retreated and the Nigerians were moving in. Vaughn said that the Ambassador can't order us around like this. I said, "God dammit, you guys get the hell out of here. I don't want to be responsible and explain to your families what happened to you. It is our job in the Embassy to look after the security of American citizens and this is number one." Nothing happened until the militant troops started moving down that way and, all of a sudden, there was panic. In the meantime, the arrangements that we had made to get them out of there were gone. They were no longer available, so Tom Smith and a couple of my other people went out to find whatever transportation they could find to get these people out. We got a hold of some old barges and a couple of tug boats that weren't really strong enough to do the job, but we loaded all 900 of these kids aboard these barges. They were out in the open and, for two and one-half days, with Tom leading the groups, they went through the swamps of Central Nigeria. They were eaten up by

mosquitoes and, occasionally, a bullet would whiz by.

*Q: I find it incredible that, in the middle of a civil war, we had 900 people in an area under attack. I'm talking about the original decision to keep them there, not just when things were falling apart. Would you say that this was part of the political and emotional pressure to do that?*

OLSON: The Department and the sympathizers had convinced the Peace Corps and all kinds of people that the Ibos would hold out and that there was no way that the Northerners could get in there. It became almost a religion.

*Q: There was also support in Congress. If I recall, there was at least one Congressional Staffer who was just renowned. I can't remember his name right now.*

OLSON: There were an awful lot of them. Two of them came out to visit Nigeria and were asking us what we were doing there and why we weren't we helping these poor Biafrans. Our policy was to hold fast. Congressman Charlie Godeel was one of them. They went down to Biafra and an air raid took place while they were there. They dove into the muck and were very proud of that. They left the mud on their clothes so that we could see it when they came out again. A lot of nonsense, but they sure got out in a hurry. The Department wouldn't believe me. I used to tell them that, if they didn't think my leadership was correct on this, then they better tell me to get out and I would go. I'm a Foreign Service Officer. But this was the way it was and this is the way it has to be. It ended up where I couldn't be named to any other post because Biafra was still such a hot issue.

*Q: Before we move on, still in Nigeria, during these four and a half years, what sort of relations did you personally and then also the Embassy and our Ambassadors have with the Nigerians?*

OLSON: On the whole, very good. The only time we had a bad situation, it was brought on by our people in Washington. I can't think of who the guy was now, but General Gowon was being told all of the time that his soldiers had to be careful that they didn't kill anybody unnecessarily and so on and so forth. This was the middle of a war. Gowon even established a code of conduct for his men and tried to enforce it. He did a pretty good job on that. But, if you're going to take several hundred thousand people out of the bush and don't have trained leaders to look after them and make sure they do the right things, you're going to have trouble no matter who it is. You get a bunch of fanatical Muslims, for instance, and see what they do in most any kind of situation in the war zone in that area down General Gowon's throat. They kept at it and kept at it and General Gowon kept saying, "We know what's in this report. We've seen it."

*Q: When you say "our people," who are you talking about?*

OLSON: The State Department. They sent a Special Mission to Lagos to make sure that the reports were shown to the Nigerians and that they read this thing. I asked for an appointment with General Gowon to do this and the Secretary General of the Foreign Office said, "Are you sure that you want to do this? I don't think that it will be very well received." I said that I realized that possibility, but I had my orders. I called to bring General Gowon over to discuss this and to deliver this report and things were heating up a bit. We got a call back from Gowon's office that

we will not be able to receive your people and nor will we receive them anytime in the near future. Bingo! Our good relationship was flattened by these idiots in Washington insisting that we shove this down Gowon's throat. So, they went back to Washington dragging their tails behind them.

*Q: Who were they? Were they Congress?*

OLSON: No, they were State Department.

*Q: We can fill in the names later.*

OLSON: That was the situation. That was the straw that broke the camel's back for the time being on our relationship. Throughout, I could have seen Gowon anytime I wanted to. We had a very good personal relationship. This destroyed it.

*Q: I heard that Gowon was familiar with Lincoln and our own civil war.*

OLSON: Oh, yes. He was a student of that. If the United States had one friend in Nigeria, it was General Gowon.

*Q: When you have an emotionally charged issue such as this thing and, obviously, in Nigeria as far as Gowon and his government are concerned, this is a matter of life or death and you have Americans for a variety of emotional and political reasons trying to push something on you. Did you find that you could operate on two levels, one to make him understand how people felt but, at the same time, continue the positive relations to get other things done?*

OLSON: Yes, I think that on different levels you can operate, but when you can do that and be completely honest with your leaders in the Department or where your orders are coming from, is another thing.

*Q: Because you can be undercutting your message.*

OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Did you feel any real engagement at the top? That would be Dean Rusk, who was obviously involved, and Lyndon Johnson was President. Did you feel any engagement there or did you feel that this whole thing was relegated down to the assistants?*

OLSON: There was engagement at the top. I was told to cool it by David Newsom actually. I was within a gnat's eyelash of being removed if I didn't cool it. There was a conversation with Elliot Richardson, so I expected to have my ears knocked down by Richardson. He didn't do it. He said that I was doing fine and to continue with what I was doing.

*Q: I'm interested in the role of the two Ambassadors.*

OLSON: To get into that, Bill Trueheart was in charge when Secretary came out to Nigeria and

went to a conference in Kinshasa with Trueheart. I stayed home and was in charge. I'm trying to think about how this worked out.

*Q: Bill Rogers, you mean Secretary of State?*

OLSON: Yes.

*Q: That would have been Rusk, wouldn't it have been? You were there from when to when?*

OLSON: 1966 to 1970.

*Q: Okay, fine, that would have been Rogers.*

OLSON: I'm trying to remember. This is the same report. This makes me so damn mad.

*Q: We can always add these things, you know.*

OLSON: What happened was this report, the Western Report. Rogers and Trueheart came back and we had dinner to discuss things and- I'll have to think about it. In a nutshell, I was asked by Rogers - I tried to carry out this order to show this report and I said I couldn't do it because Gowon wouldn't receive it - if I believed in doing this. And I said, "No, Sir, I did not believe in doing this." Rogers got mad and he said, I believe, "I don't feel that much for any Officer who carries out an order that he doesn't believe in." So, Trueheart stepped in at that point and said to the Secretary, "Let's discuss this. Olson tried to carry this order out several times and cabled the Department on it and got nowhere. He kept coming back and got nowhere. You should not criticize him for this." So, Rogers backed off on that. That was the kind of emotion - this was the Secretary of State on the issue of this one report. It's a lovely position to be in, to be caught in the middle.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

OLSON: Rogers had asked, "Why are the Nigerians so cold?" and I told him that it was because we tried to force that report down their throats.

*Q: What were you getting on the military situation and the military attachés?*

OLSON: This is something that I never felt comfortable with. Arthur Halligan, the Military Attaché, was sort of doing his own reporting and not all of it was approved. He was reporting with the acquiescence of the Ambassador. I went along with it because of the Ambassador, but I felt that some of the things were better left unsaid and unreported. The great stream of consciousness reporting by Halligan would get into tremendously long telegrams. It was all very anti-Biafran and he sort of made fun of them a little bit. I think that irritated the hell out of the Department. But this was coming from the military, not from the Embassy. In retrospect, long ago, I felt that reporting on that should have been more tightly controlled.

*Q: This doesn't seem like a situation where the CIA would have been of much help. In a military*

*situation, who's going to win and who's going to lose is not the type of thing that the CIA could get into. But how did you find it at that time?*

OLSON: Their reports were generally useful but they weren't determinate to any extent.

*Q: Trueheart was caught in another one of these great emotional things, he had been Deputy Chief of Mission in Vietnam and came out of that where he had been in a very controversial time on how we deal with Diem, where he did not support the overthrow of Diem. It meant that he had been in a crossfire there as a Deputy Chief of Mission and, all of a sudden, finds himself in Nigeria, which was not his field of expertise. He was just assigned there. Did you think that maybe he was trying to duck a bit?*

OLSON: No, in all fairness, I can say that he didn't duck. With what I knew of Vietnam, I thought he might have. I can say that Bill Trueheart regarded me as the expert on the Nigeria situation and he generally accepted my judgment on things. He generally let me determine what would be done and so forth. He was probably wrong to do this as it turned out.

*Q: I think our policy, in the long run, the one you were supporting, certainly came out to be the rational policy.*

OLSON: Sure, it was. The real Devil behind the scenes in the overall thing and, mind you, he didn't pay that much attention to it, was Henry Kissinger. He knew what was going on, he knew about this argument, but the only reference in his book regarding Nigeria and that policy was that "Our people in the Embassy said that this should be the policy and I suppose they're right."

*Q: During the 1969 to 1970 period, Henry Kissinger was the National Security Advisor, did you feel his fine hand in there?*

OLSON: I felt his fine hand through some of his staff members who were behind this and they are the ones who tried to cut my throat when I was finally named Ambassador. A fellow by the name of Roger Morris. I was nose to nose with him in front of Fulbright and Fulbright knocked his ears down to his ankles.

*Q: What was Roger Morris?*

OLSON: He was a staff member of the National Security Council. He refused to give up on trying to get me nailed for the Biafrans not winning the war. I was investigated down to my little toe.

*Q: What were they trying to prove?*

OLSON: They were trying to prove that I was unfit to become Ambassador to the great country of Sierra Leone. There's one more thing that I would like to add about your question pertaining to guidance from the top. We had an Ambassador's conference with Kissinger and one of the boys said, "Well, Mr. Secretary, what do you think we should do about our overall African policy?" Kissinger said, "Keep it quiet boys, keep it quiet."

*Q: This was later on, yes. This was when Kissinger would try to keep out of some areas.*

OLSON: Yes, he wasn't involved in Africa at all.

**ROBERT P. SMITH**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Enugu (1962-1965)**

*Ambassador Robert P. Smith's interest in foreign affairs was sparked by his service in the U.S. Marine Corps immediately after high school. After the service, he attended Texas Christian University, where he pursued a degree in international affairs. In addition, he has served in Pakistan, Beirut, Ghana, South Africa, and Malta. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 28, 1989.*

SMITH: I finished the academic year 1961-1962 at Northwestern. I'll never forget the phone call from Washington. Nigeria, of course, was the most exciting country in Africa. Even then it was burgeoning. They had an astute prime minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. The President was Nnamdi-Azikiwe. Both loomed very large on the African scene. They were both well educated, terribly articulate, bright, I would say brilliant men. And my onward assignment was to open a new consulate in Eastern Nigeria in the provincial capital, Enugu.

*Q: Why did we want to open a consulate there?*

SMITH: In those days there were three major regions in Nigeria, the Northern, the Western, and the Eastern. We wisely, in my judgment, wanted a consulate in each of those three major regions because of the sheer size, and diversity of the country, and the terrible tribal divisions that were already coming into play. The Eastern Region, Enugu, where I was, was dominated by the Ibo tribe, the Western Region by the Yoruba, and the Northern Region by the Hausa/Fulani.

So we had had a consulate in the North in Kaduna for some while, and Ibadan in the West had been open, but it fell to me to open the new one in the Eastern region. And I did so under a great country team in Lagos. Joseph Palmer II was our ambassador, already the dean of the FSOs in Africa. He had already served as principal officer in Salisbury and elsewhere in Africa in Nairobi. He was the ambassador. Jerry Green was the deputy chief of mission. I couldn't have had a better country team situation in Lagos. They gave me my head and said, "Bob, get on over there and get it cranked up." I did so and we loved it so much that we extended our assignment there and went back for a third year. I think I would have gone back beyond that had they permitted it, but they wanted me back in Washington.

*Q: What were your principal duties?*

SMITH: Well, my duties were the same as any other principal officer. I had only one other

substantive officer. I had a vice consul and two other American staff, a secretary and an administrative assistant. There were a number of Americans in Eastern Nigeria, many of them black Americans who had married Nigerians. We also had a USIS officer there.

In addition to the whole range of consular duties, politics in Nigeria were absolutely fascinating. We were already starting to see the beginnings of the terrible tribal divisions which later would almost tear the country apart. So to a far greater extent than I anticipated as a consul in an outlying province, I was doing a great deal of political and economic reporting. And it was all grist for the mill, not only in the embassy in Lagos, but back in Washington.

*Q: You were with which tribe?*

SMITH: The Ibos, who later were to establish Biafra, which touched off the civil war. One of the things involved in the struggle was who was going to control the federal government. There was always the competition as to which region had the most people and every time they did a census they would suddenly discover whole villages of 30,000 people that weren't there a few years earlier, and so forth. There was a terrible rivalry of that sort. Each tribe felt put upon by the other tribes.

The Ibos, by general agreement, then and now, seem to be among the most intelligent, hard working, articulate, outgoing people in Africa. That is a view I continue to hold today, certainly in Nigeria. And they were overwhelmingly Christian or animists, as were the Yorubas. But the Hausas, of course, were Moslem and dominated the federal government in the presence of the prime minister, even though an Ibo was president.

*Q: The fact that they were dominated, was this a policy on the part of the British?*

SMITH: Yes, I think so. The more conservative Moslem north, I think, the British felt more comfortable with. And, in fairness, they, in fact, did have the predominant population; and, measured strictly on a population basis, probably should have dominated the government. But their dominance was resented in the southern parts of the country, particularly in the Eastern Region.

But during my three years there, these divisions and rivalries were masked, so much so that you could get in trouble with a Nigerian by asking him outright what tribe he was from. He would bristle and say, "I'm a Nigerian." Because everyone was attaching so much importance to building one Nigeria, that was the cry. Yet, underlying that, and when you'd get to know them really well, over a beer at night I would get vitriolic comments from my Ibo friends about the North or even the Yorubas in the West, and so forth, about how "We Ibos are put upon and we're not getting our share of the federal pie." So this was all coming into play.

*Q: You would be reporting this back, but looking back on it, was there any real American interest in this other than this is a fascinating situation?*

SMITH: Well, yes, certainly. Nigeria was the largest country in Africa, with enormous natural resources and human resources, as well. And also, of course, in my region was the burgeoning



oil industry down there. Shell/BP was already in production in the Rivers Area of Eastern Nigeria and there were American interests there already, to say nothing of Shell/BP. We had, clearly, American interests and we, as a matter of policy from the very beginning, attached ourselves to strong support of the one Nigeria concept. We did not want to see Nigeria fall apart. We worked toward smoothing over some of these dissensions, and calming these inflamed tempers, and so forth.

*Q: I mean, after all, here were are, a country four, or five, or six thousand miles away, how could you, let's say, as a consul do anything? I mean, were you getting instructions to do anything in this nature or were you just playing a very passive role?*

SMITH: I think they left that largely to my own discretion. The major démarches, obviously, were being made by the ambassador and the DCM, who visited all the consulates quite regularly. But because of the way the United States was regarded and the enormous popularity of Jack Kennedy (indeed, I have seen Kennedy's picture plastered up in mud huts all over Africa in those years), the Nigerians loved Jack Kennedy and the United States. We also had a major aid program going there. In the Eastern Region alone, I had over 200 American Peace Corps volunteers scattered all over the region doing everything from agricultural development, education, health.

*Q: This was, of course, the birth of the Peace Corps.*

SMITH: That's right.

*Q: How effective was it at this time?*

SMITH: Enormously effective. And some of the Peace Corps volunteers, even to the present, continue to correspond with Nigerian friends and to take their families back to Nigeria to the village in which they worked as young people 25 years ago. Very, very effective.

*Q: This was a brand new program. Were you watching over this thing with some apprehension of how it was going to work?*

SMITH: No. I think I was caught up, perhaps one could call it naivete, but those were very exciting days and Nigeria seemed to be doing it right. It was a truly democratic nation. The vote was there and, despite the conflicts about the population census and that sort of thing, it was truly democratic. There were distinct major political parties, one of them dominated by the Eastern Region, one by the West, another by the North. But they would fight these battles out at the polls. There were always disputes over the election results, but the winner won and that's simply the way it was. So we wanted to encourage this and to keep going. We wanted to encourage Nigeria's development. We knew they were going to walk across the African stage with long strides and we wanted to help them.

But I can't emphasize strongly enough the close ties that we all felt in those days between the United States and Nigeria. So much so that, when President Kennedy was assassinated, I have never seen such an outpouring of affection and genuine shock and distress in my life, before or

since. A steady stream of callers at my residence lasted virtually all night. I'm speaking of Nigerians now, not just Americans or diplomatic and consular colleagues. The memorial service I arranged in his memory was attended by the Governor of Eastern Nigeria, Sir Francis Ibiam, a distinguished Presbyterian medical doctor and later politician, by the Premier, and the entire cabinet. And for weeks everything was concentrated on President Kennedy's assassination. It was as if he was their president, as well. A terrible shock to them. So I felt very close to them.

When I left, I was reassigned to the Department. I had been abroad then for almost ten years and they pulled me back to the Department, having me in mind for the Nigeria desk. That was filled, initially, though, so I took the Ghana desk for the first year.

*Q: This is 1965?*

SMITH: I came back in 1965 and from 1965 until 1966 I handled the Ghana desk. And toward the end of 1966 things in Nigeria went from bad to worse. It fell to my successor, Bob Barnard, to evacuate American citizens because of the war. There were massacres of Ibos in the North. I mean real massacres, they were killed in the streets.

*Q: This is in Nigeria?*

SMITH: Yes. 1965 and 1966. So the civil war broke out. The Eastern Region tried to peel off, seceded from the Federation and declared itself the Republic of Biafra. By this time Ambassador Palmer had come back as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, so I worked very closely with him during the war years.

**MILES WEDEMAN**  
**Head of Capital Development and Finance, Africa Bureau, USAID**  
**Washington, DC (1962-1968)**

*Miles Wedeman was born in Maryland in 1923. He received a BA from Swarthmore College in 1943 and his LLB from Harvard in 1949. He also served as a lieutenant overseas from 1943-1946. After joining USAID in 1962, he did development work in Nigeria, Liberia and Uganda. He was also assigned to Korea, Cambodia, and Syria. Mr. Wedeman was interviewed in 1995 by John Kean.*

*Q: Did this represent a major switch of geographic focus for you?*

WEDEMAN: Yes. I had never had any connection with Africa before, none. None at all. I'd been to Europe, as a tourist, and in the Pacific as a naval officer during the war. But the rest of the world, no, I knew very little about it. Ed Hutchinson was the Assistant Administrator for Africa and I remained in CDF until June of 1968 when I went to Korea. That's when I started my foreign service career. I had been a civil servant until then, and I'd been in the same job for about six years, which is, as things turned out, long for me. Usually I have not held jobs that long.

*Q: Yes, now let's concentrate on that period of experience for a little while, and tell me what were some of your principle first involvements.*

WEDEMAN: Well, the main involvement right off the bat was the fact that the Africa Bureau had a goal of authorizing \$100 million in development loans during fiscal 1963, starting from zero. And there was very little experience, naturally, in making development loans.

*Q: Yes, this was only two years after the big rush of independence.*

WEDEMAN: Well, not entirely, of course. You had Ghana, which had become independent, I believe, in 1957. You are right, the big rush started in 1960. But there were people who had been in the Development Loan Fund, if you are familiar with the Development Loan Fund (DLF). This was one of the predecessors to AID. The Development Loan Fund had been organized during the Eisenhower administration to be a kind of U.S. World Bank, but separate and apart from the International Cooperation Administration. There were people who didn't want this kind of assistance touched by people who had been active in ICA. It led an independent existence, with a very small staff. Its policies were modeled after those of the World Bank. The ways it went about putting projects together and approving them, and administering them were patterned after those of the World Bank, a system which continues at the World Bank until now. The DLF was folded into AID in the reorganization under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. The people who worked for the DLF went into AID, although they were much diluted in numbers and influence as a result of the change. Ed Hutchinson, who was head of the Africa Bureau, had been the Deputy Managing Director of the DLF. His deputy, Art McLaughlin, I think, had not been with the DLF but Ed knew him quite well and they worked like two peas in a pod.

*Q: Who was that?*

WEDEMAN: Art McLaughlin. I came to know I knew him very well. I worked with him more closely than with anybody else. He died about a year later, which was a terrible loss, both personally and professionally. He was a very, very able man. My deputy, Al Disdier, was out of the DLF. I, of course, came from the outside. I'll be frank to say my background was not in finance. It certainly was in project management, but at a fairly senior level, so I had to learn from the start.

*Q: So Miles, would you say that your approach, as you took this \$100 million commitment drive, was very much along the lines, or something different from the DLF?*

WEDEMAN: I think it was very much what the DLF had done, and I came to know how the DLF had operated. I will say I thought the DLF knew what it was doing. The DLF was entirely in capital development, not in technical assistance. It would be in infrastructure projects, sometimes in industrial projects, and also in development banks, which used to be a very popular area for foreign assistance. And that's what we concentrated on in the Africa Bureau during the years that I was there.

All of this has changed. AID does almost nothing by way of capital development now. When it began to get out of capital development, the main rationale was the fact that since AID followed a "buy American" policy, sometimes a "super buy American" policy, it meant that American capital projects were too expensive compared to those of Europe and Japan. American construction firms and equipment suppliers generally were not competitive in the world market. Therefore the Agency came to feel after a while that the role of providing capital development to the less developed world was best done by, let's say, the World Bank and other donors

*Q: Did you have some concentration countries?*

WEDEMAN: Yes. The U.S. had made formal commitments in certain cases, either to finance particular projects or to support the development of multi-year programs of a particular country, in Africa, most notably Nigeria. Nigeria became independent in 1960, and the U.S. made a commitment of 81 million Nigerian pounds, which worked out to something like \$225 million to assist the first five year development plan of the Government of Nigeria. Capital development was targeted to carry out a large part of that commitment.

To achieve the Bureau's FY63 target of \$100 million in development loans was a lot of work. The effort involved all kinds of projects. In terms of what we financed, it was quite opportunistic. It was a matter of finding things to finance, and my experience in AID was that we were always looking for things to do. AID never lacked for money. Maybe it does now, but it didn't in my day. You were always scrambling around, looking for projects. I know in the case of the decision to authorize \$100 million in fiscal 1963, it was hard work finding things that would pass muster but nevertheless would get us on to meeting that commitment. Every morning I would have what I called an operations meeting, with at least that part of the staff working on a particular group of projects or a particular group of countries. We had a system for not only measuring progress, but predicting whether we were on target to meet that goal of \$100 million. In the end we fell just short of it, I think, authorizing something like \$94 or \$96 million.

*Q: By the end of 1963?*

WEDEMAN: By the end of fiscal '63, which then would have been the 30th of June, in the old way. This was just authorizing the loan, not obligating the funds which could only occur with the signing of a loan agreement by the U.S. and the borrower. The DLF still continued in the early years of AID as a name, although not as an organization. All of the monies going into AID development loans were authorized and appropriated under the DLF, of which the Africa Bureau's share in 1963 was \$100 million.

*Q: It became the implementer of all those appropriated funds.*

WEDEMAN: That's right.

*Q: Was this the major element of Africa focused AID activity?*

WEDEMAN: I can't tell you. I was so involved with what I was doing, I probably was not looking at what was going on on the technical assistance side. I'm guessing it constituted

probably about half of the Africa Bureau's effort. Maybe more than half. You also had the fact that Ed Hutchinson had been a development loan man for quite a while. His real interest was in development lending, and much less in technical assistance.

*Q: Would you say that the Africa Bureau then was functioning in a manner significantly different than the other bureaus of AID?*

WEDEMAN: I don't know. Of course it was much smaller, because the Africa program was the smallest of all the regional programs. You had the Near East, Far East, and Latin America. The major political push was in those areas, not in Africa. Africa was way down in terms of priorities. All of the loans, I won't go into detail as to how they were authorized, but they all had to be consented to by the Treasury. Treasury was always frustrated, in my observation, by the fact that it couldn't do anything about the Alliance for Progress loans (Latin America), or about the Near East, and more significantly perhaps, India and Pakistan, which were the biggest recipients of this kind of lending. So, it would be particularly tough on the Africa Bureau in terms of insisting that every "t" be crossed and "i" dotted. It was not easy to deal with Treasury in that respect.

*Q: You had an interagency committee then?*

WEDEMAN: It was more than an interagency committee. It was something known as the Development Loan Committee. The head of AID was the chairman of it. The other members were the President of the EX-IM Bank, a very prominent member; the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury responsible for international monetary affairs; the Deputy Administrator of AID (who often chaired the meetings of the Development Loan Committee); and the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs. There may have been others, I'm not sure. One major difference existed between the way the DLF and AID approved development loans. In the DLF, as in the case of the World Bank, the board of the DLF, not its Managing Director, approved or disapproved the loans. But the Development Loan Committee AID, whose membership was virtually the same as that of the DLF, was only advisory to the Administrator and he could take the advice or he could reject it. Now...

*Q: This reflected a Kennedy Administration judgment that there ought to be a focus of responsibility in AID?*

WEDEMAN: I don't . Certainly the decision had been made that they weren't going to have several foreign aid agencies. I think that is true. They weren't going to have the DLF and ICA. They were going to combine them. They, of course, didn't do anything about the EX-IM Bank, which continued as an independent agency. The DLF and the ICA were the two principal components of AID. ICA people rather than DLF staff dominated AID, just by sheer numbers. They outnumbered all of the DLF people. Certainly you could sense with the DLF people a feeling that, I won't say that they had been downgraded, but they had a much harder time in pushing for their views and their ways of doing business. The DLF was very different in the way it authorized and administered loans from the ways in which ICA administered technical assistance.

*Q: One was more banker oriented and one more development oriented, perhaps?*

WEDEMAN: I'd put it a slightly different way - the DLF was much more flexible than AID. It was more financially oriented. I won't say banker oriented. Banker, if you mean World Bank, Okay, but the World Bank is a very particular kind of bank. But looking at ICA, ICA had, and so far as I know AID still does, this array of devices, PIOs [Project Implementation Orders] of one sort or another, used to implement projects.

*Q: Project Implementation Orders (PIOs) ?*

WEDEMAN: Yes. And a source of considerable friction between the DLF people and the former ICA people. Not long after I joined AID I was asked to chair a task force on procurement, including PIO/Ts (Project Implementation Order/Technical) and PIO/Cs(Project Implementation Order(Commodity)).

*Q: Ts being technical, Cs being commodities, right?*

WEDEMAN: That's right. But not Participants, PIO/Ps. I was chairman of a task force which was to recommend to the Administrator any changes that should be made as a result of the melding of these two agencies. My basic recommendation was to get rid of PIO/Ts and PIO/Cs. These recommendations were not adopted. I will confess to the end of my days in AID I never did understand what they really accomplished. The Deputy Administrator in the Africa Bureau, Art McLaughlin, said they had one major purpose and that was to squirrel money away and not use it. I came to see how right Art was. I found the PIO in the beginning, and all the way through my career with AID a very cumbersome way of doing business. It did seem to me as the years went on that AID became much more-bureaucratic is the wrong word for it; I don't really object to bureaucracy-but it became much more rigid and much more detailed in how it carried out things. Perhaps PIO/Ts were appropriate for technical assistance, although I doubt it, but they certainly didn't fit the world of development lending for capital projects. In any event, in the beginning, and for as long as I was with the Africa Bureau, we didn't have to worry about PIO/Ts and PIO/Cs. I felt then and later AID was an organization which should have been flexible and adaptable in the way it did its business, but alas it resembled nothing so much as a fossilized old line government agency.

*Q: Now, I wonder if you would comment briefly on how you jumped into this. Did you jump into this in terms of the administrative functions, or did you also get involved in what the countries looked like and what the issues and problems were in the country?*

WEDEMAN: Both. The approach was very opportunistic but with some emphasis on particular countries. We had Nigeria as a special case, which was the largest single country of concentration. There was a general interest in francophone Africa, although it was recognized that it would be difficult to make loans to these countries, all of which were newly independent. It was felt there should be an American presence in these countries.

*Q: But all of those had a primary focus on their relationship with France.*

WEDEMAN: Yes, indeed. They still do. AID also had an interest in East Africa, but in terms of what we did it was very much a matter of what you could find to finance. In some cases what we were doing was picking up projects that for one reason or another the World Bank decided not to do.

*Q: What were the other countries, besides Nigeria, where you were primarily working?*

WEDEMAN: Nigeria was the major one. Tunisia was a second one; there was almost a commitment to Tunisia. Then there was a country we more or less inherited from the DLF in terms of concentration and that was Morocco. But I think, although I think that my memory could be wrong, that Nigeria was the only one with which the U.S. government had a formal commitment. This was authorized under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. A commitment was designed to be something new in terms of foreign assistance.

*Q: And this reflected a sense of the importance in the size and geographic weight of Nigeria.*

WEDEMAN: Yes. Particularly the political side of it. Nigeria was and is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of population and economic potential. In the beginning there was a great deal of hope for Nigeria, that Nigeria, unlike, say the francophone states and many other states in Africa, had a fairly large number of trained, skilled people at the professional level. That was the reason behind it. You have to remember the commitment was not ironclad in the sense that the U.S. would provide \$225 million in assistance, but that the U.S. said it would consider up to \$225 million in projects and technical assistance for Nigeria over a period of five years.

This led to some misunderstandings. I can remember the time of the World Bank and IMF meetings in the fall of 1963. This was when all these people would come to see us, and the senior Nigerian visitor was the Federal Minister of Finance in Lagos, Chief Festus Okote Ibo, who was very powerful politically. He was a great big fellow who wore Nigerian dress and a boater on his head with a great big feather that came out of the top of it. And this man had a squeaky little voice and he said "That commitment has existed since 1961 and I have not seen one dollar." His view of it was that each year there would be a cash transfer and that's exactly what the U.S. was not willing to do. Certainly Nigeria was not a country where you sensibly make a cash transfer.

To show you one of the problems let me describe a visit I made to Nigeria. In the summer of 1965 I had to go there in connection with the very first project being implemented, the Ibadan water supply scheme in the Western Region. We had gotten word that the Deputy Chief Minister of this Region was trying to influence the award of contracts for that project and he had his hand out. I was asked to call on the Chief Minister of the Western region, Chief Akintole, in Ibadan. On a very dark rainy afternoon in very dark bungalow (his official residence) I told him this was not acceptable and that the information we had concerning the Deputy Chief Minister was quite reliable. He replied, "Oh, I'm so happy you have come. Now everybody says that Nigeria is corrupt, but you're the first person who has indicated that you have actual evidence of corruption. Please convey back to Mr. Hutchinson my regards that you have revealed this," and so on and so forth, "and you can be sure I will do something about it." Six months later, he was assassinated in the first coup in Nigeria. He was said to be one of the bigger takers of money in all of Nigeria. In the same coup Festus Okote Ibo, probably the champion in this game,

reportedly had his eyes gouged out and then was killed when he wouldn't reveal the number of his Swiss bank account. The commitment to Nigeria certainly was troublesome because of this fact, and it was difficult to develop projects that were acceptable and capable of being implemented.

When you mention countries, one cannot overlook Liberia. It always claimed a special relationship with the United States. While there was no formal commitment in the sense of the one to Nigeria, nevertheless, Liberia was treated as a very special case

*Q: What were some of the principal projects there?*

WEDEMAN: The one I remember best in Liberia was Mount Coffee. This was a hydroelectric scheme and it went fairly smoothly, at least to the point of awarding the contracts and getting it started. Later on, I understand, there were major technical problems with the grouting required to plug up gaps in the rock foundation of the dam.

*Q: To prevent seepage?*

WEDEMAN: Yes, that's right. It didn't work entirely. There was a great deal of seepage. One thing I do remember about Mount Coffee was that we had a visit from the Liberian Ambassador to the United States when we were in the process of completing our review of the major construction contract for Mt. Coffee. He called on the Assistant Administrator, Ed Hutchinson, and me to see how things were going. We were just about ready to approve the contract. His name I can't remember, but I can well recall his final remark "I'm going home and pray tonight that you are going to approve it." There was a great deal of religious feeling on the part of that Ambassador. We did approve the contract, but not for religious reasons.

*Q: This was a dam?*

WEDEMAN: Yes, still there I gather, but who knows? Given the tragedy that befell Liberia, I have no idea. But it was a very difficult country to develop

*Q: What about Uganda? Was there any particular focus on Uganda? It was a sort of favored country in some respects.*

WEDEMAN: I don't know if it was favored or not, but we did work on two projects in Uganda. One was the University of East Africa. We had a program for assisting the capital development of the University of East Africa, including the former Ugandan institution at Makerere, near Kampala, the Tanzanian University College at Dar Es Salaam, and to a lesser extent the University College in Nairobi in Kenya. Our main emphasis in the end was on Dar Es Salaam. We never really did get going on anything for Makerere.

The other project in Uganda I will always remember favorably. I won't say it was unique, but it had the great virtue of being home grown in Uganda. This was not like most of our projects which were our ideas. The Ugandan project was a scheme for young Ugandan ranchers to raise cattle. A certain amount of land had been set aside by the Ugandan government for this purpose



and the Ugandans had put the project together. It was very, very well thought out. All that was asked of us was the foreign exchange required, about \$800, 000, for the purchase of equipment. I and the loan officer went out to look at it and were impressed. It did go forward. Later it fell a victim to all the chaos that later engulfed Uganda. Four years ago I was in Uganda and found what had been the site of the project. Not a trace remained.

*Q: Were there differences between the four AID bureaus on capital development?*

WEDEMAN: There were four regional bureaus in AID, and the heads of capital development for each one of the four bureaus certainly knew one other, but we weren't necessarily telling each other exactly what we were doing. In some ways it was apples and oranges. In the case of the Africa Bureau there were no commodity support programs. Ed Hutchinson did not believe in commodity support as foreign assistance. I tended to agree with him..

*Q: Perhaps particularly in the circumstances of Africa.*

WEDEMAN: I would agree. Certainly given the limited nature of American assistance and the small size of even the largest African countries, commodity support lending had no real role to play in AID assistance to the continent. With the much larger economies in places such as India and Pakistan where AID had large formal dollar commitments, I wouldn't say you could shovel out huge amounts of money, but you could commit large amounts of money in this fashion. These were much larger economies, and I remember sitting through a meeting of the Development Loan Committee, when an amendment to an existing Indian commodity support program being considered was on the order of something like \$100 million-the size of the entire AID Africa development loan program. In a given year AID assistance to these other countries annually could run to hundreds of millions of dollars to any one of them. Emphases changed over the years. By the 1980s the Africa program and the Africa bureau had become much larger players inside the agency than they had been in the 1960s.

*Q: They reached the \$400 to \$500 million per year level.*

WEDEMAN: That's right. But in terms of interchange of information, I will confess, not a great deal. Sometimes your best source of information was to go to meetings of the Development Loan Committee when the Committee was considering projects from other bureaus, and hear what was said back and forth. On the Development Loan Committee, at least two or three members, were very active. I remember in one case they had up for review a development loan in Argentina. It looked like it was a project but it wasn't a project. It was masquerading as one. In fact, it was a loan to finance local costs, i.e., budgetary support, a much more dubious proposition. The President of the EX-IM Bank, a very shrewd and able fellow, and very colorful at that, Harold Linder, just took the project apart piece by piece, and said, "This is no project. All you are doing is providing X number of dollars for budgetary support for the government of Argentina." And the capital development chief from the Alliance for Progress really had no answer to this. The head of the EX-IM Bank turned to Dave Bell, who was then the Administrator of AID and said, "Dave, I don't think this ought to be approved, but it's your decision." And it was approved. But that's how you learned what was going on sometimes in the other bureaus. Later the Committee was abolished when Bill Gaud became Deputy Administrator. I understand he particularly

disliked having to justify projects before the Committee when he was head of the Near East South Asia Bureau.

*Q: There were some differences...*

WEDEMAN: In terms of what people were doing there were considerable differences. In the case of Africa it was entirely projects. The program was managed and administered from Washington. This system for running the program was much resented by the field people who had come out of ICA. They certainly had a point but, unfortunately, most of them were technical not capital assistance minded and had the PIO/T mindset. When I later served in missions I never really thought the missions were always right and Washington was wrong.

*Q: Did you make some trips to Africa with some frequency? Or were those relatively exceptional things for you?*

WEDEMAN: The first year I was totally engaged in getting the \$100 million committed. So I did not travel until the summer of 1963, which was after we had gotten almost \$100 million in development loans authorized. Then I made a swing through West Africa. Usually I would make one trip per year. The next year it was through East Africa. I would do roughly the same thing each year but I wanted to go somewhere only if I felt it was necessary. I didn't like to be just a developmental tourist. I knew later when I was in the field people from Washington sometimes just came out, they wouldn't have any serious role to play with respect to projects or programs—they just wanted to travel. To some extent they were country collectors.

*Q: And, did you have any input to, was there any relationship between what you were doing and the Akosombo Project in Ghana?*

WEDEMAN: No. That was a holdover from the DLF. This was Ed Hutchinson's project. There may have been some AID participation, but this would have been before I came to AID in June 1962. I've been to Akosombo but that's about as much as I can say.

*Q: Were there any particular kinds of projects that you felt the Africans were interested in, but you did not feel merited your response?*

WEDEMAN: It would be hard to say. It seemed to me that we were always on the offensive looking for projects. With the exception of the rare bird such as the Uganda ranching scheme, it was not easy getting ideas from the African side. I never really had the feeling of the Africans developing projects. There were some that had been put together by the French, for example, in francophone Africa, which we picked up in one way or another. Or there were projects the World Bank had been interested in that we fell heir to. However, I will be frank in saying that I never felt any real sense of initiative on the part of Africans.

*Q: I happened to be working in a different bureau at that time, and lest you feel there was something wrong with the situation in Africa, we had the same problem to a considerable extent in other regions.*

WEDEMAN: I'm not surprised. I'm not sure it's changed even now in Africa, but I don't really know.

*Q: You've spoken several times about Ed Hutchinson, and his role as Assistant Administrator for Africa. What kind of leadership was he providing for the bureau? Can you characterize the way he operated?*

WEDEMAN: I think I can. I knew him quite well professionally in connection with development lending. His heart was in development lending. He and Art McLaughlin, his deputy, were perhaps more interested in development lending than in anything else. Any project we had went to Ed, not only for a written review, but we'd have an oral review with him as well. It was like having a small development loan committee meeting with him

*Q: So it was a rehearsal, in effect?*

WEDEMAN: Yes. He knew where the weak spots were, as well as the strong ones. He was quite a leader in this field. My impression is that he found technical assistance a bother. He recognized it had to be done but his heart was really not in technical assistance. That may be unfair to him, but in development lending he gave a lot of leadership. He was also, as you may or may not know, and this reflects his DLF background and the example of the World Bank, not a great believer in field missions. I know when I said to him the first time that I thought I would be interested in going to the field, he said "Why would any intelligent fellow like you want to go out?"

*Q: So, if you were getting those kinds of vibes from your leader, what was your own feeling about the role and relationship between Washington as the formulator of major capital projects and the missions of the countries where they were located?*

WEDEMAN: I have to admit that during the time I was with the Africa Bureau I thought we were entirely right. When I got to the field and when I was not with the Africa Bureau I developed a somewhat different point of view, although as I commented earlier, I never regarded Washington as a hostile or competing camp.

*Q: Comparable to being a pedestrian as opposed to being a driver, right?*

WEDEMAN: It may be, but in the case of the Africa Bureau there were constant complaints from the field that the missions played no role in the development loan program. It is true the program was managed entirely in Washington by the Office of Capital Development and Finance which was what I was head of, and by Ed Hutchinson. Opinions of the field were not asked for and the missions weren't expected to make any great contribution. When you got to the implementation of projects, or more specifically loans, the people you were dealing with in host governments were very different from the people ICA missions worked with in the case of technical assistance. For development lending the key official was the Minister of Finance. Usually the Minister of Finance was a very powerful individual politically, which is not too surprising. This was true of every African country I ever negotiated with. And so you would deal with the Minister of Finance and with his ministry. The missions on the other hand knew a great

deal about the technical ministries such as agriculture and education. In a sense all the missions were doing was providing housekeeping services in the implementation of development loans. The missions, I will be frank in saying, were not asked to participate.

*Q: And, as you said, when you were sitting in Washington, working on these projects in the field, you at least at that point you felt that that was perfectly okay and appropriate.*

WEDEMAN: I did indeed.

*Q: Could you then reflect back on your experience in the Africa Bureau from the Washington end in light of what you later saw, and would you have had a different view working in that job in the Africa Bureau in Washington if you had had some overseas field experience?*

WEDEMAN: I think I would. One thing that needed to be done which was not done during those years was to staff the missions in a way that they could make a useful contribution to development loans. Generally they had people who had experience and expertise in technical assistance, but not in capital development. For the missions to play a role, it was certainly necessary that they have people who were more capital project oriented, not just financially but also procurement oriented, because procurement is a large part of the implementation of a project development loan.

*Q: Now, although the Development Loan Fund per se was dismantled and integrated into AID, it is perhaps not unfair to say that when AID was created in 1961, it had a fairly strong bias toward capital projects and major infrastructure activity.*

WEDEMAN: I think that's fair to say.

*Q: And therefore, you probably felt, you were in a very key role within that context.*

WEDEMAN: Yes.

*Q: Did you see this evolve during that six-year period, from 1962 to 1968?*

WEDEMAN: There was no change as long as Hutchinson was there. The amount of money we authorized annually went down somewhat from \$100 million after that very first year, and by the time he left we were deeply into major problems in implementation. Much was learned during that time as to what projects were capable of being implemented in a satisfactory way and those that were not.

After Hutchinson left, the new leadership in the bureau was quite different. Peter Strauss was head of the Africa Bureau when I left. I suppose it was quite understandable-he did have an interest in capital development, but he wasn't interested in capital development as capital development. He was interested in it more from the point of view of "splash"-what kind of public impact it would make, not in the host country particularly, but in terms of what you could say AID was doing.

There was a project in which the U.S. never participated, known familiarly as the Tanzam Railway. This was to be a railroad running from Zambia to the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, to carry copper from the copper belt in Zambia, and perhaps eastern Zaire, in order to lessen the dependence on the Benguela Railway, which ran in the other direction, toward the Atlantic through Portuguese Angola. Considerable negotiations took place on American participation in the railroad's financing. In 1966, President Johnson himself decided that the U.S. would not do so, much to the chagrin of Soapy Williams, then Assistant Secretary for Africa. I was told LBJ used some very salty language when he turned the proposal down.

*Q: Was he the big desk officer for Africa, as he was for India? You are speaking of Mr. Johnson?*

WEDEMAN: Yes. He was right in the case of the Tanzam railway. I felt he was right, and he was capable of making that kind of decision, rather than having it fuzzied up in some way. As I said, he used very colorful language and said we're not going to do it. After that, an AID project was developed as a kind of substitute, which would have been a road running over roughly the same route, even though the railroad might or might not be built. There were all kinds of problems with the road project in terms of planning, and later its implementation. The road had to be built through territory where no road had run before. I remember telling Mr. Strauss, "It will take at least a year to mobilize the equipment in East Africa for the construction of the road, let alone the time required to build the road." All the equipment had to come from the United States; there could be no other source under our development loan procurement policies.

*Q: No other source allowed.*

WEDEMAN: Yes, that's right. And he said, "I don't buy that." I said, "Well, what would you consider to be a reasonable period?" He said, "The road's got to be built in six months." I said "It can't." That's when I finally decided, and this would have been 1967, the time had come to leave the Africa bureau. There was no way of dealing with him on the subject. And the road was never built. The railroad was - with Chinese engineering, equipment and labor. It was not a success.

*Q: How did you see capital projects as a factor in national development priorities and strategies? Did you have that kind of opportunity to focus on those kinds of issues?*

WEDEMAN: In those days I thought they were good ideas. Today I'm not so sure. I suppose in this respect the career after I left the government plays a role. I worked in the field of agricultural research, not as a scientist but on the managerial side, and I came to conclude that capital development wasn't all that important. Many other things had to be done which were of higher priority.

*Q: So if you look back on the period of the 1960s when so much of what AID was doing was in the capital development field and the budget support field, and balance of payments support, would you say that that was a misplaced emphasis, as you would now reflect on it?*

WEDEMAN: I think it depends on the country. If I were looking at India, I would probably say balance of payments support made a great deal of sense. I think this is true in a country that is well developed, as India is. Capital development, I believe, is justified, when you can clearly see

what it is that is needed by way of capital development and you are not in the process of looking for something to do in order to achieve your own sort of policy or agency goals. Looking back on Africa, I would say that the projects that had education as their focus were a good idea even though they were difficult to carry out. Some road projects made sense, although I think we grossly underestimated the cost and difficulty of maintaining them after they were completed. African countries did not have the technical or financial strength to do so.

*Q: Now I've been perhaps leading you in some directions that you would not necessarily pursue as much if I had kept my mouth shut. Would you like to speak to some issues that arose during that period that you were involved with and concerned with that you would like to address?*

WEDEMAN: You mean as far as Africa is concerned?

*Q: Yes.*

WEDEMAN: I think the main thing that I became concerned with, and I felt very strongly about after a while, is that if you are looking at foreign assistance, and at capital development specifically, it doesn't work unless it's homegrown. The initiative has to come from the organization or the country that is the recipient of the assistance. I used to make a proposal every so often that, rather than have country programs, rather than have yearly targets for the amount of money you want to obligate, why not set up a system under which you tell countries what kinds of things you are interested in financing. You tell them what they have to do in order to get projects or programs approved. You may provide money to them to do the preliminary work, in terms of feasibility studies and things like that, but you put the burden on them, and you are not in the driver's seat. Now, this would have meant a revolution in the way AID did business. I was not in favor of having specific amounts for country programs. The way I would have done it would have been in effect to have a guide that you would give to aid recipients outlining what you were willing to consider in terms of financing and what they had to do in order to qualify themselves for it. But given the fact that you lived in a world as most government agencies do where you either obligate funds or lose them, that's hard to do.

**EVERETT L. HEADRICK**  
**Agricultural Program Assistant, USAID**  
**Kaduna (1963-1968)**

*Everett L. Headrick was born and raised in Idaho. He obtained his undergraduate degree in agriculture from the University of Idaho. Working as a vocational agriculture instructor, he became interested in overseas work. In addition to Nigeria, Mr. Headrick served in Libya and Zaire. He was interviewed on September 23, 1996 by Sam Butterfield.*

HEADRICK: We had a daughter die in Libya, she's still buried in Benghazi in the British military cemetery. As a consequence of our transfer, we were supposed to go to a fairly remote area in Nigeria, but my wife did not feel comfortable with that. So it took several months of

home leave while we worked this out. Eventually I was assigned as the Agricultural Program Assistant in Kaduna, Nigeria. Kaduna is in the north, I guess a hundred miles or so southwest of Kano. We had a huge program there, we had three hundred and sixty or forty people throughout Nigeria working in Agricultural programs. In fact, at one point we could have established a University of Idaho Alumni because we had about forty men in agriculture, who were graduates of the University of Idaho. We called ourselves the Idaho Mafia. All Americans. Our so called Mafia hung together for most of my career, until many of these people retired and left the agency. We built some deep friendships there, too. Northern Nigeria was a huge, huge area and the only way we could get out to many projects was through charter aircraft. For busy Ministry of Agriculture or Ministry of Forestry and Animal Resources people, it was the only way we could get them out to see projects and assist in project management, because they couldn't afford a week traveling back and forth between a project site and Kaduna. We chartered planes, flew out, looked over a project, either in a day or stayed overnight and flew back the next day. This was one way we could get Nigerian ministry officials involved in far flung projects. We supported a comprehensive agricultural development program. In Northern Nigeria we had projects supporting agricultural education, university development, development of ground, development of a statistical base, agricultural extension, maize research, and many other activities.

One thing, I forget what year it was, we started insisting that our projects have work plans. We had a Tsetse eradication program with Ministry of Health. They were ready to throw us out of the country for insisting on work plans. The Ministry of Agriculture also was unhappy with us. Written work plans, and objectives were something that they didn't care about. They didn't think we should bother with them and besides that, "Who ever followed a work plan anyway." Bob Sweet was the Regional Ag Officer, I was the Ag Program Assistant. We met regularly with our Ministry counter parts and the American project officers and the Nigerian project officers. We held people to the work plans, where we had great resentment the first year, the second year, both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health insisted that their staffs prepare work plans. I don't know how long this lasted, but during the time I was there, work plans and planning for projects became an established part of the Ministries. They weren't strictly followed and adhered to but a start toward planning had been made.

*Q: Well they never are, but they are absolutely invaluable to give you guidelines and then you can see where you have to make changes and so forth. That's a very important institutional change.*

HEADRICK: Another point, Bucker Shaib was the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Livestock and Forests. He later went on to become a senior man in FAO. One day I was in his office to obtain permission for a consultant to come in to do a study on some topic. Bucker was a good friend personally, he would accept my request. However, first in anger he turned around and hit the bookshelf behind him. He said, "When in the hell are you going to give me people to work. I've got all these studies and nobody to implement them." Which hit directly at one of our great American weaknesses. If you really don't know what you want to do, send a consultant out to do a study. This has been an irritant to host governments in every country in which I worked. Granted, studies and consultants are necessary and needed, but the thing that's missing is follow-up and implementation on the studies once they are done. Follow-up is missing because of lack

of funding, lack of acceptance by the American side, or what have you. But this is a real irritant.

*Q: Studies sometimes raise up possibilities or they bury ideas by demonstrating that they can't work. Now the latter obviously is of value, but I would gather that the Permanent Secretary had a sense of what he wanted to do and he wanted people to get at it.*

HEADRICK: That's correct, and he eventually, during the meeting, agreed for the study to go on. Subsequently in every country in which I have worked, I have found this to be an extremely sensitive area. I think in our development programs we need to realize that the studies are important but perhaps we should down play them somewhat or be prepared to follow through and provide needed support to implement the studies.

*Q: Thinking over the decades of your experience, have you seen any change in this factor? Does it remain about the same, that is, we still propose them and they're still irritants? Perhaps we propose too many?*

HEADRICK: I think we propose too many and they are not an irritant if, as with our project designs, the host government is in full concurrence with what is proposed. Which has been one of the errors, less so today than say, in the '60s and early '70s of the American Assistance program, in that we would go in and design projects with very little host country input. Then hand them the project and ask for their approval and signature, and no matter what we would do the project was always the American project. As the technicians left or programs phased out, most of these programs died on the vine. Wherever we could work with the host government and give them adequate time to have an input and have a great deal of say in project design, the projects were always the host governments projects, not ours. We were just helping. I note that we still have this problem.. A few years ago following retirement, I was on a contract in Uganda. I had talked to the host government officials, had them convinced that we were a small part of the total resource of the project and this project was really theirs and they had to take a leading role in project development. However, we had a junior officer who felt he had to make an impact on the project and within six months these senior Ugandan officials were again saying it's an American project. So this is something we need to be very concerned about.

*Q: We have to relearn it with every new generation of staff.*

HEADRICK: That's true, and we should not expect either junior or senior staff to micro manage activities. Because every time we fall into that trap we end up with an American project, not a host country project, with a lessening of host country interest and support.

Every assignment was a learning experience, and still is. Another problem that I found in Nigeria was that our livestock advisors took a look at the local livestock and decided that they knew what was better for the livestock industry than the traditional herdsman and they imported new breeds of cattle and poultry from America. The upshot of it was that in order to keep breeding animals alive, we had to keep veterinarians working with them on a daily, if not 24 hour basis. As a consequence, I take a very, very negative view of us importing livestock into countries that have problems with rinderpest and endemic diseases within that country because our livestock genetically cannot handle the endemic diseases.



*Q: Did you find either in Nigeria or elsewhere, any livestock projects, that the US was engaged in, that you felt were of value in the long run to the host country?*

HEADRICK: While I like livestock, I felt that they had very few programs that really had an impact on livestock production. We tried range management throughout Africa, the big problem with range management projects, is control of livestock numbers. If you can't control livestock, you can't enhance the livestock production or feed for the livestock. In Nigeria, we had tribes shooting at one another as a result of some of our activities in range management. Primarily because we were trying to put in place a rotation grazing system. Some of the tribes that had traditionally used these areas were being fenced out and closed out from their traditional areas which created a great deal of anger. As a consequence of my experience in Nigeria, I take a very dim view of livestock projects where you cannot obtain a commitment from the host country and livestock producer to control numbers.

Incidentally, however, we had one heavy equipment mechanic come over from Utah on a BLM managed project.

*Q: Bureau of Land Management. This was a range management project I assume.*

HEADRICK: Correct, and he was from Utah. He was very, very frightened of black people and he was in Kaduna for the better part of a week with one illness or another. I finally went down to the airline office, made a reservation for him to travel back to the States and gave him his choice, either get out into the bush and get to work or go home. He finally went to the bush. Did an outstanding job for us with servicing and repairing equipment and getting it back into operation. But when he came back he showed me photographs that he had taken where he had walked into a herd of wild elephants. They were standing in a semi-circle, their trunks up, their ears forward, a beautiful picture of elephants, but they were ready to charge! All I could say, knowing how he feared Nigerians was "You damn fool!"

*Q: Putting himself in mortal peril!*

HEADRICK: Absolutely!

The Nigerian program was huge. As a result we had a tremendous impact across the agriculture and forestry sector in northern Nigeria including the development and construction of Ahmadou Bello University. Kansas State University staffed the facility in the early days, they sent out first rate people.

*Q: This was in the '60s?*

HEADRICK: Yes, the '60s. They sent out first rate people and they did an outstanding job of development. A side light to this story though. As a part of the program, we had sent a Nigerian to Washington State University for undergraduate work. He had tribal markings all over his face, i.e. scars, and he decided that the other students at the university were laughing at him. Ultimately, he was brought back to Nigeria in a straight jacket. I met the attending doctor and the

student at the airport. The Nigerian walked off the plane without his straight jacket. Three days later he was back in my office asking how soon he can return to America. I said, "Never." Ahmadou Bello had advanced to the point where he could go there and get his undergraduate degree. We worry about Americans suffering cultural shock, but the students coming to America often suffer cultural shock themselves.

We were there during the fighting in northern Nigeria. In fact, our cook, Alghi Usman Telewade, had been an organizer for the Northern Peoples Party (I believe it was or Congress or I'm not sure which.) Anyway, he couldn't read and write, but he was an Al Haji and very active socially and so on. The Nigerians were very concerned that foreigners would be caught in some of the disturbances within Kaduna. I learned that there were Nigerians in two other embassy groups, the British and the French as well as the man working for us, and they would come in and tell us, "Sir, at such and such a time there will be a spontaneous demonstration against the Ibos in such and such a quarters. We don't want any Americans there." The first time I reported this to the Consular officer. He laughed and said, "What's a stupid house boy know about the politics of Nigeria." We had people caught in the middle of the "spontaneous" outbreak. After that, when I told the Consular officer there was going to be trouble, he would listen and we would alert everybody to stay out of those areas.

Despite this, our cook also had a great many individual friends in the Ibo community (the eastern region.) As they would flee northern Nigeria, they would bring their trunks and boxes by and store them in our garage. It was months before I could get our car in the garage. They would leave them with our cook. As he could find trucks going to the eastern region he'd ship the personal effects off to his friends in Eastern Nigeria. I found this unusual. On the one hand he'd be part of the group organizing "spontaneous" fights or attacks on Ibos, and on the other hand he was helping Ibos move their materials back home.

*Q: Fascinating man. In Nigeria you were there for how many tours?*

HEADRICK: We were in Nigeria for two tours. With the trouble, my family was coming home on evacuation orders and the day they were scheduled to leave, I received word that my father had died, so I left before they did. However, approval for training in economics at the Foreign Service Institute had been granted. Which I think was one of the best training programs I've ever attended in government service. The program was six months long and we had some of the finest instructors in American economics come in. We also spent a week on our graduation trip, on Wall Street, going into Solomon Brothers, various banks and brokerages, a tremendous program. Following that I had four or five months of intensive French training, then went to Zaire.

**HAROLD M. JONES**  
**Program Officer, USAID**  
**Samaru (1963-1968)**

*Harold Jones grew up in Virginia and graduated from Virginia State and Cornell. He served in India and Nigeria. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.*

JONES: My next assignment was Nigeria, northern Nigeria in 1963. I came back from home leave to Washington for orientation talks. I have a niece who lives in Columbia, Maryland. She called me and said, "I hear you're in town. Would you like to go with me to an affair tonight?"

I said, "What kind of an affair?" She said, "They're raising some money to give to somebody in Nigeria." So I said, "Yes, I'll go with you to see what's going on."

We went to the affair. They had a band and some dancing Africans. I told her, "I bet these guys come from New Orleans or Chicago and not from African countries. They found them from Chicago or New York. More interesting than anything else was the mistress of ceremonies, the former Mrs. Harry Belafonte. The show went on and on and on. Some money was collected for Nigeria.

The next day I went down to the AID Nigerian desk officer. The first thing he asked was, "Do you know any black people that would like to join the agency?" I said to him, "Give me some time to think about it and I can come up with a half-dozen good names, I think." He said, "But we don't have the time, we need instant black." I said, "I'm not sure what 'instant black' is. Whatever it is, I don't know any." So he shifted the subject and began to tell me about Nigeria.

A day or two later, I went on out to the airport. I flew to New York and took the "red-eye" express to Lagos, Nigeria. In Lagos, there was a shabby looking airport. I went up to a custom officer with my two bags. He wanted to know what I was doing in Nigeria. I told him why I'd come. He said, "I guess we need a lot of more people like you." I said, "Well, we try to do what we can."

He put his white crayon marks on my bags and waved me through. I looked back over my shoulder and said, "Two weeks from now there's a lady coming here with six girls and she's going to have 15 or 20 bags. You might want to get some extra help here with your customs. Don't give her a hard time. You let that lady go on through. She's going to join me in Samaru, in northern Nigeria."

He said, "I'll see that she gets taken care of." I went into Lagos, and found that place to be as near to a moisture laden heat furnace as any place I had ever been. In India at least it was dry. In Lagos, it was steamy. But it was kind of refreshing to see the street vendors with so much energy, so much enthusiasm, and personality. Some selling one item, others selling two or three items -- a shoestring, a comb, toothbrush, whatever. Finally I went to the hotel, stayed overnight and went to AID the next day and got a vehicle issued. I decided to drive north, which was 300 or 400 miles, to Samaru in northern Nigeria.

*Q: Did you spend any time with the mission at all?*

JONES: Very little. They gave me very little mission orientation.

*Q: Did you see the head of the agriculture, J. B. Davis.*

JONES: I don't remember who it was, whether J.B. Davis was there at that time or not. It wasn't much more than an introduction, a word about what I would be doing in northern Nigeria. I had been told earlier what that might be anyway. I went on. Somebody told me at the office that a friend of mine from India was in Nigeria. He's in Ibadan. You pass right through Ibadan on your way north. I said, "Okay, I'll see if I can trace him down."

I went on this little narrow kind of black top road up to Ibadan and asked a few questions around and found the house where Ted Elder lived. Ted had been a grain storage adviser in India for building grain silos. J.B. Davis was in India then, at that time, because when Ted walked in his office in India, he saw that Ted was only a high school graduate. He told Ted, "You don't have an engineering degree, you can't do this job." Ted said, "If I can't do it, there's an awful lot of damn fools in South America, because I built an awful lot of them down there." I found Ted's house. His wife is the best guardian angel I think I've ever seen, she looked after Ted 100 percent. Ted was stone deaf. Through her, we got to exchange a few ideas about the differences of working in Nigeria and India. I said, "I've got a long trip ahead, so I better move on. Can you get Ted to drive me out to the highway to Kaduna?"

Cecil got the word over to Ted. I drove behind Ted. He went busting through like he was on a race track. I had a tough time keeping up with him. The street vendors fell back with their packages, hens and roosters scampered off the streets unscathed. Ted finally arrived at the airport, jumped out of the vehicle and came up to my vehicle window, pointed at the road and said, "There she is. Straight as an arrow, rough as a woodcock's ass," another one of Ted's earthy sayings. He had many.

I stayed on that road and arrived at Kaduna just before AID closed down. Some introductions of the regional staff were made and I headed out for Samaru, my posting about 50 miles away.

*Q: They had an office there?*

JONES: This was the regional office for AID at the time. The embassy had a consul there. So the U.S. set-up there was for the northern region. At Samaru, there was a certificate-level school called Samaru Agricultural School. The roads were awfully bumpy with red flying dust. I stopped at the Kaduna market to purchase a few food items. There were department stores run by the British and Lebanese, and were stocked well with a variety of items. At Samaru, there was a five-person team, three men and two women, working at a certificate-level agriculture school. The team leader was Gene Swanson from Michigan. I drove around until I found where Gene lived. It was late in the afternoon when I got in touch with Gene. Gene had already made arrangements for a place for us to live. It was one of the British-built houses that had been tropicalized. It was a good-looking place, with three bedrooms and lots of fruit trees grew around. I chatted with Gene for awhile, then had dinner at the club. The British had a club and a nine-hole golf course about 200 yards from our house. It was then to bed. The house was in order for family living. AID's general services from Kaduna had done an excellent job getting it in order.

The next morning I went down to see the school, Jim Craig, Jim had had his training in Kansas and was married to an African-American girl named Lucille. Craig and I talked about the school

program, the schedule and all. I met the other four members of the team, two home economists and two extension workers, working with the certificate-level, school two years beyond high school, trying to strengthen it where needed with the hopes of making a more reputable institution.

Jim said, "We come to work at 7, work until 9, then take an hour off for breakfast. We come back at 10 and we work 'til 1 p.m.." I thought the work schedule was such that I didn't see how much could happen.

He told me what I was expected to do, to be chief of the team, as well as try to set up a farm mechanics workshop, to teach farm mechanics to both men and women. Gene Swanson, who was head of the team at the Mission, had started working on the workshop but hadn't set up the program because the physical aspect hadn't been completed. I had to assist with finishing the physical plant and set up the curriculum. That took several months.

After two weeks, I flew down to Lagos and went to the little airport facility. When I arrived, there was a lady standing in front of the Customs officer with six girls and 21 bags. I reminded the officer, "You know I was here two weeks ago." He said, "Yes, I think I remember." "And I told you about this lady that was coming with all these bags." He said, "Yes. You told me how I should treat them. I remember." He went down the line and marked on all the bags and said, "Go on."

The mission car took us to where we spent the night. The next day, we flew up to Kaduna. An AID car met us at the airport and transported us to Samaru, where we settled in our house. AID's general services had furnished it to a comfortable level. The cook stove was electric, backed up by a wood stove. The electricity was not very dependable.

The family settled and I went on to work. We had a good program going. The home economics ladies were doing just what I thought they should be, dovetailing their kind of training into the home situations in the area and the region in general, which was pretty simple -- cooking, sewing, and trying to devise household items that could be useful in the homes. I went ahead with the farm mechanics program. The team met once in awhile to determine how everything was going. I got the farm mechanics set up, with good tools -- AID had brought the tools and equipment. We finished the physical plant, set up and the training began. I told the principal both boys and girls could be trained in farm mechanics.

*Q: The principal was a Nigerian?*

JONES: Yes, Nigerian. Jim Craig, as I mentioned earlier, who had married the girl from Kansas. Jim was still there. I decided to set up a course in household physics and mechanics for women, and young men. How to use tools, how to keep tools in shape and different kinds of mechanical skills that were needed for woodworking, metal work, rope and leather work, and fabricating useful articles for the local farms. The training went very well. I found that the girls had a tremendous amount of enthusiasm. They caught on very quickly how to make useful things while understanding mechanical principles. I decided first to work with the six basic principles in mechanics -- levers, pulleys, wheel and axle, inclined plane, screw, and wedge.

They began to understand what this meant in terms of how these simple machines came together in a bigger, more compound machine and how each functioned. We put on a competition of building things. They built chicken coops, wheelbarrows, stools and tables, and other things that could be used in their home and farms. Late in the year, an agricultural fair was held in Zaria, the provincial headquarters. Many of the things that were built were put on exhibit and display for prizes, like at a county fair. To my surprise, the women got more blue ribbons than the men.

In the meantime, a Kansas State team came on the scene. They enlarged the American community because they had five or six project people with families. They had come to start a agriculture college, a land grant model, at the University of Ahmadou Bello in the north. Our team did what we could to orient them.

All used correspondence to train their children at home. Loretta had done this for years. Most of them came to Loretta and wanted to know how best to organize the home training and so forth. They got on well and moved into their jobs at the university, which was just a half-mile down the road from the Samaru school. Things went well, and good progress was being realized. Training started with the School of Agriculture and a veterinary faculty. Team members were being rotated every two to three years back to Kansas.

*Q: How did you find the Nigerian students?*

JONES: Nigerian students were enthusiastic and eager to learn.

*Q: They were all Northerners, I guess?*

JONES: No, not all northerners. They came from all over the country at that time. The Ibos were doing especially well, because many of them had been to missionary schools earlier. Several African countries sent students to the school.

*Q: Where did the graduates of the school go? What were they being trained for?*

JONES: They were being trained for agriculture projects that the government was promoting in the region. The permanent secretary was the head of the agriculture office for the region, and his whole program was designed to develop agricultural projects all across the region. The biggest export in northern Nigeria was peanuts. Nigeria almost had reached the point of producing a million tons of peanuts. They were the biggest export from the region. The young men were being trained as extension agents and specialists to work with agricultural development projects across the region.

*Q: What was the agricultural situation generally in the north?*

JONES: Generally, good in the north. In fact, the north was self-sufficient foodwise. They had this great export crop of peanuts that earned foreign exchange which contributed substantially to the economics of the region.

*Q: What were some of the principal agricultural problems that you had to address or work with?*

JONES: Well, they had an extremely primitive agriculture. The only thing that farmers had to work with was a machete and a hand hoe. Land cultivation and weed control were done by hand. All the operations from seeding to harvest were hand farming. The machete was the major tool in the country. They had a indigenous hoe that required back breaking labor to till the land. Digging the ground with that hoe was the ultimate in being labor intensive. The other problem was slash and burn. That was a major problem that we thought needed addressing, getting farmers to use as much of the waste material as mulch on the land as they could rather than just cut and burn it. Using it as an organic material to help fertilize the land was badly needed. But it wasn't easy to get them to convert to this practice, but we kept plugging away at it. AID had 48 people scattered across the region doing some of the best work that was going on in Nigeria, in addition to the Kansas faculty project, U.S. extension workers. There were very commendable programs in action.

We had an extension specialist named Tom Reynolds, who had done some extension work in other countries. He worked in a small farming area up country not far from the school. It was just amazing how the farmers were taking to his teachings of improved methods in crop production.

*Q: What were they growing in that area?*

JONES: They were growing peanuts, sorghum, and millet. These were the main crops in the region. A little rice in places and a few vegetables were being grown. AID provided a horticulturist for promoting vegetable production.

*Q: Do you remember any of the technology that was being introduced by the extension people?*

JONES: Well, mostly it was what they called "improved practices." Not a lot in the way of mechanics yet, but in the way of fertilizers, organic materials, spacings, timely plantings, weed control, insect control and things of that sort. These were the thing available and affordable at the time. This program was going very well. We had several people scattered over the northern region. In addition to farm mechanics at the school, AID provided three agricultural engineers setting up mechanical shops in different areas of the northern region. These were coming along at the same time.

*Q: You were working with them?*

JONES: I was working with them.

*Q: What were some of the innovations you were trying to make?*

JONES: Well, one of the first innovations that we started with was, a few people who were trying to grow vegetables along the streams, from pockets of monsoon water. The rainy season was during the summers and things dried up the rest of the year. But along the stream beds there were pockets that held the water, pools left from the rainy season. And many of them were trying to lift up this water up onto level land where it would flow down to the vegetables being grown.

They were using the shaduf. Maybe you heard of the shaduf, from the Middle East, where they have a bucket on a pole and weight on the end and the pole to dip the water and throw it on the land. We designed a hand pump that could be set up over a pool of water and pump it upon the land by jogging the pump up and down in the water with a handle. It would lift water up to a ditch, allowing it to flow to the flat land onto the vegetables.

I set up a demonstration along the road where people traveled to the market and hundreds of people would stop by, children and grownups, who wanted to try to pump and see if they could make it lift water. The biggest kick came from the youngsters, when they found out they could use this pump and lift as much water as two adults with the shaduf. They figured they were as adult as the men when they used that pump. I went back to that spot after two months. I asked the owner, "How do you like it? What do you like best about it?"

He said, "What I like best about it, I got water put on my vegetables and didn't have to work." Passing people pumped and he sat there watching, as his vegetables were being watered.

*Q: Did that spread, the use of those pumps?*

JONES: I don't know how much that spread. You'd be surprised at that stage in Nigeria what a little cost of maintenance of something meant to people. There was a great tendency to hold onto the traditional type shaduf. It wasn't all that efficient, but the maintenance was practically nothing. I had left this idea with a number of mechanical students at the school of agriculture. They knew how to make the pump. They knew how to install it and how to operate it. But I don't know how fast that spread. That was toward the end of my time at the school. So I really don't know how it caught on or how it spread.

*Q: Did you have a counterpart at the school, somebody you were trying to train to carry on the work?*

JONES: This was a big problem in Nigeria. There were practically no college graduates in that part of the country. Most of the people in the north were Muslims and they didn't have a very good educational background. The most they had was certificate-level schools, and they hadn't been established very long, as there were not many graduates. That's just two years beyond high school. In the education system, that is a blue-collar type education. These people that went to that school could go out to the field and were assigned by the minister of agriculture to some project. Depending on their performance out there, they were allowed to come back and take an extra year. So the most schooling that any of them had was three years beyond high school, and most of them were two-year certificate holders working in agriculture.

So from the standpoint of counterparts, it wasn't very easy to get somebody that could fill the counterpart position.

*Q: How would you compare that with the situation in India?*

JONES: Oh, the Indian situation was way ahead, in terms of people to work with, as counterparts.



*Q: They had many more advanced, educated people?*

JONES: Oh, much more advanced. There had been a lot of missionaries working there, like this Presbyterian school I told you about in Allahabad. College graduates were many. The missionaries from the States had introduced a much more practical approach to agriculture training.

*Q: That's of course why Kansas State was there, to help establish a college.*

JONES: That's right.

*Q: So it was sort of a generation behind.*

JONES: Maybe two generations behind.

*Q: Did you see the results of the work of the students that you taught and how they were able to perform?*

JONES: Well, you see, civil war came to Nigeria, and that interrupted everything. We lost track of many of the things happening that we had been involved in. I learned later that the Kansas people spent nearly 16 years in Nigeria.

I'll tell you another little story that occurred while I was there that brought about some change. The principal of the school was an Ibo, who lived in the north. He was very articulate, studious and very aggressive. But he had a run in with our home economics teachers and he didn't like their program. They fell out with each other and a heated feud ensued. I intervened a few times. The principal promised to do better, but then he'd go back to the same old position.

In the meantime, I was told, the permanent secretary in Kaduna had little regard for expatriates, and less than that for Black American expatriates. He came to inspect the school one time and I saw him going around with the principal. The principal was giving him an impression of things being a lot better than I thought he should have. But he carried on anyway. So I thought something had to be done about our home economists and the principal feud. I went to a young British fellow who was helping with the planning in the ministry of agriculture, Don Pickering. I said, "Don, do you think you could set up an appointment for me with Mallam Lawan, the permanent secretary?"

He said, "Mallam Lawan chews up expatriates every time that he gets a chance." I said, "I'd be willing to be chewed up if you'll get me an appointment." He made an appointment with Lawan and I went to see him.

Lawan was sitting back in his chair with his big Nigerian robe spread out around him. I said, "Mallam, I want to talk to you."

"What you got to talk about?"

“You were at the school the other day. I saw you go around looking at and inspecting things. I think you left with an impression that was better than you should have left with.”

“What do you mean?”

“There are some things going on there that I think you need to intervene in and talk with the principal about.”

“What are you talking about?”

I said, “Well, he’s having a confrontation with the home economics teachers and in my opinion, the home economics program is very much in line with what I see in Nigeria in terms of home economics at this time. It relates well to homes and what people are doing in their home in that areas. I also have a couple of recommendations that I’d like to make.”

He said, “But things are going well up there.” I said, “Do you wish to take the impression that you got from a one-day inspection? Or would you rather listen to someone who is there every day, seeing everything that is going on and is interested in that school being a good school as much as you are?” I said, “If you want my opinion, I’ll give it to you. If you don’t, I’m sorry I’ve taken your time.”

So he said “Go ahead and start talking.” I told him about the home economics situation and he promised to do something about it. I said, “You mind if I make a couple of other suggestions? You are running a school there at certificate level, two years, and you’ve got some very smart people going to that school, some very bright young men. Those young men don’t have an opportunity to go on further to explore their academic potential, which you need in this northern region to run your projects. Unless you get some people with higher training to do certain things, research extension and design, you’re not going to have much luck with agricultural development.”

“What do you suggest?”

I said, “You let the principal, and if he needs it, a committee of some sort, to select 15 or 20 percent of the top graduates from that school and let them go on to the university just down the road. That would allow them to get enough academic background to go over to the States or other countries overseas and then come back and work in your programs.” I said, “The second thing I want to talk about is Kansas State and the agriculture faculty at the university. I don’t believe they are including any courses in extension. The biggest thing that you have going in this northern region is the extension program. You need extension workers. Putting it at the common level, you need college-trained extensionists. That’s all I’ve got to say.”

He thanked me, got out of his chair, pulled open the door, shook my hand, and said thank you again. Don Pickering, who was the British planner with him, and I walked down the hall. I said, “Don, how did I do?” He said, “I thought he was going to chew you to pieces when you first went in there. But when you got to talking to him, I felt like jumping up and saying, Hallelujah, somebody’s told him!” I said, “Is he going to do those things that I suggested?”

“He’ll do them, don’t worry about it, he’ll do them.” I said, “What about the extension courses by Kansas?” “He’ll take care of that, too.”

So it wasn’t long before word was circulating around at the school that the best graduates could go on to university.

I saw the chief of the Kansas team a little later, and I said, “Are you guys putting in any extension courses here?” He said, “We think that’ll come later.” I said, “It should be up-front. The biggest thing in this whole northern region is agriculture extension.” He said, “You know Mallam Lawan was up here the other day.” I said, “He was? I had just been to see him at Kaduna. He thought well of our program here. Did he say anything about adding courses here?”

He said, “Come to think of it, yes. When he was getting into his Mercedes and I asked him was there anything else we could do that he would like, he looked back over his shoulder and said add some extension courses.”

*Q: I’m surprised that they would put that off.*

JONES: I would think the same thing, but they hadn’t gotten around to it. The reason I knew that the Samaru school people went on -- this is jumping the story a little bit -- to universities, when I came back from Africa I went out to Utah on a trip for AID and had lunch in the cafeteria on the university of Utah campus. A young man walked up to me and said, “You’re Mr. Jones.” I said, “That’s right.” “You taught me agriculture at the Samaru school in Nigeria.” I said, “I did. What’s your name?” He told me his name. I said, “What are you doing here?” He said, “I’m finishing up my Ph.D. in agricultural engineering.” I shook his hand and we sat down and talked. I said, “That’s amazing.” I never told him how he had come to be allowed to go to the university.

Then one month later, believe it or not, in Greensboro, North Carolina, under the same circumstance, another Nigerian youngster walked up to me and said, “You’re Mr. Jones. You taught me at Samaru school of agriculture.” And he told me his name, he was from Ibo land. I said, “I think I remember you.” He said, “I married one of these girls that you taught, also.” “Where’s she?” “She’s downstairs.” “What are you doing here?” “I just finished my Ph.D. in economics at Ohio and she just got her master’s degree and we’re going back to Nigeria to work.”

I don’t know whatever happened to them, but just to show you that what I had done with the permanent secretary had borne fruit.

*Q: Planted a seed, and it blossomed.*

JONES: He made no announcements about changing the certificate level training or any policy, he just went on and did it, because I suggested that he do it.

*Q: You may have some more about the Samaru experience, but one of the comments from people looking back at AID’s work in places like Nigeria, was that the technical assistance that was*

*provided didn't last. It was not sustained. What kind of impression did you have? How would you answer a question like that?*

JONES: The best answer I can give to it is, I think, is the intervention of the civil war, which was a terrible thing, interrupted the whole country. The other thing is that the progressive people had been uprooted. The Ibos, probably one of Africa's most progressive groups, who had been posted all over the country, were killed, mutilated and were forced to be confined to their small tribal area. They had been missionary trained. They were administrators, managers, and technical people, and administered in all the regions of the country. That was their downfall. Loretta, my wife, used to say, the missionaries taught them, but they never taught them to be humble. They were cocky about themselves and they didn't feel that the Northerners were educated enough to mind their own business. The British had sent them all over the country to administer many things and the intervention of civil war was followed by military administrations from time which were never firmly linked with technical assistance. Technical assistance didn't get a chance to be established in a way to move another and grow in a way to incrementally improve the overall economy of Nigeria. This is my guess as to why many technical efforts did not seem effective.

*Q: What happened to the Samaru school?*

JONES: The Samaru school was still going on, but I don't know how it came out in terms of graduates, I don't know how it came out in terms of progress. I didn't go back to the Samaru school, although in 1983 when I was working with the Rockefeller Foundation I passed by that school at about daybreak one morning on a road trip coming from Sokoto. But I didn't get a chance to stop by and see what was going on. I had gone to Sokoto in connection with a Rockefeller Foundation project.

*Q: Let's talk a little bit about the sustainability of the technical assistance in that northern area. You gave an interesting example how a little seed can grow and result in change, but the question is whether counterparts were trained. What did you think about the counterpart concept?*

JONES: The counterpart concept I think is a good one. Many times it depends on the relationship that one develops with the counterpart and how his notions dovetail with project objectives and fit in with local and national development efforts. The counterpart concept, to be effective, has to have a goodness of fit of many factors, none more important than technical and counterpart relationship. Full support of responsible recipient country officials is a must.

*Q: How did you find the Nigeria agricultural potential efforts to capture this potential?*

JONES: Well, the potential was there. FAO had worked a bit in northern Nigeria. They were particularly interested in crops for export, round nuts or peanuts had become the big export crop objective for the region. They had set a timetable of producing a million tons. Northern Nigeria was about a year and a half ahead of schedule on reaching that million-ton target. Most of the north was self-sufficient in agriculture produce in terms of consumer, the area market. This was the situation when I arrived in northern Nigeria and probably would have continued that way

with that level of growth had it not been for the civil war. It's difficult to say what happened to the potential due to the civil war and the series of military regimes that followed.

Then the other thing that interrupted development was the big oil money. I went back to Nigeria in 1983, I think it was, I couldn't believe the changes, but it was mostly infrastructure. Boats in the harbor loaded with all kinds of imports which couldn't even be unloaded. Decay, rot and rust claimed many items. Cement hardened in place on the dock. In a sense, the oil money interrupted many development projects. So much money was being allocated to states, they were able to spend it well, much of it wasted.

*Q: What did it do to the agriculture sector? What was the effect of the oil bonanza on agriculture?*

JONES: I couldn't notice much during the trip. I was told agriculture production had declined. During our time, cooking oils were in abundant supply due to certain amounts being processed from peanuts and the remainder being exported. During the early '80s, Nigeria was importing oils. A young Nigerian gave me a ride from Sokoto to Kaduna. Most of the trip was before daylight hours, so I was unable to see much of the countryside. By coincidence, the young man was on the staff of the deputy permanent secretary for agriculture, a very good friend of mine. He was then head of the grain board. When I walked into his office and embraced, he told his assistant, "Give this man a car and driver as long as he is here." He was on his way to the airport starting his trip to Mexico. We didn't have a chance to talk.

I told him what I was doing there. He said, "I'm sorry I can't spend some time with you. I'm on my way to Mexico. I'm in this grain business, and I must make sure enough grain is here for our people to eat and have a little surplus. Then he said to the assistant, "This is one of my best friends. He used to be here with us working in agriculture."

The point I'm getting at in terms of grain productions, Nigeria had realized that its agriculture potential was sliding down from what it ought to be and they were moving about from place to place to procure enough grain. Judging from that, I don't think agriculture went too well once the military regimes started taking over, but I don't have any statistics or facts on what has happened since then.

*Q: The northern region, at the time you were there, was self-sufficient in food?*

JONES: They were very close to self-sufficient and were exporting almost a million tons of ground nuts. I did hear when I was there that Nigeria was taking 200,000 plus tons of ground nuts and pressing them to get oil for domestic use, which was adequate, to market. I did hear when I was there that they were now importing cooking oil.

*Q: You found agriculture in the north still quite basic and quite primitive in terms of the small farmers?*

JONES: Yes, they were basic farmers. There was very little industry in northern Nigeria. The people were hard workers, mostly Muslims, and most of them weren't shirkers when it came to

getting out and getting things done. The women were just amazing in terms of production, marketing, and street vending.

*Q: You didn't see any major transformation take place?*

JONES: I didn't see any major transformation.

*Q: Not like you saw in India, when you said you saw all these different forces coming together?*

JONES: In Africa, you've got so many primitive situations and so many things to overcome, they haven't even come to the stage that larger components are in place which could come together for a major impact. Africa was basically a primitive hoe, machete, hand agriculture, with the exception of certain plantation farming exports such as coffee, sugar cane, and pineapples..

*Q: What are those things that you're talking about?*

JONES: Irrigation dams, machinery, steel mills, a well-trained corps of farm artisans, input distribution systems, food processing and storage facilities are lacking in Africa.

*Q: I mean those conditions in Africa.*

JONES: Oh, the hoe farming. Basically, hand hoe farming with slash and burn. Africa had not yet reached the animal-power stage. They still depended on hand tools and human power. India had 52 million pairs of bullocks for farming and transportation.

*Q: Compared to the bullock.*

JONES: India had developed a cadre of people that could fabricate things, repair and maintain. They had blacksmiths, they had different mechanical type operations in terms of using metal and wood to make things. They had people who were excellent at it. I was amazed at how well some of them could do things with their hands.

You couldn't find a blacksmith in Africa. The metal work that was done in Africa was largely for arrows and spears. You didn't have anything in terms of farm equipment and hand tool improvements. They imported the machete. They imported the hoes that they cultivated the land with. These were all part of the British system, I guess, but in terms of coming to a level where you could put things together to start a take off, just didn't exist. You can't be much more primitive and produce effectively than agriculture in Africa.

Of course, in some of the countries nowadays they've come to using machines like in Kenya where the British farmed, and left some infrastructure for larger scale farming. But not much in this regard had happened in Nigeria.

*Q: What you were trying to do through the Samaru training program?*

JONES: We were trying to train people and tried to get them to work with farmers and to get farmers to adopt what we call “ improved methods” from time to time and gradually build up a larger, skilled group of people that would be willing to do things a little bit better and more efficiently. We thought the training program was necessary to get this done. It just was impossible to get out and deal with farmers on an individual or group basis, due to language problems and other things. But if you trained the Nigerians who speak the language, in extension and improved methods of farming, gradually they could work in the villages help move agriculture along in terms of production efficiency, storage and processing.

*Q: Any also on your Nigerian experience?*

JONES: I left Samaru school of agriculture in 1966 and became the agriculture officer for the region. I had the supervisory responsibility of the whole region, which consisted of about 48 specialists in different categories of expertise, scattered all over.

*Q: What were the different types of activities they were engaged in?*

JONES: The activities were still fairly basic and what we thought would be the kind of thing that would be needed to come together that would lead to larger efforts and larger development activities that would move agriculture along. Much of this was agriculture extension. We had farm mechanics. There were technicians in cooperatives. There were people in veterinary and animal husbandry, poultry and soil conservation. Animal population in the north was sizeable and important.

*Q: Soil conservation?*

JONES: Yes, soil conservation was there. AID had a PASA arrangement with the Bureau of Land Management. They ran a training school and worked with provincial soil conservation programs.

*Q: Who was the administrator.*

JONES: The administrator for AID was former president of Michigan State John Hannah. His brother, Arthur, was the poultry specialist in Kaduna. Poultry production, was coming along very nicely. That was due to several things: AID had furnished some hatcheries that went with the certificate level school of veterinary medicine and animal disease and production. That was on the same level as the school at Samaru but they had one or two others that dealt with the animal side of production. At the same time the poultry production got started. Pfizer Pharmaceuticals came in and set up a feed mill in Kaduna where they produced commercial poultry feed. This gave a real boost to broiler and egg production.

It was taking off pretty well, until the civil war came along. I don't know whatever happened to the Pfizer business there. But these were things that were in the makings. And then the U.S. Bureau of Land Management had a school that they set up in the northern region dealing with soil conservation. They had a number of specialists there. We had three agriculture engineering shops in different locations, all in the northern region, and we had a poultry specialist at Joll

working with the extension side of poultry, emphasizing egg production and fryers markets. Those were basically the programs. And we had some range management going on in the livestock sector. This is basically the summary of our agriculture program for northern Nigeria.

*Q: And you said earlier that you didn't think much of this caught hold because of the civil war?*

JONES: I think the civil war had a lot to do with how well it caught on. When I visited Nigeria afterwards, the World Bank had picked up and had projects in areas we had worked and apparently what we had done helped give them a very good start.

*Q: Were you there during the civil war?*

JONES: Oh, I was there when the war broke out, and remained 18 months after it started.

*Q: What happened that it caused such a disruption in the north?*

JONES: First place, there was a military coup. The Prime Minister, Balewa, in Lagos, and two of the premiers of regions were killed. One of those premiers was of the northern region, which upset things politically, and economically. Then the northerners went on a big killing spree. They killed Ibos by the thousands. I have gone into towns in the morning on some of my supervisory trips, and I have found Ibo communities totally burned out, their businesses, their homes, and 4-500 dead people laying on the street. And being collected on trailers and stacked like wood and dumped into large graves that were being bulldozed and covered.

The administration, general management of government and business were being done mostly by Ibos, who were blamed for the military coup and killings. Many of the businesses and services in the north were run by Ibos. There was no mercy. Anybody who was Ibo had to go. So that kind of interruption brought the economy to a standstill, certainly in the northern region, and I would assume it would be the same thing, or nearly the same thing, in the other regions. Coup and counter coup led to the war. Although none of the fighting was done in the north, they were left more intact than anybody else to build military machine for carrying on the war to get revenge against the Ibos. The north eventually won and took over the country.

*Q: Did you anticipate this hostility before it broke out?*

JONES: No. What happened is, we were on home leave when the coup took place. I was riding into Nashville from a little town called Franklin one evening and as we listened to the radio, the news reported a coup in Nigeria. But details were skimpy and they didn't know what had happened. Then later on they reported on BBC that a military coup had resulted in the assassination of top officials. And then things calmed down. But one other person tried to reorganize, and to get things back in some kind of stable condition. I think he was in the western region, but the Northerners didn't like what he was trying to do. They thought that he was trying to intervene to look after the Ibos interest. They had seen the Ibos as the persons who had carried out the coup. He too was assassinated later on. Then one thing led to another and finally they were just having pockets of disturbances where the Northerners were killing off the Ibos. Then all of a sudden they had gotten themselves together and put on a big regionwide kill, all



happening at the same time. It was a coordinated killing drive. But we hadn't sensed any of this before we went on home leave. Because at the school, for instance, where we were working, there was a mixture of ethnic groups, students and the faculty, and things seemed quite peaceful. We had no feeling that such a conflict was in the making.

*Q: What happened to the school?*

JONES: The school stayed on. The school was there and was still training people for government service and pre-college students.

*Q: Was it the same group of people?*

JONES: They killed a few people at the school. There was a research station near there that the British were running, mostly with British staff. Wherever the Northerners saw an Ibo, they would kill him. I remember one time we were standing watching this happen, and the chief of party from Kansas State could hardly stand and take it. He just felt like intervening in some kind of way. He was told in no uncertain terms, "If you stay out of this thing and don't intervene, you won't be hurt, you won't be touched." They spread that word among all foreigners, among all expatriates. "You got to stay out of it, this is our business, if you intervene in any way you'll end up under the machete like the Ibos." This is the way it was happening. So we didn't feel anything that would give us cause to be concerned for our personal safety.

*Q: But then the regions were found to be deteriorated?*

JONES: Yes. Then when the money came along, the government tried to redo things through imports and building infrastructure. They built roads, public buildings, schools, and repaired and expanded all existing roads.

*Q: While you were there?*

JONES: No, not while I was there. But that's what I saw when I went back. You can't believe the spread of residential areas. I would drive into some towns and as far as I could see were good-looking houses in all stages of completion, with tin and asphalt roofs and fine-looking lots and gardens. I asked someone, "Who's spending all of this money building these places?" He said, "These are the market women, the women that do the marketing. They handle the money in this country. And just about every house you see in any place belongs to a market or businesswoman."

But in terms of agriculture production and indigenous industries and things of that sort, it seemed to have been mostly abandoned. Because you could get just about anything they wanted imported from Europe, the US and other countries of the world. The markets were filled with a great variety of imports.

*Q: Well, is there anything else there on your work there in the north?*

JONES: That pretty much sums up my work in the north. At one point the civil war and the killing seemed so severe that I decided to send my family to Spain to live for a year. They left me in Nigeria and they spent a year in Spain. I went to visit them a couple times. I stayed on and battled with the civil war situation in Nigeria until it was time to leave.

Upon my return, the federal forces were gearing up to undo the Republic of Biafra to reunite Nigeria. People in the northern region would experience none of the battlefield action. Our AID program was still intact, but the war effort was beginning to impact negatively on the effectiveness of some of the activities. I had left more than two months of my assignment in Kaduna before picking up the family in Spain for home leave and transfer. I made a few short project-inspection trips. A final visit was made to Gusau, north of Samaru, where Tom Reynolds was advisor to a highly exemplary, small-farmer extension project. On the same route were Ed Boiling with his wife Ellen. He advised and assisted with building and organizing an agriculture engineering workshop, similar to the one described in Maduguri. With no other expatriates nearby, they handled well the isolation of their post and the struggle of assisting with the building of their home. I visited a similar workshop project in Bida, where Moses Morgan was advisor with his wife Dena and family.

Mostly I was in a phasing-out stage in the office and at home. My chicken project was dismantled and shared with friends. I gave the broiler rearing cage to the young Nigerian who was assisting with house chores. Packing air and sea freight demanded considerable time. Arranging to ship Guardie and Pandora, our dog and cat was a major concern. I could turn Guardie over to General Services at AID for shipment to our next post in Kenya, but I needed to take Pandora with me.

The family station wagon had to be driven to Lagos for shipment. Notice had been circulated by the Embassy that no night travel into Lagos should be undertaken due to the potential dangers of military action around road blocks. In spite of good intention and much hustling to get the car packed and ready for shipment, I was late getting started. There was little chance of reaching Lagos before dark nor was there any place to spend the night other than in the vehicle. With my house assistant and a tightly packed vehicle we started the trip. Darkness caught us fifty miles north of Lagos. We were speeding along at about fifty miles per hour when the road curved sharply as it passed through a village. I caught the black image of a road block in the head lights, and slammed on the brakes, but the vehicle skidded into one end of it. Instantly there was stomping and loud shouting in Hausa as the vehicle was encircled with seven machine guns aimed and poised towards us. I was ordered from the car, jostled roughly, and asked why did I hit their road block. I tried to explain but they continued shouting and pointing their machine guns. They were all young nervous recruits and I had seen some of their training exercises, which did little to ease my adrenaline or fear. Guns still pointed they demanded to see what I was carrying. All the time my passenger was squashed down in the middle seat. They jabbed him to sit up and when he did he started speaking in Hausa. This broke the tension and the word went out. "He is carrying one of our brothers." Abraham told them who I was and that he worked for me. The guns slowly went down and they told me I could go on but warned I might not get into Lagos at night. Five miles ahead on a straight stretch was another road block but no one was visible. I pulled up and stopped. A voice called out of the bush, "Who goes there?"

I responded, “No one is going anywhere unless you remove the road block.” Abraham yelled something in Hausa and two soldiers came out pointing their rifles at the car, after listening to our story they took a look in the vehicle where among other things, one spotted a pair of rubber boots.

“You didn’t buy those boots in Nigeria.” one of the soldiers noted.

“No, I bought them in the U.S.A.,” I responded.

“I sure would like to have them.” he stated.

I looked down on the ground at his foot and said “they are much too small for you,” and I passed him one of them to put beside his foot, which was about three and a half inches longer than the boot. His countenance fell. He passed the boot back and waved me on. As I drove away I looked out the window and said, “I’m sorry those boots did not fit.”

A few miles further on, fifteen cars had parked on the right side of the road at a road block. I got out and walked to a booth manned by two soldiers with machine guns. I asked the corporal what my chances were of getting through to Lagos.

“You have no chance to pass through tonight. We have orders not to let anyone pass until daylight. General Gowan could not pass if he showed up here tonight. You have no chance!” he shouted as he stomped his feet.

I retreated to the station wagon, but was not totally resigned that I would spend the night. I dozed briefly then looked up to see the corporal with his gun slung over his shoulder walk out to the middle of the road. I hurried up to him.

“What will it take to pass through this road block?” I reached in my pocket and counted out several pounds and passed it to him and said. “Split this with the Sergeant.”

He accepted it and stuck it in his pocket and said, “Do you have an office in Lagos?”

“Yes, I do,” I responded. “I work with the U.S. Embassy.”

“If I send my sister by there next week would you give her a job?” he inquired.

“I’ll do my best,” I responded. He took my name and I went back to my vehicle to wait. Within minutes the corporal stepped out in the middle of the road, looked in my direction and moved slowly next my station wagon.

“You can pull around and go on,” he said as he pushed up his machine gun strap on his shoulder and pointed in the direction of Lagos, only about seven miles away.

A scary and worrisome trip had been completed, I was unscathed and had been granted a pass through the last road block to Lagos, something they said not even General Vakubu Cowan

would not be allowed to do. I bet he could have made it through had he flashed a few pounds of cash.

A good restful night at the Federal Palace Hotel and I left the vehicle with Peter Bloom, a young officer who had recently joined the agency, for shipment to Nairobi. I flew back to Kaduna. Abraham wanted to stay a few days in Lagos and planned to return by bus.

The few days remaining were used to clear up personal details of packing, readying Guardie for shipping, attending farewell receptions and paying farewell visits to government officials, including Mallam Lawan, his deputy, Alhaji Alkali and Bukar Sahib, head of the livestock division. Hallam Lawan requested that I send him a copy of the latest book published on citrus production. I Promised I would as we had a round of handshakes and goodbyes. My certificate of clearance from Barclay's Bank rounded out the requirements to clear post.

I built a box for Pandora following the specifications provided by the airlines. When I appeared with the completed box I got a long lecture as to how it would not protect her in a case the freight shifted. My argument about having built the cage as instructed ended with the comment that the person issuing the instructions had made a mistake. There was not enough time to start over so I figured out my own methods and warned personnel on duty if I didn't get away with it, I would blame the airline. I converted an old briefcase into a cat carrier. Much of one side was cut out and replaced with a screen. I placed Pandora in the case for a few hours in the days before departure to acclimate her.

I boarded the plane in Kano on May 14, 1968, for Madrid. Bag scanners were not in use at that time so I could carry the screened side against my body. She went undetected a good pacer lining and other absorbent material lined the bottom. At my window seats I set the briefcase against the wall or placed it on the unoccupied seat next to me. When I went to the bathroom I held the screened side against the front of my body. Pandora cooperated beautifully. We arrived In Madrid by mid-afternoon. Standing in the customs line an elderly lady spied the cat, came over and started telling me what a fine cat Pandora was and how much she loved cats. The more I tried to ignore her and wished she would move on or cease, the more persistent she became. By now a lot of other people were paying attention. When I reached the customs officer I declared the cat. They were good enough to let me keep her, took my name and address, gave me the name and address of a veterinarian and twenty-four hours to met a certificate of vaccination against rabies. I made an appointment with the veterinarian and took Pandora to be inoculated. The extended formal process was amazing. The waiting room decor was mostly red with elaborately cushioned chairs and sofas, artistic wall paintings, carpeted floors and lots of Spanish reading material. The wait lasted nearly an hour when the doctor was ready, an assistant carried Pandora in on a red, satin pillow. Pandora was talked to, caressed and very gently handled before the needle was inserted with the inoculant. The certificate issued was large and decorative more like what would be given for a Ph.D. than for a cat rabies inoculation. Pandora appeared to enjoy the queenly treatment. The price was amazingly low, Pandora was once again a full-fledged family member.

The girls pitched in to close out family living in Madrid. All were proud that they had successfully completed another public school year. With packing under control, the girls and I

decided to visit the famed national Prado art museum of painting and sculpture, next to the fashionable promenade of the same name, which means meadow. The best of the 3000 painting there were done by the artists of the 1500s, 1600s and early 1800s. Thirty excellent works of El Greco were on display, and fifty by Diego Velazquez. The Spinners, The Surrender of Breda and The Maids of Honor were among the more memorable. Francesco Goya's painting of Charles IV and Family caught our eyes. His other etchings and drawing were said to be inspired by bull fighting.

The big surprise and delight of the visit was that we ran into Aronetta Hamilton and her friend, Joe, visiting the museum from Nashville, Tennessee. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. David Hamilton, among our closest friends during my tenure at Tennessee State University prior to entering the foreign service. He and I traveled extensively in Tennessee working with the Teacher Training Program of African-American high school vocational agriculture teachers. Their two daughters Aronetta and Sylvia, were friends of our oldest daughter, Burnetta.

**LAWRENCE LESSER**  
**Peace Corps**  
**Enugu (1964-1965)**

*Lawrence Lesser was born in New York in 1940. He received his BA from Cornell University and his MA from the University of Minnesota. He was in the Peace Corps in Enugu, Nigeria in 1964 and 1965. His foreign assignments included New Delhi, Ouagadougou, Brussels, Kigali, and Dhaka. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 12, 2002.*

*Q: Where in Nigeria did you serve?*

LESSER: What was then Eastern Nigeria. At that time newly independent Nigeria had four states. The country had only become independent in 1960. Nevertheless, we were the second generation of Peace Corps volunteers. Harriet and I were assigned to a school where there had previously been two Peace Corps volunteers. Here we were in a brand new, newly independent country, and by the way, a country which was being hailed as the model for African development and African democracy. Hard to remember when you consider what a rocky history Nigeria has had in the last 30-plus years. It started out looking like it was situated to be a great example of the transition from colonialism to democracy. We were in Eastern Nigeria which only a couple of years later became the breakaway state of Biafra in the Nigerian civil war, which caused the Peace Corps to withdraw from the country. We actually completed our tour in December of '65 about five or six weeks before the first military coup, which means we left before there was any trouble at all, much less war. So, we had a normal tour of duty there.

*Q: How were you received by the school? Were you in a city or a town?*

LESSER: We were in a city: Enugu, the regional capital. The Peace Corps apologized for putting us there, but they said in order for the organization to be accepted, we have to show that our

volunteers have credentials that qualify them to teach anywhere, so although you might prefer to be pioneers out in the bush building a school from nothing - and some of the volunteers will do that - but you Lessers, Harriet and Larry, we're sending you to a government technical institute in Enugu, the regional capital, and you'll be teaching on a faculty of mostly expatriates from Britain, Ireland, South Africa, Ceylon, India, Pakistan, Canada - the English-speaking world - plus a few Nigerians, and the school had a kind of elite student body who were preparing for a London City & Guilds examination (that was the reason I had to teach British economic history). We lived in a relatively cosmopolitan setting and for good reason, a good reason institutionally, but it meant that we didn't have what you might regard as the classic Peace Corps experience.

*Q: Well, how did you find the faculty received you?*

LESSER: I would say we were received very well. We were needed. There wasn't anyone else who could teach the courses we were teaching, and our academic credentials were fine. We were very well qualified. I had already been a university teacher in the States. My wife was not as highly qualified in that sense, but she wasn't teaching the post-secondary students either. Interestingly, I mean to situate this in time, we got there in January of '64. Kennedy had been assassinated in November of '63; we were in Peace Corps training at UCLA when the assassination occurred and everyone knows what they were doing then and everyone's life was altered by that. When we got to Nigeria it was only six weeks or so later and it was shocking to learn how the killing of Kennedy was interpreted in Africa. At first, until you get a sense of the cultural differences of people in other lands, it comes as an enormous shock, but the students took it for granted that there was some kind of conspiracy. Well, okay the Warren Commission didn't, but a lot of other Americans then and even more since then still do, but I didn't. I was shocked because people said, you know, LBJ must have had something to do with it because look who's president now. Initially I couldn't even respond to that, it was such a shocking thing to hear. Of course Kennedy was very highly admired by Nigerians, and by people all over the world I suppose, and it was a very humbling experience to learn how important this American image was that we represented. To get back to the basic question you're asking, people were very interested in and very welcoming to me and my wife.

*Q: Well, how did you find concern for teaching British economic history? So much of Africa latched on to the British former colonies, latched onto the Fabian socialist side and all which you know, I'm stating my prejudice, I think it was a great disaster. But, be that as it may, did you find that the course was weighted towards this or not?*

LESSER: I tend to be a bit of a simplifier. The great discovery I made that enabled me to teach British economic history was that another name for British economic history is "the industrial revolution." That's very meaningful to Nigerians who were experiencing their own industrial revolution at a very speeded up pace and with a lot of things out of chronological order because, for example, people had transistor radios all over the place, but they didn't have electricity in the villages. It was an odd way of approaching things, but basically the story was how an agrarian society gets transformed into a modern industrial society and that was deeply meaningful to the Nigerians. The students got right into that. With that kind of simple, what's the word, framework, I could learn ahead of them and we could fit it in and say, here's what's happening folks. Here's what railroads did, here's what prestressed concrete does, here's all of the industrial

things.

*Q: Were the students for the most part Ibos?*

LESSER: Yes, they were, not all, but most.

*Q: This has always been, the group has been touted as really the most sort of intellectually aware or whatever you want to call it, upward striving group. How did you find them?*

LESSER: I would agree with that. You know, when the Nigerian civil war came, the Nigerian military government was glad to see the Peace Corps leave because no matter where the Peace Corps volunteers were assigned in the country, that is whether in Iboland or anywhere else, they all seemed to be very sympathetic to the Ibos and to identify very much with the Ibo values. The Ibos were all over the country, as small business entrepreneurs and civil servants, they were the railroad engineers and mechanics. They sold bed frames and transistor radios and ointments. And yet, they were not cultural imperialists.

*Q: Do you want to say more about that last thing?*

LESSER: Sure. The Ibo value system was that I get ahead by giving you something, making it worthwhile for you. A good bargain benefits both parties. So, Ibos were always ready to negotiate a deal and inherently and certainly the Ibos understood this. The Ibos who were in business and who were getting ahead, the deal is, let me know what you need. I'll see if I can provide it and I'll get mine out of it, but you'll get what you want. So, you had Ibos running the railroads. You had Ibos running the radio stations, you had Ibos in the bureaucracy in the federal government and active in politics, but in general, not asking to be in the top positions, but to be the powers behind the top positions. They sensed, for the most part, that it was contrary to their interests to have too prominent a profile: to use a West African English term, to be too "pushful." It was a very appealing approach and it was very development oriented. The American Peace Corps volunteers, who were after all development people, were very happy to work with the Ibos. But there are some built-in vulnerabilities there politically that got exposed when the national consensus came apart. Face it, the same qualities that PCVs found appealing, were resented by non-Ibo Nigerians, especially in the Muslim north, where Ibos were outsiders who seemed to be taking over all of the "modern" sectors of society, just as the imperial British were quitting the scene.

*Q: How did you find your students? Were they inquiring about the American system and the American way of life or approach to things or not?*

LESSER: I wouldn't say that they were deeply curious. As a matter of fact compared to students in other countries when I was in the Foreign Service I didn't sense an enormous hunger to go to the United States, although once again that is something that Ibos did more than other Nigerian ethnic groups. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first president of Nigeria, was an Ibo and he was also the first Ibo, and the first Nigerian, I think, to get a degree from an American university. The Ibos started a little bit late. Yorubas were way ahead of them and were oriented much more towards England, while the Ibos who had no hereditary chieftains and instead had a participatory

democratic tradition at the village level, and were perhaps less tied to traditional ways, found themselves more attracted to the American system and the American style - or so it seemed to me and to many of us who were living and working there. At the same time, it was my impression that for the most part Ibos were very happy to be growing up in Nigeria and they were going to put their shoulders to the wheel to make the Nigerian dream come true, that the idea of a Nigerian nationality would be meaningful and realistic.

*Q: How did you find the students in class? Were they in a way more interested or thirstier than say the average class that you taught at the University of Minnesota?*

LESSER: Probably so. I don't remember that vividly, but...

*Q: It doesn't stick out.*

LESSER: Yes, but Ibos are debaters. They are arguers and so even though the traditional education method was to learn an awful lot by rote, to learn the answers to questions, you can count on it that if you've got a class full of Ibos you're going to get a lot of arguments and a lot of, well, what if the circumstances were a little different and so on. These were intellectually curious and challenging students.

*Q: Did you get around much in Nigeria?*

LESSER: Not very much. We did travel into the Islamic north to the north and to the west, the Yoruba country, and went to Lagos, the then-capital. It wasn't that easy to get around because volunteers didn't have cars. On one of the trips my pregnant wife and I were in a train derailment. Nobody was hurt, but we were stuck out in the middle of nowhere for 17 hours on a Sunday near a village but miles from any road. The village - Mada was its name - didn't have provisions for a trainload of people who were stuck there all day; the passengers soon bought out all the Coke, sardines, and package white bread in the little grocery kiosks. Traveling was not that easy to do.

*Q: Did you get a feel for the embassy or the Foreign Service while you were there?*

LESSER: Not for the embassy, but Enugu was a regional capital and there was a very small U.S. consulate there and that was my first encounter with the Foreign Service. I had never heard of the Foreign Service. You know, I grew up in New York. New York City is very parochial. It's a world unto itself. I had no idea about the conduct of foreign policy or anything of the kind. There was a little consulate in Enugu with two officers and a USIS office, and I did get to know the people there. That is where I first became interested in joining the Foreign Service. I took the Foreign Service written exam in Enugu (because it was given anywhere in the world), and then I learned that I passed it and that I had to wait until returning to the States to take the second part, the oral exam. Once I passed the written, I decided that if I could get into the Foreign Service, that's what I wanted to do. In that sense this series of accidents that landed me up in this little West African corner, very decisively changed the course of my life. I never went back to academia. I couldn't even remember a couple of things about what I had done at Minnesota just a year or two before.



*Q: How did your wife feel about this?*

LESSER: She was enthusiastic. Of course, she's not my wife anymore. The Foreign Service inevitably, you know, over the long haul, affects...

*Q: It takes its toll.*

LESSER: It takes its toll. It affects the different people in the family in different ways. Harriet is an artist, as I mentioned, and that's a "portable" profession, so it was compatible with being a diplomat's wife for many years, but eventually her ambitions - to use a word that may sound crass but I don't mean it negatively - and my own ambitions and needs diverged too far to sustain the marriage. But by then our children were practically grown and the end of the marriage wasn't disruptive to them. I like to frame things positively, and I sometimes say that after more than twenty years we ended a successful marriage. And just to complete the thought, it has worked out very well for both of us and for our children, and we're on good terms.

I'd like to describe our life in Enugu in a little more detail. Since Harriet and I were assigned to teach at a government school in the regional capital, we were given the same expatriate housing as the other expat teachers (and some of the Nigerians). It was a simple but comfortable two-bedroom bungalow on a half-acre plot. Ours happened to be right next to the railroad line. We sat bolt-upright in our bed the first time we heard the blood-curdling shriek of the train whistle in the middle of night, signaling its approach to the station a couple of miles ahead. Once we got used to it we slept right through. Peace Corps gave us a Lambretta motor scooter for shopping and to get around town. Even with that it wouldn't have been practical to teach full-time and run a household consisting of just the two of us. Even in the towns and cities, most Nigerians live with large extended family households, and they divide up the responsibilities. The equivalent for little Western nuclear family households like ours is to hire servants. We could - just barely - afford to do that on our Peace Corps allowances, and that is what we did. We had a cook named Samuel, a part-time gardener, and after our son Richard was born, a nurse-girl named Paulina. I know that sounds more like the Foreign Service image than Peace Corps, but believe me it was the only arrangement that made any sense.

For the most part, Sam cooked British style, or British colonial style - for example, a green curry, served with assorted condiments which he called "gages" - since that was what he had learned. He also did most of the marketing for groceries; inevitably, that meant we were buying more sugar, flour, eggs, and cooking oil than could be accounted for by our own consumption, but you have to be somewhat philosophical about that.

It was a little tricky to function as PCVs, with the special Peace Corps message of living simply and close to the economic level of the local people, and be colleagues with teachers who were quite well paid. Peace Corps was always image-conscious; too much, I thought. There was pressure from headquarters to take away the motor scooters, for example; not for safety reasons but because it set us at too high a standard. At one point we were told that Peace Corps was considering taking away refrigerators, for the same reason, until the Peace Corps doctors petitioned that they could not take responsibility for the health of the volunteers if they couldn't

store perishables safely. I've always been a ball player, and I had an occasional tennis game at the classy hotel in town, which was the only place with a good tennis court. The regional Peace Corps director gently suggested to me that maybe it was inappropriate for a PCV to be playing tennis at that fancy place. I was indignant, saying that I didn't join the Peace Corps to reject the activities I liked, nor to pretend that I would be content to live strictly the same life as the people in the local community. Besides, what would the Nigerians think if I acted like I wanted to give up the rewards of coming from a high standard of living society? One of my Nigerian colleagues told me that he sees no point in Peace Corps Volunteers showing local people that they can live in mud huts. They already know how to do that. They want to get out of huts and live more comfortably, like us.

Last point about life as a PCV in Enugu, Nigeria in 1964 and 1965: Harriet and I were already married more than a year before we joined Peace Corps. Once we were settled in Enugu - not that we didn't have some pretty serious cultural adjustments to make there - we decided to have a baby. Our son, Richard Amaechi, was born early in our second year there, at Dr. Okeke's hospital, locally in Enugu. (Amaechi is an Ibo name meaning "who knows tomorrow?") His birth was registered on an "alien births register," thus he doesn't have a claim to Nigerian citizenship. Harriet stopped teaching for a term, and then resumed on a reduced schedule. Peace Corps officially discouraged volunteers from having children, and had the option of terminating our service and sending us home, but in those days in Nigeria - or at least in the more developed southern portion of the country - they were allowing it. As I recall, Richard was the seventh or eighth Peace Corps baby in Nigeria, and the first boy.

*Q: Excellent. Let's move on. You left Nigeria in '65 was it?*

LESSER: Yes, in December of '65.

**HORACE G. DAWSON, JR.**  
**Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1964-1967)**

*Born in Georgia, Ambassador Horace G. Dawson, Jr. entered the foreign service in the early sixties. His assignments included Uganda, Nigeria, Liberia, and the Philippines. Ambassador Dawson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 7, 1991.*

*Q: I have here you spent three years in Lagos, Nigeria, from '64 to '67. Was the situation different there [than in Uganda]?*

DAWSON: Oh, yes, yes.

*Q: If there's something more to talk about in Uganda...*

DAWSON: Oh, no, not really. Not really. I must say, though, that...see, I had come into USIA

laterally and was sent to Kampala, a very small situation. As I said, I was the first number two. But on this thread of these things we've been talking about, because I was able to do these things there, they selected me to go to the largest program, you see. And so I went over to Lagos to be interviewed by the public affairs officer who was in charge then, a very senior man, who said, "Okay, by all means you must come."

And I went to Lagos, after nearly three years in Kampala, as the cultural affairs officer in Lagos. And there, of course, I had a staff. There were about three or four assistants on the staff in Lagos for cultural affairs alone, and it meant that I now headed a program, whereas in Kampala I just had to generate one.

Now Lagos was quite different. Although the system was British-oriented, Americans had made inroads out there over a long period of time. Indeed, in the eastern part of the country, they had a university there, the first in Africa, modeled on the land-grant college in this country. And they became the first university in Africa, certainly in Nigeria and I suspect in Africa, to award their own degrees. See, prior to this time, degrees were studied for in Africa, but the examinations were sent to Britain.

*Q: Oh, yes, they had that same system in India; it was part of the empire.*

DAWSON: The colonies, yes. And then the degree was awarded by the University of London. So a graduate at Makerere, if you asked him had he finished university, would say, "Well, I'm a graduate of the University of London." What it meant was that his degree was conferred by that university, because Makerere was in, I would say, sort of a father-son relationship to the University of London.

Anyway, the University of Nigeria was founded basically by American-educated Igbos, when you come right down to it, who had recognized the value of the kind of flexible education system we have and wanted that for Nigeria. And so, at the time when I was there, it was being, in a sense, nurtured by Michigan State University. And it was existing side by side, of course, with traditional British-type universities -- Ibadan, Ife -- but it was something new on the continent. Soon after the University of Nigeria began issuing its own degrees, the other universities started doing it as well, and they cut off this relationship with the University of London.

The University of Lagos was being built when I got to Nigeria. And this was one of my primary responsibilities. And, indeed, as I stayed there for a year, I saw the civil war was beginning, was gathering steam. It had not broken out by the time I left, but it definitely was on the way. And one of the manifestations of this was the fact that all of the Igbo faculty at the University of Lagos were leaving Lagos unceremoniously. They just couldn't stay there. The faculty, of course, was mainly foreign and Yoruba at the time. And I was invited to go there, with two or three other outsiders, so to speak, and to help them form the first school of mass communications, probably, in Africa. Certainly this was the first in Nigeria, and was formed right there at Lagos. So I'm, in a sense, one of the founding faculty members of the Department of Mass Communications (I think it's a School now) at the University of Lagos.

*Q: Well, now, I've never been there, but it would strike me that in a country like Nigeria it would*

*be very difficult to reach out, say, to the Muslim side, the Hausa. I mean, was it difficult to get to, particularly the Muslim groups, but to the different groups? Because it's a very disparate country, isn't it?*

DAWSON: No, well, no. Well, first of all, in Lagos, you have a variety of peoples, backgrounds, and types. It's a very cosmopolitan city in that sense. And so the Muslims there were simply another population. Not all of them were Hausas, northern people. Many of the Muslims belonged to the dominant tribe in the area, the Yoruba tribe right there in the area, number one. And so it was not difficult at all to reach them. The problem was that, even though they were large in numbers, their education lagged behind the education of both the Yoruba and the Igbos. And so one didn't come into contact with them as often as one did with these other groups.

Secondly, the U.S. government has consulates, as you know, in other parts of Nigeria. At the time I was there, there were three, I believe, in the north. There was one at Kaduna, one at Kano, and one at Zaria. And with that kind of establishment there, the consulates, with USIS attached, had direct access to Muslims, because they were the majority group in these areas.

*Q: Were there any major problems in dealing with the Nigerian government, or were they basically receptive at the federal, state, and local levels?*

DAWSON: Basically receptive. Very, very Western-oriented, to the extent that you dealt with Igbos who were in government. And many of them were in government, they were the civil servants. They were extremely pro-American, or certainly American oriented. Many of them had been educated in this country.

See, the education of Nigerians in this country went back to Nnamdi Azikiwe, and that's not very far really, about the late twenties, early thirties. And he espoused the idea of American education, especially among his own people. And, of course, the notion spread, and there was not much of a problem; Nigerians were eager to come to the United States. In fact, even when I was there, as far back as the mid-sixties, you had a problem there similar to the problem that you had in places such as Manila and, I guess, Mexico City and Jamaica, where people are just lined up trying to get visas to come to the United States.

So there was no problem really, except that in some of the ministries you still had the British civil servants who were resisting these kinds of inroads. They felt threatened by the American influence and wanted to keep things as British as possible.

The thing I did that was most memorable and certainly most satisfying to me in Nigeria was to start what came to be known as the John F. Kennedy Memorial Essay Contest. I started that in, I guess, my second year there. It was a nationwide program, with all of the best schools competing, and it was extremely successful. It went on right through the civil war, long after I left, and they invited me out there for the tenth anniversary observance of it.

*Q: The civil war ran from when to when?*

DAWSON: From July of '67 to January of '70.

*Q: Apparently we must have been completely cut off from Biafra, weren't we?*

DAWSON: Well, see, I left before that break occurred. It was rumored and we knew that there would be a Biafra, but I guess the war really hadn't started before I left. The Igbos were headed back east; they all had been given time to get back into what became their tribal enclave, the eastern area of Nigeria, before Odumegwu Ojukwu declared a Biafran state.

**C. WILLIAM KONTOS**  
**Emergency Deputy Assistant Secretary**  
**Lagos (1964-1965)**

*Ambassador C. William Kontos was born in Illinois in 1922. He received an B.A. and M.A. from the University of Chicago. He served in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946. In addition to Nigeria, Ambassador Kontos' tours with USAID took him to Greece, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Lebanon, Israel, and Sudan. He was interviewed by Thomas Stern in a series of interviews conducted in 1992.*

*Q: Let me return to the program evaluation process. By the time you left it in 1972, did you feel that you were beginning to make an impact?*

KONTOS: I should add that in the middle [1964] of my tenure as Director for Program Evaluation, I was asked by the Department of State to take on an emergency assignment. The Nigerian war was just coming to an end. State had decided that in order to deal with the special problems resulting from the post civil war confusion, it would establish a new office for Nigerian affairs, which would encompass the political, economic, consular, relief, and assistance functions, all under one director. This was unprecedented because never had all the Washington responsibilities for these activities been put under the direction of one official. They asked Dr. Hannah and Rudd Poats, who was the Deputy Administrator at the time, for my services. With a certain reluctance, they agreed to let me go to work for David Newsom, who was the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. The assignment was to be temporary until the post civil war phase in Nigeria had ended and the situation in the country had stabilized. The assumption was that it would be a one-two year assignment, at most.

I was given the rank of Deputy Assistant Secretary. My principal deputy was a Foreign Service officer; the other deputy was an AID officer. The Office of Nigerian Affairs was staffed by eight or ten people, two or three of whom worked on relief matters. It was an interesting experience. I had served in Nigeria and had maintained some currency on the issues. I visited the country on a couple of occasions while directing this Office. Bill Trueheart was the Ambassador and Mike Adler was the AID Mission director. Joe Palmer, who was then Director General, but had been Ambassador to Nigeria, served as an advisor to Newsom. It was a most successful effort. Nigeria had become a major American domestic political issue between those who supported the rebels and the those who supported the regime in power during the civil war. The Department was at odds with the NSC and the White House because we wanted to support the government in Lagos

without being antagonistic to the rebels in Biafra. We felt that the legitimate government was in Lagos; we were accredited to that government. But there were a lot of people, including, I was told, Mrs. Nixon who were extremely partial to the Biafran cause. Mrs. Nixon became involved because she had become concerned about human rights violations against the Biafrans.

The Biafrans were for the most part Ibos, who were probably one of the most sophisticated tribe on the continent of Africa. They were the most widely traveled and therefore had the widest range of contacts in the West. With the help of their friends in Switzerland, France and Germany, the Ibos mounted a very successful public relations campaign, which showed starving Biafrans and other examples of the evil intentions of the government in Lagos. There were poignant posters in London, Paris, and other major European capitals showing a starving Biafran baby. The Nigerian government was accused of impeding the delivery of food stuffs, handled by private relief and governmental agencies, to Biafra. To an extent this was true since Lagos felt that the relief supplies included war materiel, which would be used against them. Lagos also considered food as a military weapon and engendered great internal debate whether it should be permitted to be delivered at all. France almost openly was supporting Biafra as was the Catholic Church whose constituency was primarily in Biafra. That made Nigeria an extremely volatile political situation and created great controversy here in the United States. I remember that the NSC staff man handling Nigeria was Roger Morris, a young FSO on detail to Henry Kissinger's staff. Roger was probably in his late twenties or early thirties. On at least one occasion, Palmer, a very senior and experienced diplomat, was harshly berated by Morris because we favored Lagos too much and were not sufficiently pro-Biafra.

The basic reason for the establishment of the unique Office for Nigerian Affairs was this bitter political struggle that was raging in the United States. We started essentially as a program of humanitarian relief. There was great anxiety about the possibility of a major famine in Biafra. That might have happened if the Nigerian government had decided to be punitive toward the rebels, but in fact, Lagos was extremely helpful and assisted in expediting the delivery of foodstuffs. The alarm about massive starvation was premature; it did not happen, although we were constantly under pressure to reassure all concerned that there was no famine. A number of non-governmental agencies sent out a continual stream of observers, who would return with dire stories of whole villages and regions outside the distribution system, blaming the U.S. government for failing to deliver supplies to these areas. That pressure was a very important factor in the beginning. Later on, we spent much time seeking to calm the Nigerians who were always suspicious of what they felt was a less than fully supportive position because the State Department clearly was at odds with the NSC on this issue.

Nigeria was *sui generis*; it was not part of the Cold War. We wanted to make sure that Nigeria, the largest and most populous country in Africa, would stay united. Had the Biafrans succeeded in the civil war, it might have become a model for other African minorities or irredentists who aspired to be self-governing. There was concern that if Nigeria broke up, it might be the beginning of a series of such events throughout Africa. Therefore, we wanted Nigeria to remain united. Biafra was fighting for independence from the rule of the Yorubas and the Muslims of the North. The NSC, on the other hand, was motivated by sentimental and humanitarian reasons. Both the President and Mrs. Nixon were somehow sympathetic to the Biafran cause. I don't think it was question of *realpolitik* in this case as much as the President's sentimental inclinations.

The Biafrans, had they achieved independence, would have controlled most of Nigeria's oil reserves. That suggests that there might have been some ulterior motive behind Biafra's supporters like the French besides the religious one. The issue was debated in the United Nations, but that was not a major factor during my tenure as Office Director, which lasted about eighteen months. The debate was mostly about the adequacy of the relief efforts.

**OWEN W. ROBERTS**  
**Political Officer**  
**Lagos (1964-1965)**

*Ambassador Owen W. Roberts was born in Oklahoma in 1924. He received an A.B. from Princeton University and an M.I.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Army. Ambassador Roberts entered the Foreign Service in 1955, serving in Egypt, Congo, Nigeria, Upper Volta, Ethiopia, Gambia, Seychelles, Chad, and Togo. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.*

*Q: Then you left IO in 1964 and went to Lagos, where you served for just about a year and a half as the political officer.*

ROBERTS: As second of three political officers in the Embassy, responsible mainly for Nigeria's role in international affairs.

*Q: What was the situation in Nigeria at the time you went there?*

ROBERTS: Well, that was interesting and instructive. Nigeria was the new giant of Africa. The British had done a good job in setting up parliamentary institutions. They had done a wonderful job in setting up education. They had educated maybe as many as 8,000 to 10,000 Nigerians through the university level. Had brought them into the civil service. There were senior Nigerians, people who could perfectly well be assistant secretaries of state, in a lot of different fields. Big political groups had formed, based on the main ethnic groups -- the Ibos, the Yoruba, the Hausa, and some subgroups. It was, to all intents and purposes, a real functioning country.

At the same time, tribalism was such a strong factor that politics became so bitter as to threaten the parliamentary/administrative framework. Political relations became a continuous, all out struggle. We realized this and had made holding Nigeria together the Embassy's main objective. Our AID, USIA, Defense, CIA, Peace Corps people were all to promote a national framework so that the tribal outlooks and the tribal-based politics and, to some extent, violence wouldn't break it apart. The difficulty in doing this, in organizing an Embassy with many different Agency parts, was demonstrated by the Department instituting one of our first management schemes. It was called PPBS (Planning, Programming, Budgeting System). In essence it said shape your budget and programs according to your policy priorities.

*Q: This was also made a management technique within the Department of State?*

ROBERTS: Yes, and it was promulgated worldwide to Embassies. There were detailed instructions and an Embassy officer was to be assigned at each post to organize it. I got the job. The plans/priorities part was, in our case, quite simple. We had a clear policy of promoting the federal system and integrating the regions.

The next step was cataloguing our existing activities and costs. So I went around to all the agencies and put together an agreed outline of programs and budgets. Then I put these up against our policies.

The result was extremely disturbing. It turned out that 85 percent of our resources were going directly to the provinces, to local activities. At the very most, if you stretched the imagination, most programs and budgets had minimal federalizing impact.

That's not really surprising. If we were going to promote education, we helped the university expand in Ibadan, in the Yoruba area; and to be even-handed we helped education in the Ibo east, in Enugu, and in the Hausa north, in Kano. This was good, sensible long term preparation of people for leadership in all fields. But, at the same time, as we were doing it within a provincial framework, we were increasing the capability of all concerned to play tribal politics. We hadn't really appreciated this.

I presented this to the country team meeting and said, "Only 15 percent of our resources are going for our first and second priorities; the rest is for lower order technical activities." This was so unarguably evident that it stopped our PPBS effort in its tracks. The other agencies, with most of the local program budget, had organized their activities according to their agencies' various interests. They were not as Agencies committed to State's PPBS. We were, as an Embassy, not one management, but a collection of them. This too should have been obvious.

Meanwhile, Nigeria, like our PPBS effort, was coming apart. For much the same reasons. The Government divided on increasingly hard tribal lines, both politically and within administrative departments. There were riots, then violence. Politicians hired private guards. The Embassy should have said fairly early on: "Whoa, things are going really badly here." Well, we were kind of reluctant to give up our basic objectives and what we were doing, so we tended to put a more hopeful outlook on this. It was the independent voice of the CIA that began saying, "Things are falling apart out there." Then, suddenly, Balewa was assassinated. The collapse into civil war had started.

*Q: He had been the prime minister.*

ROBERTS: Yes. Several other ministers were killed; others managed to escape. The government limped along for a while, but the country had started splitting into its three major ethnic pieces. The embassy, I'm afraid, was surprised by this. It was because of our operational outlook; we were trying to make something happen. I now recognize, in retrospect, that we had nowhere near the means, even if we had gotten all of Washington behind us, even if we had directed all the other agencies' activities on PPBS lines. Nigeria was simply too big a place. The major tribal



units were large, well organized, and powerful, functioning sub-states. And there were even more ethnic groups (about 460) than in the Congo. We really had no hope of holding this together.

After Balewa's assassination, several governments were put together for a while, but the parliamentary effort failed because there was no consensus that federal government was more important than the factional elements. So it broke down into civil war.

*Q: Did you or any of the people with whom you were working ever question our policy? Our policy had been quite firm, really, and quite consistent, that the boundaries, which were highly artificial, drawn up during the European times, would hold true, and we would do everything we could to try to keep these entities -- Nigeria, the Congo, or what have you -- within these boundaries rather than let the whole tribal thing sort itself out after a period of time. Was there any questioning of this?*

ROBERTS: There was really very little, because the policy -- keeping the inherited boundaries -- was overall a correct one. Respecting each ethnic group would create wholly unviable states. The problem was that we couldn't enforce such a policy and we had to really sit on the sidelines. I feel that, as an analyst, I was delinquent in not recognizing soon enough that the tribal divisions, their strength and the capability of their leadership, would almost inevitably drive this brand-new federal structure into the ground. I was caught up in the operational effort as in the Congo. All of us in the embassy reported fully what was happening, but we did not pointedly make the analytical conclusion. While it was a general Embassy failing, I feel it was a major personal mistake. It did make me more cautious thereafter about operational situations.

*Q: Well, sort of looking at it from the overall picture, did it make any difference where the embassy came down anyway? Were we just sort of a chip on a stormy sea, and we could be reporting what was happening, but really would have little effect on keeping Nigeria together?*

ROBERTS: That's correct. But not something a diplomat wishes to admit. I don't think there was anything that the AF Bureau could have done if it had seen this, or the Department. In no way was the United States going to try to put together a UN operation big enough to save Nigeria from itself. Also, remember that the UN had just broken its back over the Congo peacekeeping; it was left with that \$200 million bond debt, which it still has, and with members who had decided they were not going to finance peacekeeping. A lot of other countries were delinquent in paying for their peacekeeping; the UN simply had no capability at that time. In this case, as an internal domestic matter, it would have been very difficult for the UN to get involved unless the federal government had asked for help -- which was politically impossible.

*Q: How did you find dealing with the Nigerian government, both at the regional and at the central level? Were they easy to talk to?*

ROBERTS: The Nigerians, whatever their tribe, are a very strong, very assertive group. Foreign Minister Wachuku was a surprise for many American diplomats because he considered himself as having a status equivalent to the British, French, German, or Russian ministers. He demanded that much attention and respect. U.S. representatives weren't always that ready to give it to him.

This caused some hard feelings, and Wachuku could be pretty bitter. The Nigerians were, and have been, very independent. Senior US echelons weren't used to dealing with Africans as assertive and as strong minded as the Nigerians were. I found this nice, because the Nigerians were absolutely always open with you, and would hit you over the head with whatever the problem was. But it was always aboveboard. They were entitled to respect and helped gain it for Africans.

They themselves had very little diplomatic experience. For instance, they invited an Algerian delegation to Lagos, assumed the visitors spoke English, and had to search frantically for interpreters at the last moment. A Tunisian and I were invited to serve, which the Algerians found extremely strange. It would never happen again; it could only occur in the very early phase of independence.

I remember also telling the Nigerian in charge of American affairs that I was reassigned to Upper Volta. And he said, "Oh, yes, the Volga River is one of the most famous rivers in the world, and the Volga is a tremendous part of Russia, and I've always wanted to go there. You'll be very happy in Moscow."

I explained, "No, I'm going to Upper Volta; it's an African country, just one over from you." "Oh," he responded, clearly thinking it a second-class appointment. It's unbelievable now how provincial the English-educated Africans and the French-educated Africans were about each other. They had had very little contact.

*Q: Did you find that one group, like the Ibos or the Yorubas, could monopolize the diplomatic corps just by the fact that they spoke better English or were better educated, and so this gave them an edge as far as the reporting goes? Were you co-opted?*

ROBERTS: No. Remember that all the Nigerian leadership were very well educated and all spoke excellent English. They were all assertive. Also, the ethnic groups were well scattered through all the ministries. The Embassy had excellent access, largely because the Nigerians wanted it. Our ambassador could see the prime minister anytime he wished, and we could see any one of the ministers. As second political officer, I had open access at the office director level. It was as open as working in Washington.

We also traveled freely all around the country. I made a trip of over five weeks with my family throughout much of Nigeria, and was always well received. Governors and administrators who hadn't previously seen Embassy people were generous with their time. And patient. I learned a lot, especially how completely different the north was. We knew it intellectually, but not so as fully to appreciate it. I found that Nigeria was really divided by the "Y" of the Niger River; there was a northern half and a southern half, with the southern half being below the two bars of the "Y" of the Niger River. There were only two ways that you could get from north to south except by air. One in the west, was over a railroad bridge where there were continuous ties so that when the train didn't run, cars and cattle and people went back and forth over the railroad trestle. The other was a little ferry in the southeast. It was a little bit as though you were assigned to Washington as a British diplomat, somewhere in the 1960s and went west to find there was only one bridge across the Mississippi. You might have wondered whether this was going to be one

place or two.

*Q: I wonder if you could talk a bit about Elbert Matthews, your ambassador. What was his style of operation and how effective was he?*

ROBERTS: I really didn't have enough to do with the overall running of the embassy to say how effective he was. But personally he was a very kind, thoughtful, laid-back, ambassador. He'd had a lot of experience and a very quiet manner. He was certainly respected and decisive in his leadership of the country team. I felt he was kind of presiding over a board, listening to everything that went on, making decisions when they needed to be made, encouraging people to do what they were already working on.

For me, it was epitomized when I went to see him at the end of my tour. I asked him, "Mr. Ambassador, you've hardly changed any of my reporting cables. My boss changes a lot of them, but you've approved them all." He replied, "Well, I've always thought that you knew what you were doing, and that you had interesting ideas. Maybe I didn't necessarily agree with them, but there's no reason why they shouldn't be expressed, so I authorized them to go out." I thought that was taking a pretty big chance, but he replied that he was interested in diversity of opinion. A nice person for whom to work.

*Q: In reporting on Nigeria at that time, was there any diversity in how you and others were looking at whither Nigeria? We're talking about the '64, '65 period.*

ROBERTS: Generally not. Nigeria was considered important but was not a Washington issue. We were largely agreed, in Washington and the field, on our objective of encouraging Nigeria's unity. This operational aspect, as previously discussed, makes for unity.

*Q: Did you feel a damper on your reporting of schisms in the country? Not necessarily somebody from above saying this, but just from wishful thinking or not wanting to give ammunition to those in Washington who might have thought, well, this is a hopeless matter.*

ROBERTS: I think that there was wishful thinking, but it was largely unconscious. Our mistake was not appreciating how difficult the problem was. Africa was a very new situation for most of us -- all the issues of newly independent states suddenly running themselves. After the years of relative stability in the colonial African states, it was difficult to appreciate how little statehood had really been implanted. I remember the DCM, Scott, making a confession upon leaving for reassignment. He stood up at his last staff meeting in the Ambassador's office and said: "You know, I really don't think I should leave without saying the situation is getting bad, and I'm nervous about it, more nervous than I've let on."

*Q: Somebody looking at foreign policy and at reporting should remember that there often is a certain amount of pulling punches by the post, anywhere. Not over reporting on corruption, for example, if you have other fish to fry.*

ROBERTS: True. Sometimes too, a situation can be embarrassing.

*Q: How about dealing with the Nigerian government, was there a problem there? Were they easy to deal with?*

ROBERTS: We had very good access. And I liked all the Nigerians. They were very strong minded, independent people, who in no way wanted to be thought of as "Africans in a Western world." They were Nigerians and as good as any Europeans. I remember Ambassador Matthews called me one evening about eight o'clock to say that he'd gotten a telephone call from IBM's Watson, who had arrived in his own jet, because he was going to meet with the minister of finance the next morning. The airport wasn't letting him in because of some "visa problems" and would I kindly solve the situation. I rushed out to the airport and found that they didn't have any visas at all, in fact they just hadn't bothered (Nigeria being an undeveloped country). The immigration officer was saying that no, they couldn't come in if they didn't have any visas. I pointed out that they were going to see the finance minister and that it was important for Nigeria to have business with IBM. The official replied: "I'm sorry. You don't let people into your country without visas; we don't let people into our country without visas. If IBM doesn't respect us enough to come in with visas, I don't think our finance minister will want to meet with him. But you can take it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and see how they feel about it."

So, about eight-thirty at night, I started calling up the diplomatic chain of command, and got turned down by the head of the America Division. But he agreed to call his boss. The answer came down very clearly: "If Watson doesn't think that we're important enough so that he's going to follow our visa requirements, he can just damn well go home and we'll deal with somebody else. We can deal with Germans, Japanese." Watson got back in his plane and left. I thought the Nigerians had a point, but I'm doubtful many in the Department would have. We didn't report it.

*Q: Did the embassy have much contact with the Nigerian military?*

ROBERTS: The embassy probably had good contacts, but the military were not yet important politically. A good many Nigerians had been in the US on military training programs, and we had at least a five or six man military mission at the time. But I don't recall that we had any particular inside channel. It was the civilians, the tribal groups, who were involved in the violence and assassinations. The military fragmented later.

*Q: The Peace Corps was there at the time, wasn't it, in its earlier years?*

ROBERTS: Yes.

*Q: What was the impression at the embassy as far as its effect?*

ROBERTS: Well, the Peace Corps was still very new at this time. Its original focus was largely people-to-people contact. The volunteers were supposed to help in schools and at the village level. There were as yet no small scale development activities as wells, truck gardens, co-ops, and fish ponds. Also, Nigeria was even then huge in terms of population: about a hundred and fifty million people. Our 300 volunteers disappeared into the overall mass of Nigeria. It was different than in a smaller country, we'll say in West Africa or Central Africa, where there are five million people and 100 Peace Corps volunteers would have a greater impact. But at the

village level, the volunteers established excellent personal relationships from the first.

*Q: Well, back to Nigerian sensitivity, their wish to be treated for what they were, a major nation. Was there a problem for us to have a policy goal of trying to keep the nation together, a kind of United States? It's sort of patronizing in a way. Was this a difficult thing for you all in the embassy to live with?*

ROBERTS: Our objective was publicly stated in general terms as supporting Nigerian federalism, and corresponded with the Nigerians' own concepts. Our Embassy plans were confidential and few if any Nigerians realized the extent to which we thought we were involved. Also, as demonstrated with our PPBS management attempt, it would have been hard to guess it given our diverse aid efforts spread over the whole country. It was a nice concept, but we weren't pushing it that hard that it created difficulties with us for the Nigerians. AID, USIA, DOD, and Peace Corps people were all carrying on their particular projects with the various ministries and working in all the regions. There wasn't any apparent conflict between our concern for the federal unity and the relationships that we had with various peoples. I agree, it could have been a patronizing policy had we been patronizing. But it was hard to be superior to a Nigerian, particularly when they were as capable as we, or more so, in most fields.

Ambassador Matthews was not the kind of person to go in and tell Balewa or Jaja Wachuku how to do things. He would explain how a particular issue might affect things that they were interested in, and what the reaction would be in the United States. Standard diplomacy. But they were touchy. Do you recall that a Peace Corps volunteer wrote home on a postcard about her first impressions of Lagos, including that men were peeing all over the place? All very true. But the Nigerians blew up: demonstrations, university protests, radio and press diatribes, ministry of Foreign Affairs notes, demarches in Washington. Reverberated for months. A hullabaloo.

**ROBERT RACKMALES**  
**Foreign Service Generalist**  
**Lagos (1964-1966)**

*Robert Rackmales was born in Maryland in 1937. He graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a degree in history in 1958 and studied in Germany on a Fulbright fellowship. He also did graduate work at Harvard University. In addition to Nigeria, Mr. Rackmales served in Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Italy. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 11, 1995.*

*Q: Your first post was Lagos, is that right?*

RACKMALES: That's right.

*Q: ...in Nigeria, and you were there from '64 to '66. How did that sit with you being assigned there?*

RACKMALES: It was a good assignment from a personal and professional standpoint. From a personal standpoint, I met my wife in Lagos, we got married midway through my tour. From a professional standpoint, with the coup in January 1966 that overthrew the civilian government, it was a dramatic, exciting time.

*Q: Maybe we'll come back to it. Let's talk first about when you arrived in 1964, what was the situation in Lagos?*

RACKMALES: The city itself had a poor reputation although not nearly as bad as the deservedly awful reputation that it has had in later years. You did not have in those days the level of crime, certainly not crime directed at westerners. Areas of the city where American embassy people lived were much more pleasant than I had expected. Yes, downtown had open sewers, and you noticed smells that might be a little disagreeable, but I found it a vibrant, interesting place to be. I remember coming back from a trip to Kinshasa which struck me as a dead, morose city compared to Lagos. I found Lagos an exciting place to be.

*Q: When you arrived it was what? A fairly full blown democracy, would you say?*

RACKMALES: There was a civilian elected government. It was closer to a fully functioning democracy than has existed since. The thing that did it in though, the same thing that did in Yugoslavia, was that politics became purely ethnic. The political parties turned into engines for promoting nationalism or tribalism, whichever word you want to use. Tribalism seems to be used more in an African context, nationalism in European context, but it's the same thing. I remember one close exposure to this phenomenon. I had gotten to know the head of the Nigerian Timber Association who was British. He took me to some of the saw mills, so we got to meet with and talk to some of the workers in the midst of the 1965 election campaign. Their passions were so high that we were literally threatened with machetes and forced to say of course we were supportive of their ethnic party. These were regional elections in the western region, and I was given the job of following those closely. I was the only one working full time on these regional elections. I wrote a long evaluation just before the election which went in and was commended by the Department, but my final conclusion got watered down by the embassy. My conclusion was that these elections were going to trigger large scale violence. The embassy fudged it because we were supporting Nigerian democracy, we didn't want to make it seem as if this was a country in trouble. So the prospect for violence was played down. In fact, large scale violence did break out, and eventually led to the coup that took place about six months later that overthrew the government. It was an early exposure, both to the force of tribalism/nationalism, and also to the unfortunate reluctance of some embassies to give Washington bad news.

*Q: It's a strong tendency, and it doesn't always reflect you might say the considered thinking of the observers on the spot. Well, you don't know where this news is going to go for one thing. If you do say this, you become known as a doomsayer. It's much easier to paper it over. Who ran the embassy when you were there?*

RACKMALES: The ambassador was named Elbert Matthews, known as Bert. I had a lot of respect for him, he was a gentleman. I was able to spend several months as his executive

assistant when his executive assistant was medevaced. I served approximately six months in each of the embassy sections, and I was grateful for that. It resulted in changing my primary interest from administration to political work.

Q: *Why was this?*

RACKMALES: I found political work intellectually more exciting and challenging. Looking back at the end of my tour, I was proud that what I had done in terms of analyzing the election, and other events resulted in predictions that were pretty close to the mark. It was gratifying to have more access to the front office, sensing that I was working on issues that were of more concern to the senior levels of the embassy. I also enjoyed the admin work that I did. I didn't regret the time I spent there. I was put in charge of the motor pool, so that was my first significant supervisory experience because I had about 30 Nigerian drivers. I think that helped later on when I had other supervisory jobs. But I was not as taken with the content of the work, and also my impressions of most of the admin people that I was working with, the Americans in the embassy, is that they seemed to be not as broad gauged. I couldn't see most of them as ambassadors. I guess my perception was that that was not the path that led to the top of the Foreign Service.

Q: *I think this is true. I mean there is a trend to shy away from the administrative side because of this, because of the people in it. They're not as intellectually as fun to be around. What was Matthew's background?*

RACKMALES: A career man. He had had at least one other embassy in Africa, I think it was one of the other Anglophile.

Q: *He wasn't parachuted into Africa.*

RACKMALES: No, he was quite knowledgeable, a real professional, a gentleman.

Q: *How did the embassy deal with this brewing storm that came about and the coup? You mentioned that at least to Washington they were playing down the possibility of major problems.*

RACKMALES: Well, let me tell you about one episode that typifies it. In December of 1965 I was invited to a dinner party. One of the guests there was a young Nigerian engineer who was working for a French oil company doing exploration off the coast of Biafra. He had just graduated from Ibadan University where there had been serious tensions, and even a riot which was ethnically based. And this young engineer who was very open, laid out for me in some detail the fact that there was a group of young Ibo military officers who were plotting a coup to overthrow the civilian regime, because of their anger over the way that Federal troops had treated the Ibo students who were demonstrators in Ibadan. I thought that was a pretty significant bit of information, but still being new to the game the following morning, instead of just sitting down and writing a cable, I went first to the political counselor because I was kind of excited about this. He acted skeptical, and told me to talk to the military attaché and to a member of the station. The reaction of both was, "Oh, we hear rumors all the time, we're not going to bother Washington with this sort of thing." I was disappointed because I thought I had something and

neither the political counselor nor the CIA person thought it was worth reporting. So I didn't. And a few weeks later the coup occurred, and I got an urgent request to tell the ambassador everything I could recall about that engineer. So, in effect, we had warning about the coup, and could have sent something in to Washington which would have at least indicated that the embassy was aware of something. The information was even detailed enough that Washington could have decided whether it was worthwhile to give the civilian government, which we supported, enough information that they could have broken up this group of young officers. The information was specific enough that you could pretty well identify who were the officers.

*Q: How did the coup play out?*

RACKMALES: It was bloody, it wiped out not only the top federal leaders, but a number of the regional leaders. It was a trauma. That in turn led to mass killings in the north where there were tens of thousands Ibos who were killed and an exodus of hundreds of thousands of Ibos who fled the north.

*Q: They were entrepreneurs.*

RACKMALES: They were entrepreneurs, but also civil servants, railroad workers, and had lived for generations in the north, because the north had a shortage of workers, and all of these people packed up and there were, of course, heartrending stories. We left in the summer of 1966 at the height of this trauma. Then there was another coup that took place later in the fall. Later the Biafran war took place as a result of all of that.

*Q: When the coup happened, how did the embassy react to the initial part of the coup?*

RACKMALES: It took the embassy totally by surprise despite my earlier (oral) report. What we would now call a crisis management center was set up. We quickly focused on the army command, since the coup plotters had managed to wipe out most of the top civilian leaders. The Federal army structure stayed more intact, so we looked to the army command to establish order. Within a short period of time they had taken the coup plotters into custody. I believe some were executed eventually. Of course ethnic relations went to hell in a hand basket as a result of this. We obviously were also focused on any risk to American citizens. I remember going out to a prison...It was hard traveling around in Lagos for several weeks because you had extremely jumpy military. I remember having a machine gun poked under my nose when I was trying to get around to check up on Americans. We had one young man in jail on drug charges. I remember it was very hard, once this happened, getting to see him. Our policy continued to be that we continued to report the unity of Nigeria. We recognized that in Africa once you start fiddling with the borders then where do you stop. So there was never much sympathy for Ibo separatism except in our consulate in Enugu, which became sympathetic to the Biafran cause. They actually transferred the consul there after he wrote one report too many that was sympathetic to Ibo separatism.

*Q: Who was the consul, do you remember?*

RACKMALES: If I remember correctly his name was Bob Barnett(?). He had been the deputy



coordinator of our A-100 course so I had known him. He had gone out as principal officer in Enugu just around the same time that I went to Lagos. But he fell afoul of Ambassador Matthews, and he was curtailed.

*Q: Did the embassy have much contact with the military? Actually you had a couple military, but at the time you were there. First there was the coup while you were there, then the military per se...*

RACKMALES: That's right, they took over.

*Q: Was there much contact?*

RACKMALES: Well, I'm sure that the attachés had military to military contacts. I'm sure the military they were talking to didn't know about the coup. If they had, it wouldn't have happened. I can't speak to Ambassador Matthews' ties with the senior military leaders. I think he had known General Ironsi, who was the general who emerged as the first military leader. But I don't know what the nature of their relationship was.

*Q: When you were in the economic section what was the feeling whither Nigeria at that time?*

RACKMALES: There was a lot of interest in oil that was clearly...in fact, I think it was in that period that Nigeria first entered the top ten oil exporters. The oil sector was crucial. My own work...I mentioned that I had gotten to know the head of the Nigeria Timber Association, timber was a major industry at that point. In terms of employment it was larger than the oil sector, and it was an important exporter, particularly of hard woods to Europe. I also did a fair amount of commercial work, and got an early exposure to the kind of fraud that *Sixty Minutes* and others have been covering.

*Q: Sixty Minutes being an expose TV.*

RACKMALES: Right, but with serious journalists. Although I suspect the scale of it has vastly increased, I certainly saw as a first tour officer doing commercial work how some Nigerian entrepreneurs used tricks and fraudulent schemes, and could see how Americans could easily get caught up if they didn't approach Nigerian businessmen with a great deal of caution.

*Q: How about corruption? Was corruption a way of life?*

RACKMALES: Yes. I saw a lot in my first months as a consular officer. (Incidentally, just to show how much time has passed, I was the only consular officer. We had one American vice consul, and two FSNs, and that was the entire consular section of embassy Lagos. When I went back in the '80s, there were at least a dozen American officers, and many more Nigerians.) Even in that short time, I saw hundreds of fraudulent documents. Sometimes they were patently fraudulent, and sometimes they were a little more sophisticated. You had to check everything extremely carefully. At that point official corruption did not have the profile that it had later on. But I'm sure there was a lot of it.

*Q: Did you have any concerns about the Soviet Union? Or were they involved there at that time?*

RACKMALES: Yes. Part of it was through the labor movement. This was the area that seemed to cause the most concern to the embassy. There was a left-leaning labor movement, maybe it was even Marxist. But there had been some Soviet involvement, and our labor attaché was the lead person in trying to deal with that particular issue.

*Q: American interests at that time? How would you describe what were American main interests in Nigeria?*

RACKMALES: The Peace Corps was very active there. It was still a new organization, still a lot of idealism. Just before I arrived in Lagos, there was the incident involving Margery Micheltore. You may remember that.

*Q: This was the postcard. Could you explain what it is?*

RACKMALES: This was a young woman, a Peace Corps volunteer, who wrote in a postcard a rather detailed description of the sights and smells of the city, not in a pejorative sense, but just, "this is what it's like." And since it was in a postcard it got read by a Nigerian postal employee who thought this was outrageous that someone should make comments about the sewers, and the smells. So it got turned into an incident. She had to leave, and it roiled the waters for a little while. I don't think it had a lasting effect. I know the Peace Corps volunteers were still glad to be there. I think most of them were enthusiastic about the experience of being in a dynamic country.

There was a strong feeling that we had a lot to offer. There was a large AID mission, a large Peace Corps. We thought that Nigeria was going to be a flagship country for all of Africa, the largest sub-Saharan African country by far in terms of population. And on the commercial side, as I mentioned, a lot of interest in the oil resources, and the commercial implications of that. I had certainly asked to go to Nigeria because I thought it was an important country. It still is an important country but I seem to end up in countries that start off as positive role models, and end up as negative role models, Nigeria and Yugoslavia being in that category.

**CLARENCE SWIFT GULICK**  
**Program Officer, USAID**  
**Lagos (1965 - 1967)**

*Clarence Swift Gulick was born in New York and raised in New Jersey. He received a graduate degree in economics and political science from Swarthmore. He attended graduate school at Harvard. In 1943, he began active duty in the U.S. Navy. Mr. Gulick served with USAID in Ireland, Pakistan, and India. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on February 1, 1996.*

*Q: So then you went to take a position in Nigeria?*

GULICK: Yes.

*Q: And this was in 1965?*

GULICK: Yes, from '65 to '67 I was in Nigeria.

*Q: Do you remember anything in particular about the US policy towards Nigeria at that time?*

GULICK: The big thing was us not taking sides exactly, but making no bones about the fact we were not supporting Biafran independence though we were sympathetic up to a point. But Ojukwu overplayed their hand badly. I don't know what he thought. He probably expected more international support.

*Q: What was the main thrust of what you were doing there?*

GULICK: What I remember about Nigeria most clearly, was the general deterioration of the political situation that was already starting by the time I got there. The first thing was the Western elections that came in-I guess it must have been the fall of '65. This led to the first coup in the following year when three of the strongest political leaders were executed.

*Q: The Minister of Finance, Festus Okote Ibo...*

GULICK: Yes, and Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, and the Northerner.

*Q: In January 1996?*

GULICK: I think so. Then, of course, the military took over in January '66. Oil revenues were beginning to build up rapidly. That of course had started some years before, but really became major. Intertribal, interregional hostility built up rapidly. In the second coup, Gowon took over from the Ibo, Ironsi at the center. I guess that was at the time of the Northern massacres. Finally, Ojukwu took over in the East, and led the split, the secession and Civil War. So all this was happening while we were continuing very interesting programs.

*Q: Who was the Director then?*

GULICK: Well, Bob Mossler was the Acting Director for most of the time I was there. Then Don McDonald came out to be Director. Just about when he got his feet on the ground he got jerked off to Vietnam, and then Mike Adler came and took over. Mossler left and I was serving as Acting Deputy for the last few months that I stayed there. So the war was underway and we began to close up the program.

*Q: To close up the whole program, or were there only parts of it or what?*

GULICK: We closed up the whole program in the East. Quite a lot of it was there: the Michigan State University team at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, especially.

We were always pushing to Nigerianize everything. In practical terms that meant 'ibo-izing' them, because they were the ones who were qualified. The second coup and the massacres in the North halted that. I don't know that we really contributed to Northern resentment; but we surely were not very sensitive to what was happening in terms of Northern attitudes. I'm saying 'we' meaning the Embassy generally.

*Q: Were there any major development activities carried out and accomplished in that period at all?*

GULICK: I remember there weren't very many new activities. Most of the program was following on from what was already under way. There were several new things sort of cooking, but not much became of them before the end. They were talking in terms of setting up a new university in Lagos. Dr. Biobaku, who came back from Kenya I guess, was to be Vice Chancellor and a project in Public Administration training. We were already involved a bit in that earlier on, but we were increasing our support for that quite a bit up in Zaria.

*Q: What was your impression of the main objective of the program in Nigeria?*

GULICK: It was a pretty broad across the board sort of technical assistance program. Very large, as you know. We had nearly 500 people in technical assistance, probably more than half in agriculture. The huge Niger dam project, the World Bank was doing that. We did finance some interim smaller electric power expansion, which was very badly needed, waiting for the Niger dam to be completed. There were other initiatives in education. Of course the University of Nigeria Nsukka group was quite important and covered a range of fields.

*Q: Nigeria was one of the countries selected for a long range assistance strategy (LAS).*

GULICK: Yes. I don't really remember whether that really made much difference to us or not. Probably it did in terms of the funds.

*Q: The basis was a \$225,000.000 commitment in '60/'61 for five years related to the concept of long range assistance strategies that you had worked on in Washington.*

GULICK: Yes.

*Q: That sort of faded away, I guess at the time...*

GULICK: I think maybe - I'm trying to remember. I'm sure that we thought about that. Maybe it just got sort of bypassed, because we were going plenty fast to meet it. I'm not sure, I don't remember.

*Q: Did you travel around the country much?*

GULICK: A fair amount.

*Q: What was your impression of the development situation in the country at that time?*

GULICK: Well, there was a lot of ferment of activity. That was the impression I had-I remember when I came there from India, I thought, "My God, what a disorderly sort of ebullient economy we have here!" In India everything was orderly and rather slow, and everything seemed to be going madly in Nigeria. Probably partly owing to the oil, I guess. On the policy side, I'm not really sure how well founded this is but I had the impression that as long as Okote Ibo was there, Chief Festus, there may have been some corruption, probably was - the fiscal policy and the climate for private activity was really quite favorable. Things were certainly happening. After he left, things were much less flamboyant. I think they were deteriorating. The government was sticking it's fingers in more things. There were still some good people working in the government, in the finance ministry.

*Q: Did you have any direct dealings with them?*

GULICK: Of course, we did on our own matters. We got fairly well acquainted with several of them in the finance ministry. Of course Ebong, Imi Ebong in the Ministry of Economic Planning was our formal contact most of the time; my formal contact anyway. Allison Ayida was next layer up in the Ministry of Finance.

*Q: He was the Permanent Secretary of Finance, I think...*

GULICK: Yes, well...no. Who was that? Abdul Atta, a big fellow-a Northerner with an Eastern wife.

*Q: Was he the permanent secretary?*

Yes, I think so. Ayida was sort of an additional secretary or something like that? Anyway, he was a strong force. Even though he wasn't technically political, I think he had influence beyond his position. All those three were quite sophisticated and favorably oriented toward encouraging the private sector and so forth, I think. But the government increasingly under the military was trying to run things a little too much and lost track of their fiscal situation. They had these large revenues coming in from the oil-this was after I left-but it is perfectly clear they squandered those resources. Not only that; but they did it in a way that distorted the exchange rate and price structure.

*Q: You were there just two years?*

GULICK: Yes. As I say, we were preoccupied a lot at the time, particularly toward the end, with dealing with the beginning of the war.

*Q: Were you caught up in any emergency operations at that time?*

GULICK: Only a little bit with people coming out of the East. Our people in the East were terribly sympathetic with the Eastern cause; they couldn't understand why we were not doing more to assist them and protect them.

*Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?*

GULICK: Elbert Mathews. He was very good.

*Q: Did you have any dealings with him?*

GULICK: Sure. He was interested in the program, but not a meddler. He was always interested and wanted to be kept informed of what was going on.

*Q: You finished up in Nigeria in what year?*

GULICK: '67. I remember a lot of people were leaving, however we were still replacing them, so I guess we were planning to continue the program. I don't really know whether we ever did stop. I don't think we did, but I left in the late summer of '67 and I got to India in October of '67.

**DONALD PETTERSON**  
**Political Officer**  
**Lagos (1966-1967)**

*Ambassador Donald Petterson was born in California in 1930. Petterson served in the US Navy for four years before graduating from the University of California Santa Barbara. Petterson joined the Foreign Service in 1960 and has served overseas in Mexico, Tanzania, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa and as ambassador to Somalia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Sudan. In Washington, DC Petterson served on the Policy Planning Staff and as a deputy assistant secretary in the African Bureau. Ambassador Petterson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy and Lambert Heyniger in 1996.*

PETTERSON: So I was assigned as the number two officer in a three-person political section in Lagos. We left Washington in January 1966 and flew on a Pan Am flight to Lagos. Pan Am then had a flight from the U.S. to Africa. As we approached the airport in Lagos, announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry to tell you that there's been some trouble. The airport has been seized by army troops. The government has just been taken over by the military."

Let me give a little background. Nigeria had been independent for a several years. Its coalition government was led by Amadu Tafawa Balewa, a northerner and a very remarkable man. There was political friction in Nigeria, especially between the larger tribes, the Yoruba in the west, the Ibos in the south, and the Hausa-Fulani in the north. The northerners, the more numerous people in the country, were somewhat dominant. The frictions were causing unrest, and some violence had broken out.

Before I arrived in Nigeria, I knew there was some political turmoil, but I didn't know how bad it was. The embassy was not sending political officers out of town enough to comprehend the full scope of the violence that was taking place not all that far from Lagos. They really did not have a handle on the full extent of the dissension and violence.

*Q: Why was that? Why not send people out?*

PETTERSON: I don't know; I wasn't there. I just know that the State Department was annoyed by this failure of the embassy to really be on top of the situation. I don't believe, however, that the embassy could have foreseen that the military were suddenly going to take over.

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*Q: This is Nick Heyniger, Lambert Heyniger, and today is February 14, 2001. I am again interviewing Ambassador Don Petterson about his experiences in Africa. We are now starting Don's tour of duty in Lagos, Nigeria.*

*So, Don, then, you told me that as you and Julie were just arriving in Lagos, they had told the pilot of the plane that there had been some military activity. What...can you pick it up there?*

PETTERSON: Sure, let me go back to that. The plane landed, and the military attaché, or someone from his office, and an officer from the embassy's administrative section were there to meet us. We drove through the cordon of troops around the airport into Lagos, and I went to the embassy. The ambassador greeted me and joked that maybe I had brought the trouble with me. Somehow my Zanzibar reputation had preceded me.

*Q: Who was the ambassador then?*

PETTERSON: Burt Matthews, a very distinguished, gentlemanly man of the old school and a veteran Foreign Service officer.

The root cause of Nigeria's political instability and the military coup was the intense tribal feelings that had arisen from, or at the very least had been exacerbated by, the regional framework of government that the British had fashioned. It reflected their colonial policy of indirect rule through the strongest groups in the country, the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Ibo in the east, the Yoruba in the west. The country was divided into regions - those three regions and the mid-west, which was sort of a mixture of the east and the west.

The post-independence government was a coalition headed by Tafawa Balewa. He was honest, highly intelligent, and a moderate, unlike some of the other leaders of the country, especially the regional governor of the North, Ahmadou Bello, the Sardana of Sokoto, and the governor of the West, Samuel Akintole. There was widespread corruption, particularly in the Western Region. The corruption and Nigeria's serious economic problems gave rise to political unrest. Underlying all this were tribal tensions. The unrest and dissatisfaction infected the army.

In late 1965, with northern political backing, Akintole was victorious in a blatantly rigged election. This sparked a political explosion that resulted in extreme violence especially in the area between the capital, Lagos, and the capital of the western region, Ibadan. Law and order began to break down. Virtual anarchy reigned for a while.

The embassy tended to downplay the seriousness of the violence, in part because they really didn't know, at first hand, what it was like. In contrast, the *New York Times* and the *Washington*

*Post* correspondents, respectively Lloyd Garrison and Donald Loucheim, were filing stories that painted an alarming picture. Washington was concerned, and the State Department began to have doubts about the acuity of embassy reporting and analysis. I was unaware of all this.

The rigged election, ensuing violence, and continued corruption finally pushed southern mid-grade army officers, most of them Ibos, to mount a coup attempt, which took place early in the morning of January 15, 1966, the day that we arrived.

In Lagos, the dissident officers killed Balewa and senior military officers, almost all of them northerners. In Ibadan, they killed Akintole and senior military officers. The same occurred in Kaduna, the capital of the Northern Region. The army commander himself, General Aguiyi Ironsi, escaped death, although he had been marked for death. He managed in the course of the morning hours to rally loyal troops and put down the rebellion in time. He then formed a military government. The surviving civilian leaders responded to the unsettling events by readily agreeing to the army takeover. The overthrow of the government was met with great joy on the part of southerners. In the north, there was some approval, but a subdued reaction and only lukewarm support. Within a few months, support throughout the country for the military government waned.

Julie and I and our children got settled into our house. I began pulling my weight in the political section.

*Q: Yes, let me interrupt you here, Don, just to ask you how many officers in the political section? What were your duties? What were you supposed to be working on?*

PETTERSON: It was a three- person political section. I was the second officer. My duties were to report on Nigeria's foreign relations and to assist the political counselor in following internal affairs in the Lagos area. Later I was given the responsibility to travel to the North to work with the consulate there during my stay and to report on what I had observed. In addition, I traveled to the East and did the same thing there. So I had a variety of reporting responsibilities.

For me it was an adjustment after having been in charge of the consulate in Zanzibar and not having to have my messages cleared, now, in Lagos, to have to submit everything I wrote through the political counselor. He was a man who, whenever I handed him a report, would pick up his blue pencil even before starting to read the report. He was an inveterate nit picker.

*Q: Sounds like many Foreign Service officers that we both know!*

PETTERSON: [Laughter] Well, I got used to it. I began reporting. I recall an airgram I wrote in April noting that the federal military government, as it was called, had failed to curb urban unrest, that corruption had resumed within the government, and that public support for the government was decreasing. More important, I noted, were indications of unrest or instability in the army. Later that month I made a driving trip with Julie and our youngest child, John, to the north, along with economic officer Bob Rackmales and his wife Mary. We drove to several northern towns and saw many examples of the great diversity of the northern people. An army officer in Kaduna told me about the serious split that now existed in the army.



In late May, General Ironsi, the supreme military commander, the head of government, decreed that henceforth Nigeria would have a centralized form of government rather than a federation. This act contributed to the belief of many northerners that the Ibos were bent on dominating the whole country.

Many Ibos lived and worked in the north, where they had skills and the education that the poorly educated northerners did not have. The Ibos tended to be very aggressive, sometimes arrogant, as well as extremely able. Northerners, by and large, hated them. Thousands of Ibos lived in sections of northern cities called Sabon Garis. Following Ironsi's announcement, riots broke out in the north. Several hundred Ibos were killed, and thousands fled back to their homeland in the East. Based on talks I had with Consul Bernie Stokes and his staff and others in Kaduna, I wrote a cable highlighting that northern traditional leaders in civil service had actually organized these riots. I reported that hatred of the Ibos and fears of Ibo domination were intense. Ironsi tried to cool down the situation and backed away from his centralization decree, saying that he meant only to provide for a unified command within the army. This did not wash with northern military officers and military personnel in general. In July, young officers rose up, killed Ibo officers, and seized the government. Ironsi was assassinated.

The northern officers took over the government and chose a young 32-year-old officer, a well-liked moderate named Yakubu Gowon, who was called Jack Gowon, to head the government. For a time, the northern military were inclined to pull out of the southern area, return to the north, and establish a separate country. But Gowon resisted this successfully, and the new military government was in business. He convened a constitutional conference in September that tried to work out a new acceptable framework for governing Nigeria, but its deliberations were cut short when northerners started killing Ibos in northern towns. At first the violence was limited to two cities, but it spread, and several thousand peoples were killed. The survivors left for the East. All told, about a million Ibos from outside their homeland came back to the east.

The military governor of the East, Lieutenant Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, refused to recognize Gowon as supreme military commander. The embassy had foreseen the possibility of the northern coup but mistakenly did not believe secession was likely in the foreseeable future. This was communicated to Washington. The estrangement of the East from the rest of the country intensified. Young eastern intellectuals, in particular, were agitating for separation. In October the State Department and Ambassador Matthews had come to disagree on the prospects for a breakup of Nigeria and on possible danger to foreigners in the country. The ambassador did not believe that Nigeria was heading for a breakup. In stating, as he did, that war between regions in the near future was only a remote possibility, the ambassador was wrong. He was right, though, in telling Washington that foreigners would not be the targets of violence. Soon, however, the ambassador and the embassy realized that Eastern secession was close to taking place. The reporting from our consul in Enugu, Bob Barnard, was excellent and painted a picture of a breakup coming soon.

The ambassador and Washington also differed on Nigerian unity. He, reflecting American policy as it had been previously stated, thought that the maintenance of Nigerian unity was of utmost importance and recommended that to help keep the country together, the United States

government should apply threats or sanctions against the East. He ran into disagreement from Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Rusk said that the United States should, and I quote, "be very careful about nominating ourselves as a supervisor of Nigerian unity." Rusk felt it should be up to the British and fellow Commonwealth countries to take the lead in applying any measures to keep the East from seceding.

In late October of that year, 1966, Tom Smith and I drove to the North. Tom was about my age. He was my counterpart in the economic section. The number two officer in the four- or five-person economic section, Tom was a very able officer who one day would be ambassador to Nigeria. We took a 17-day trip by car, a Chevy van, throughout the northern region. It was a great adventure. We found that life for the vast majority of northerners seemed to be largely unaffected by the crisis in the country. But what we saw in the Sabon Garis were stark reminders of what had happened and how serious it had been, and how this must have deeply affected the Ibos who survived. The Sabon Garis were ghost towns, deserted, with the detritus of people who had fled rapidly left behind. Most northerners we talked to had no apologies for what had happened to the Ibos, for the pogrom that had killed so many. There were exceptions, but in general there was no remorse, and the feeling was one of good riddance.

Tom and I drove as far east as Lake Chad. Because of the gas shortage in the country that existed as a result of all the turmoil, we carried big jerry cans of gasoline with us. Every night we would take the cans out of the vehicle and carry them inside our sleeping quarters. We generally stayed in government guesthouses. Sometimes the accommodations were pretty Spartan. Other times, they weren't bad at all. We did a long report on our trip when we got back, and it was well received in the embassy and in Washington.

In Lagos our Ibo friends were departing, fearing for their lives. I had met some in my work. One was a close friend in the ministry of foreign affairs. Julie and I got to know him and his family, but they were among those who left. One day, our Hausa gardener attacked and tried to beat up our Ibo cook. We fired the gardener, but not long afterwards the cook left for the east.

From April 1967 onward, Ibo secession was expected at any time. Some time before that, air travel between Lagos and the East had suspended. Embassy officers periodically would travel by car to the East carrying the diplomatic pouch. It was, I think, in mid- April that my turn came. I was driven in a van through the Mid-West Region to the Niger River. There I got into a canoe, carried the pouch across, was met on the other side by a consulate employee in a van, and drove to Enugu.

*Q: Don, can I interrupt us there?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Is that normally the way it would happen or had there been a bridge that had been blown up?*

PETTERSON: There was a bridge across the Niger at Onitsha, but the Eastern Region military government had blocked it to all traffic. Later, during the Biafran war, it was partially destroyed by retreating Biafran soldiers but was repaired and reopened in 1970.

*Q: But was this not evidence that the Ibos in the east were cutting themselves off from the rest of the country, the fact that you had to take a canoe?*

PETTERSON: Yes. By this time, Easterners wanted nothing more to do with the rest of the country and were sliding toward secession. At any rate, a canoe I took. [Laughter]

In Enugu the sentiment for secession was very high. I reported that one night at a popular, crowded bar (I recall the name was the Progress Bar), young men were vocal in expressing their bitterness and their hatred of northerners. They said they were ready to go to war, and I reported that sentiment back to Lagos. There was a feeling in the embassy that Bob Barnard was showing too much sympathy for the East, or was getting too far out in front in indicating that secession was right around the corner. The embassy's leadership came to think that his reporting was colored by his sympathy, and that was unfortunate for Bob.

*Q: Is this another instance, in your opinion, of officers who report things that Washington doesn't want to hear sometimes have a hard time.*

PETTERSON: Yes, although in this case it was the embassy, not Washington. The situation within the U.S. mission had become difficult for some officers. Let me explain. The ambassador's emphasis on supporting Nigerian unity and, by that, supporting the federal military government, and his view that Washington should try to deter the East from seceding caused some in the embassy, led by the DCM, the military attaché, and my boss (the political counselor), to view Bob Barnard, as I said, as being sympathetic to the Eastern cause. This, in my view, unfair criticism severely damaged Bob Barnard's career later on.

Ray Wach was the most junior officer in our political section. He and I fell under some suspicion of being less than foursquare supporters of Nigerian unity. At least one report I had made from the East had caused some annoyance in the embassy because it didn't square with the embassy hierarchy's judgment of what was really happening. This, even though I was just reporting what I was seeing and hearing and not venturing opinions. In addition to the annoyance with my reporting from the East, I was criticized for continuing to see New York Times correspondent Lloyd Garrison and Washington Post correspondent Don Loucheim, who were in disfavor with the embassy brass. They didn't like their reporting, and embassy reporting officers were advised to steer clear of them. However, I liked them, and I found it useful to trade information with them. We had a symbiotic relationship. They had sources of useful information that the embassy didn't have, and I saw no reason not to tell them things that were not sensitive, that belonged in the public domain. Nevertheless my association with them didn't do my reputation any good, I suppose, with certain of the embassy officers. I don't want to say that the DCM and political counselor were angry with me. We had a good relationship, despite the fact that from time to time something I did annoyed them. When word got around that I had been awarded a fellowship at Stanford and would be transferred in July of '67, Garrison and Loucheim thought my bosses had engineered my transfer. [Laughter] This of course, was not true, and I told them so.

As I said, I was not really in deep hot water at all and had good relations with the DCM and certainly with the ambassador, who was a wonderful man. I would fault him only for not having

taken firmer control of the DCM, the military attaché, and the political counselor and thereby avoided the antagonisms that became a serious problem within the embassy.

Not long after I left Nigeria, Ray Wach, who wore his sentiments on his sleeve, so to speak, in that he didn't hide his sympathy for the plight of southerners, was castigated for his views, and his efficiency report was so bad that his career was fatally damaged. This was in a way similar to what was taking place in Vietnam, where Foreign Service officers (many of them junior officers) were reporting truthfully on the situation they were covering. When their reports were inconsistent with the embassy's party line, they got into trouble. There was really a kind of censorship. It wasn't that bad in Nigeria, but it was bad enough, and I was lucky to leave when I did.

On one of my last trips to the East, I was in Enugu. I borrowed a USAID (United States Agency for International Development) van and drove north across the border between the Eastern and Northern regions. The war between the East, which soon would be called Biafra, and the North had not yet started, and I was able to get across the border. However, further up the road, not far from Makurdi, soldiers examined my passport, didn't know what to make of it, took me into custody, and drove me to the chief of police of Makurdi, who was a British civil servant. He laughed at the incident and let me go about my business. Well, one of my objectives there was to see what military dispositions might be, see whether troops had moved down from the north into Makurdi. I nosed around a little bit and made the mistake of talking to a couple of British civil servants (including the police chief), who I assumed would be forthright with me. Well, they weren't, and they reported what I was doing. The federal authorities in Makurdi in turn sent a report to Lagos, and a complaint about me was conveyed to the embassy. The DCM, who handled the case, told me when I returned to Lagos that he had resisted the call for my expulsion from Nigeria.

*Q: I'm not quite clear. I mean you were a political officer in the embassy.*

PETTERSON: Right.

*Q: Political officers are supposed to go out and talk to lots of people, ask questions, and try to find out not only what's going on, but also the attitudes of various people towards that! This is exactly what you were doing. Who was concerned? I mean, did the people think that you were spying?*

PETTERSON: Yes, the Nigerian federal government authorities, whoever they were in Makurdi, didn't like what I was doing. Their state of mind was an indication of the tension within the country, of the great suspicion about spies, subversion, saboteurs, you name it. So with that kind of atmosphere, the Federal government authorities in Makurdi did not react rationally to what I was doing and they blew the whistle back to Lagos. Someone in the Federal Military Government had the same kind of attitude and sought my expulsion. But Clint Olson, the DCM, talked them out of it.

On another trip, my last trip to the East, I participated with consulate officers and a couple of other people from our embassy in helping with the evacuation of American citizens from the

region. A chartered DC-8 aircraft made shuttle flights to Lagos to take all of the American civilians out who wanted to go, and most did.

*Q: Of Enugu?*

PETTERSON: The entire Eastern Region. On May 30, Ojukwu, the military governor of the East, announced the East's independence and the formation of the Republic of Biafra. In July the civil war began. There were signs around town warning of possible air raids. I remember walking in town one day with Barry Watchorn, an officer of the Australian embassy and a close friend. We were reading a sign that said, "In case of an air raid, jump into the nearest ditch." Well, the ditches in town were open sewers. [Laughter] We resolved that if an air raid came, we would stand [laughter] and watch instead of jumping into the ditch.

Near the end of July, Julie, our children, and I left Nigeria. Incidentally, it was ironic that the officer who replaced me in Lagos as the second man in the political section was Fritz Picard.

*Q: Who had been your boss in Zanzibar?*

PETTERSON: He'd been my boss in Zanzibar.

*Q: One thing I wanted to ask you before we leave Nigeria. Are we about to leave Nigeria? Don, you got there in '66?*

PETTERSON: January 15, 1966, the day of the coup.

*Q: Sixty-six, and you left in sixty-seven.*

PETTERSON: July of '67.

*Q: So you did about a year and a half?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Which is a rather abbreviated tour.*

PETTERSON: Yes, a normal tour of duty for most officers was two years. But I had applied for and received a fellowship and was transferred after only a year and a half so that I could enroll at Stanford at the beginning of September.

*Q: As far as you know, that was just happenstance?*

PETTERSON: Oh, yes, sure.

*Q: There wasn't any effort on the part of either the Department or the embassy to shorten your tour?*

PETTERSON: Oh, no. I know that I was well regarded in the Department. Certainly the officers in charge of Nigerian affairs had conveyed that to me on a trip they'd made to Lagos and later when I went back to Washington on my way to Stanford. And, as I have said, I wasn't in such bad order with the embassy brass that they would have tried to get me out. No, I was very fortunate to get the fellowship!

**WILLIAM E. HUTCHINSON**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1966-1968)**

*William E. Hutchinson entered the Foreign Service in 1944. His assignments included Japan, Libya, Pakistan, and Nigeria. Mr. Hutchinson was interviewed by Jack O'Brien on August 10, 1989.*

HUTCHINSON: The Nigerian war had broken out in 1966 and the Agency sent me there.

*Q: All right. Is it fair to go on to Nigeria?*

HUTCHINSON: Sure.

*Q: So you were in Nigeria --*

HUTCHINSON: I was country PAO in Nigeria from 1966 to 1968.

*Q: Was that a direct transfer from Libya.*

HUTCHINSON: A direct transfer, yes. That took some getting used to. It was an altogether different cultural scene from anything I had ever experienced. It was very rewarding in many ways -- a unique experience. To test me, I think, my quite sophisticated staff, especially the VOA correspondent, had a reception for me at which the piece de resistance was African snails, which are about the size of your thumb and approximately as tender as boiled owl. And they wanted to see how I would react to African food. I guess I passed.

But the war of course had already begun between so-called Biafra, the eastern section of Nigeria, and the western sections of Nigeria. And the Ambassador had the devil's own job of keeping U.S. sentimentality from stampeding us into support for the Biafran breakaway government which pictured itself -- erroneously -- as being Christian, the upright Christians against the decadent Muslims, and so forth. Which is a piece of propaganda itself. Things are not nearly that simple. But we managed to hold the line and U.S. support for a unified Nigeria persisted.

My first assignment, I was I think one day into, one day on the scene when Lieutenant General Jack Gowon, G-o-w-o-n, who was head of the military government of Nigeria, asked me to put on a film show for him and his cabinet at his residence in Ikoyi, in Lagos. So I started at the top with these introductions and continued to get along very well with the military leaders, and the

civilian leaders, such as they were. Civilian leaders were largely in eclipse during the time I was there. They were beginning to come back toward the end.

*Q: What was the state of the war when you left?*

HUTCHINSON: It was still going on when I left, but it seemed pretty clear that the union would win. I was fortunate, I had a very good staff there. The African staff were particularly good. And I had a splendid deputy, he's dead now, but Bev Carter --

*Q: Oh, yes.*

HUTCHINSON: W. Beverly Carter, Jr., he was my deputy PAO, an excellent fellow. And he succeeded me as country PAO and, I hope partly on my recommendation, was later named Ambassador. Because I certainly had recommended him as a potential Ambassador. He died several years ago in Washington. We worked in somewhat difficult conditions. We managed to make friends with a fairly hostile press.

**ROBERT P. SMITH**  
**Nigeria Desk Officer, Bureau of African Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1966-1969)**

*Ambassador Robert P. Smith's interest in foreign affairs was sparked by his service in the U.S. Marines immediately after high school. After the service, he attended Texas Christian University, where he pursued a degree in International Affairs. In addition to the Bureau for African Affairs, Ambassador Smith served in Pakistan, Lebanon, Ghana, South Africa, and Malta. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 28, 1989.*

*Q: Well, let's move on to Nigeria. You became the head of the Nigerian Desk in 1966. For somebody who was looking at this record, what does it mean to be the head of a desk or a desk officer for Nigeria, for example?*

SMITH: I think, perhaps, the simplest way of putting this is that the State Department desk officer for any given country is the point man for that country within the United States Government. And any questions, almost without exception, having to do with that country, that desk officer, if he doesn't have the answer, is supposed to be able to put his finger on it right away. He is the action officer on the incoming telegrams from that post and is expected to know a great deal about the country.

Ideally, he will, of course, have served in that country. So I was in an ideal situation, having just finished three years in Nigeria. I was also blessed by the fact that Governor Williams had been replaced by Joseph Palmer as Assistant Secretary, with whom I had a very close personal relationship.

*Q: And who had been ambassador.*

SMITH: And who had been ambassador in Nigeria for four years. So the war came as a terrible, personal blow both to Assistant Secretary Palmer and to me because we had so thoroughly enjoyed our service in Nigeria, and we were so fond of the Nigerian people. Conscious as we were of the tribal problems which rent the country apart, we were very sad to have it happen. In my own personal case, and I guess Foreign Service Officers have this kind of problem from time to time, I was in personal agony because my heart was pulling me in one direction in that my personal friends, my closest friends, in Nigeria, were all rebels overnight. They called themselves Biafrans. And very dear friends, my children's teachers, the entire cabinet of Premier Okpara, and so forth, and many of the army officers that I knew were suddenly rebels.

Instinctively, therefore, in my heart I had a certain latent sympathy for them because I knew what they had gone through the last few years. I knew how mistreated they felt, how put upon. So I couldn't avoid a personal feeling of sympathy. And yet, our policy, which I must say, I helped formulate and adhere to over those years, was one of clear-cut support for the federal government. We felt very strongly that the worst things that could happen was to see Nigeria torn apart. Had that happened, I think we would have seen a real domino effect in Africa in that there isn't a single country in Black Africa that doesn't have similar tribal divisions. If you once start down the road of tribes being able to secede from the national government, it would be utter chaos and you'd have a Balkanization such as the world has never seen before.

*Q: We'd already been facing this problem in the Congo.*

SMITH: Yes, that's true. And we had a similar policy there.

*Q: Did you feel that the Congo example was very much before you?*

SMITH: I don't remember Congo being much of an example. I'm sure it may have been in the back of our minds. On the other hand, and, again, I will confess to some prejudice here, the Nigerians were simply a great deal more civilized. When the Belgians left Kinshasa, there wasn't a single graduate engineer in the country. Nigeria was full of Rhodes Scholars, engineers, doctors, lawyers. The British, in short, did a much better job, so we had higher expectations for Nigeria, much higher. But I had this ambivalence in that I was sympathetic to the Biafrans on the one hand, but our policy was to support to the federal government.

*Q: Let me ask a bit about this. All of a sudden all hell was breaking loose in Nigeria. How did policy develop? I mean, all of a sudden did everyone say, "Okay, let's sit down. We've got to have a policy."*

SMITH: No. I think it was not a question so much of formulating a new policy as continuing the old one. We have always taken the position that tribalism was one of the problems and that African states must have a strong central government and they must have a feeling of oneness, of unity. We had contributed to this all the time. When the secession came, we had strongly advised the Ibos not to go down this road.



I think, in their heart of hearts, they really felt that we would support them. They felt so close to us. The Ibos, I think, more than other tribes in Nigeria, felt close to Americans. They fancied themselves like Americans in their attitude toward work, and their gregariousness, and so forth. I think it came as a real shock to many of them that we did not support them. Now mind you, many private Americans did. Indeed, one of the most painful mornings I spent during those early years of the Biafra War was one Saturday morning when Joe Palmer and I drove out to Senator Kennedy's residence in McLean.

*Q: This was Robert Kennedy?*

SMITH: No, Teddy Kennedy. We briefed him on the war and our policy there. Senator Kennedy made no bones about his sympathies lying with the Biafrans because the Biafrans had mounted an enormous and very successful propaganda campaign about their suffering.

*Q: You said you went to see Senator Teddy Kennedy.*

SMITH: I should back up by mentioning how successful the Biafran, or Ibo, propaganda campaign was. I hadn't, at that point, seen anything quite equal to it except, possibly, the Israelis. They managed to get cover stories in Time, in Newsweek, Life, with the cry of "genocide," that these horrible northern Moslems in Nigeria were trying, literally, to wipe out the Ibos as a people, all eight or ten million of them, however many there were. This was not true. We never thought it was true. Ambassador Palmer, of course, knew Balewa, Azikiwe, and the others much better than I did. And later, when Balewa was assassinated, General Gowon became the Head of State. He was a hymn-singing, practicing Methodist, although from one of the small Northern tribes, not the major tribes. We never really thought for a minute that genocide was the intention of anyone.

*Q: Let me ask a question that there was a hint of in what you are saying. Do you think that there was a parallel between this and, you might say, the media looking at the problem of Israel? In other words, here is an outgoing people and here are these Moslems. Maybe it wasn't the Israeli lobby, but the supporters of Israel saw a parallel here.*

SMITH: Absolutely.

*Q: And if you let one go, the other might go.*

SMITH: Absolutely. The Ibos, with great pride, called themselves in those years, "the Israelis of Africa." They milked that for all it was worth.

*Q: So this is much of the reason for the success of this?*

SMITH: Yes. Yes. They raised enormous amounts of money here and in Israel, and elsewhere. The Israelis flew in military equipment, and so forth. Several other states did, too, the French and others. In short, the Biafrans almost succeeded, especially, in Britain because of their British ties, but elsewhere in Western Europe, and in Israel, and in the United States. They developed an enormous reservoir of good will and support. Our policy was not to do that, of course. So this

became very awkward for us.

Also, because the Ibos are so Christian, they managed to enlist the support of Catholic Relief Services. The major hierarchy of the Catholic Church here was strongly supportive of Biafra. That, of course, impacted on Senator Kennedy. They also enlisted the support of the World Council of Churches, and the American Jewish Committee. And I can best illustrate the point by relating that Catholic Relief Services, the World Council of Churches, and the American Jewish Committee, and several other religious organizations all got together and demanded a meeting with Secretary Rusk on the Biafran War, demanding that we change our policy and stop the "genocide" going on in Biafra.

So I arranged this meeting. Assistant Secretary Palmer and I accompanied the Secretary. And for an hour or an hour-and-a-half, these distinguished religious leaders of all the major faiths were ripping into Secretary Rusk, whom we had prepared, obviously, as best we could, to answer these questions. And I must say, the Secretary responded beautifully, keeping his eye on the U.S. interests down the road. "We didn't want to see the country fall apart and, indeed, we did not believe for a minute the charge of genocide. Any civil war is horrible, brother against brother, et cetera, et cetera." And the Secretary handled this beautifully. But I don't think we satisfied these gentlemen.

I'll never forget what happened then. The meeting broke up and we saw the religious leaders out the door. We left the conference room and started walking down the hall. I was sort of lagging behind the Secretary and Ambassador Palmer. I remember Mr. Rusk put his arm around Joe's shoulder and looked at him as they were striding down the hall, and he said, "Joe, congratulations." He said, "You've succeeded in getting the Catholics and the Jews and the Protestants all mad at us at the same time. What do you do in your spare time?" And he laughed. [Laughs] These were difficult times, and we needed to keep our sense of humor.

*Q: Well, after all, when you look at it, we have a policy that makes sense, but Nigeria, or even Africa, is not at the top of our plate or what have you.*

SMITH: No, but Nigeria was at the top of our African plate.

*Q: At the same time, looking at it as a practical measure, one can say that, in the Middle East, Israel is a political entity because of support within the United States, rather than looking at it as in our real strategic interests. I mean, there's a strong case to be made there. But because of political pressure we give it our unqualified support. Now here you have almost the same pressures, albeit not over a long period of time, but rising up. The State Department and the Administration often gives in to expediency, particularly, political expediency. Why didn't we give in on this one?*

SMITH: Well, I take great pride in that. I think I helped contribute to it because I know Ambassador Palmer would often refer to me as illustrating his point that, however sympathetic we might be to Biafrans on a personal basis, here is my desk officer who lived there for three years and knows them intimately, but even he understands that we can't let the secession succeed, not that we would lift a finger militarily to prevent it. We had a very firm policy of

providing neither arms nor ammunition to either side in this dispute. Unfortunately, a lot of the other countries didn't follow this, so they were getting arms from the Soviets and some of the NATO countries, as well.

I would also attribute it to what I have already referred to, and that is the enormous success of the Biafrans' public relations effort. It was skillfully done. They retained high powered firms both in California and New York, and there was a steady drumbeat in the press. But I think, certainly, Ambassador Palmer, and the Secretary, and the President never wavered in their support. Indeed, one of the first national decision memoranda put before the new President Nixon was on the Biafran War. Nixon, too, came down firmly on the side of maintaining our policy.

But you are quite right, we were under enormous domestic political pressure. I will not identify this congressman, but I got an angry phone call one day from a congressman who demanded that we change our policy. I explained as best I could why we could not. I got a call from some Jewish leaders in New York who demanded the same thing. I had to refuse, there was just no way, this policy was firm and fixed. He said, "Well, I think you're going to be hearing from some of our friends on Capitol Hill." And within a week, the Department was inundated with irate telegrams, letters, and so forth, from representatives and senators on this.

Some of them, otherwise intelligent men and women, would have gotten us involved militarily, I'm sorry to say. Some U.S. senators, and I won't identify them, were actually pressuring us to use U.S. Air Force transport aircraft to drop food, supplies, and equipment behind the front lines into Biafra. And, of course, we kept refusing.

Going back to my personal agony on this, to reflect our support of the federal government, we would not receive or meet with Biafran officials. We didn't recognize it as an independent country. They built a clandestine air strip in Eastern Nigeria and managed to fly out on these various fund raising missions, and so forth. I remember on one occasion Sir Francis Ibiam, himself, the Governor of Eastern Nigeria, got to the States, got to Washington and asked to see me. What to do? Ambassador Palmer said, "Bob, there's no way you can receive him in the Department." And I said, "Well, right. But we need to know what he has to say."

To make a long story short, I found myself, literally, climbing up the backstairs of a Washington Hotel to a virtually clandestine meeting with the distinguished Sir Francis Ibiam, the Governor. And it was painful because he said, literally, "Bob, you know us. How can you let this happen to us? They're killing my people." So it was a difficult time for me.

*Q: Were you there when the war was over or had you left?*

SMITH: Yes. And it ended in the way that we anticipated. That is to say, the federal government finally prevailed and crushed the secession. But what made us happiest was not that so much as the way they handled the defeated Eastern Region. Like Lincoln, they were very generous in their victory. There was no genocide or anything approaching that.

*Q: I think this surprised so many of us because we had been hearing the drumbeats, and all this, and thought, "Oh, my God, here it comes." And it didn't.*

SMITH: Never happened.

*Q: Which shows that you all knew what you were talking about.*

SMITH: It made honest men out of us. And I must say, it was a sigh of relief, in a way. Ambassador Palmer and I went out to Nigeria several times during the war, of course, and we would meet with General Gowon in Lagos. I had great confidence in him. I still think it was tragic that he was later assassinated. He was one of those military leaders who was genuinely skilled in the art of governments, which is a rare thing, I think, in Africa.

*Q: In your time on the desk you dealt with both Governor Mennen Williams, Soapy Williams, and with Joseph Palmer. I wonder if you could do a little of, as we used to say in school, compare and contrast their styles, and interest, and the way they dealt with matters in the Department, as you saw it from your point?*

SMITH: I admired both men enormously. Governor Williams, of course, came out of the American domestic political scene, a very popular four-term governor in Michigan. And I think what impressed many of us, as you may recall, was that President Kennedy appointed Soapy Williams as Assistant Secretary for Africa before he appointed Secretary Rusk, attaching, thereby, the importance to the job that Kennedy felt. And Soapy certainly shared that. He was genuinely interested in Africa. He was an indefatigable traveler, like a politician must be. He was a very fine listener, and so forth. I don't think he was an intellectual heavyweight, but he was bright. And he, above all, knew to listen to his people. I think there was some naivete on Soapy William's part in that he expected too much too soon from Africa and was, I think, disappointed, as he was, of course, with Nkrumah, in the case of Ghana.

Joseph Palmer, on the other hand, brought to the job 20 to 25 years experience in Africa and elsewhere. He was a consummate professional foreign service officer. He was very, very bright, out of Harvard, was a very polished, intelligent, hard-working diplomat and knew Africa very well. He was cautious, conservative in his approach.

I didn't mention this before and I was very negligent not to have done so. We had a very fine professional in Lagos who replaced Ambassador Palmer there in the form of Elbert G. Matthews as ambassador. He was another seasoned professional. He'd been ambassador to Liberia before and knew Africa very well. He was a strong supporter of the federal government.

I guess I had a closer, personal relationship, for obvious reasons, with Ambassador Palmer. And, of course, then we were dealing with a crisis situation -- 12, 15 hour days. Many times Ambassador Palmer and I would be there until 10 o'clock at night, getting instructions out to the embassy, or something of that sort. I liked them both and they were both very effective in the job, very effective.

*Q: Speaking from a somewhat removed perspective, not having dealt with African affairs, but the impression of many of the people in the foreign service was that Mennen Williams was a man whose heart was in the right place, but you mention this naivete, that it was hard to report from some posts in Africa if you said, you know, this country is falling apart, or this is a lousy leader,*

*or something like this. He didn't want to hear this, particularly, if we were talking about native leaders. There was a certain amount of caution in how one reported because of this advocacy of the new independence movements in Africa.*

SMITH: Well, there may be something to that. I have no direct experience of that because I was in a consulate, reporting through the embassy, most of the time.

Q: *And in a successful area, too.*

SMITH: Yes. Nigeria was successful. Certainly, there was nothing like that under Ambassador Palmer. With Williams I would simply leave it with naivete. I think his heart certainly was in the right place, but he expected rather too much, I think.

Q: *I think he reflected how many people in the United States felt. Certainly, you might say the liberal wing, and I include myself in this, wished Africa all the best.*

SMITH: Indeed, we all did. Sure.

**WILLIAM BEVERLY CARTER, JR.**  
**Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs, USIS**  
**Lagos (1966-1969)**

**Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1969-1972)**

*Ambassador Carter was born and raised in Pennsylvania, and was educated at Lincoln University. After a career in journalism, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965, serving first in Nairobi as Public Affairs Officer and then as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. In 1972 he was appointed United States Ambassador to Tanzania, serving there until late 1975, at which time he was named Ambassador to Liberia, where he served until 1979. Ambassador Carter subsequently served as Ambassador at Large from 1979 to 1981. Ambassador Carter was interviewed by Celestine Tutt in 1981.*

CARTER: I was asked to go to Nigeria as Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs. And at that time, you may recall, Nigeria was involved or about to become involved in a civil war. I got there a year before the Biafran Civil War. And I got there in the summer of '66, and in April 1977, Biafra, the Eastern region, attempted to secede from the Federation of Nigeria.

Our embassy was very active in trying to keep the Federation together when the secession in fact began. There were a number of people in Washington and in the press, politicians who sided with the Biafran Ibos and our embassy found itself in the position of trying to have to explain why we were supportive of the Federal Military Government and not supportive of the break away section of Nigeria.

Ambassador Elbert Mathews, who's now deceased, decided that I would be a person who could best explain that situation in Washington and to the many politicians and newsmen who were coming out, and so I was both spokesman for the embassy and also did a shuttling job between Lagos and Washington, made a number of appearances on the Hill. And very candidly got the kind of exposure which brought me before the attention of a number of people. And I guess I did that job fairly well.

Then in 1969, toward the end of 1969, when the new Assistant Secretary of State was named, David Newsom, he had observed my work and he asked me if I would come to work for him as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. David had had prior experience in the Middle East and in North Africa but had had no experience in Africa south of the Sahara. I had both in terms of my Foreign Service career and also when I was a newspaperman. I guess I did not say that, as a newspaperman, one of my geographical areas of interest was Africa. And so I went to Africa for the first time in 1952 when there were just five of the countries that were independent, and I began to write then about the winds of change in British colonial West Africa, using Liberia and the Gold Coast as points of reference.

So with that kind of background, Newsom asked me to come on as Deputy Assistant Secretary with him, which I did and enjoyed thoroughly, and I think we made a very good team.

And we particularly worked on southern African issues. Dave and I made a trip to South Africa together and I helped to change some of our policies, both in dealing with South Africa on a government-to-government basis, and also in terms of policy changes within our own government about assignments of officers. We got our first black American officer assigned to one of our installations there; it was the purpose for our visit. We were able to get black South Africans upgraded in positions that other nationals held in the Embassy and consulates. So with that kind of background ... for three years ... and also having arranged for a ten-nation tour of Africa by Secretary William Rogers, which was at that point in time the first time an American Secretary of State had ever visited Africa, it became fairly clear to the people in the (State) Department that I had some African experience, some African contacts, some African know-how. And Bill Rogers, whom I regarded as one of our very finest Secretaries of State, and David Newsom, said that they would like me to go to Tanzania when that Embassy became vacant, because Tanzania was on the cutting edge of our southern African situation with so many things happening in southern Africa. And I was asked to go, and I was confirmed by the Senate. And we left in June of 1972.

*Q: I want to ask about your first impressions of Tanzania, but before you do, you said that you did a number of things to try to keep the Federation together.*

CARTER: In Nigeria?

*Q: Yes. Could you talk about some of those things you did?*

CARTER: Well, I think primarily in trying to maintain a dialogue between the leadership of the people who were responsible for leading both sections of that Federation at the time. Ojukwu,

who you recall, was the Governor of the Eastern Region. At that time Nigeria was divided into four states instead of the nineteen that now exist there. Ojukwu was a very, very popular, very dynamic, very charismatic leader. And Jack Gowon who was the leader of the rest of the country did not begin to have the sort of charisma and political savvy that Ojukwu had. And I think we just tried to backstop him and his colleagues so that they would feel that they could better serve the Federation by trying to accommodate Ojukwu and keep him in the Federation. We did not realize at that time that there were so many forces outside of Nigeria that were in fact pushing Ojukwu to secede. For instance, the French connection. The Rothschild banking people were financing the secession on the basis of what had become known then as early, early affirmative seismographic discoveries of oil off the Bonny, Calabar and Port Harcourt region of the coast, which region at that time was in the Eastern part of Nigeria. We tried to keep some of the ... Americans who were so enamored with the Eastern Region. We had our largest Peace Corps contingent in the Eastern Region and they were very much spokesmen for trying to tell the U. S. that we should support the Eastern Region and encourage them in their secession. And then the Catholic Church was very strong in the Eastern Region as against the Muslims from the North, and Protestants in the remainder of the country. So, it was a matter of trying to work with these segments of public opinion in trying to keep focusing on the need for the Federation staying together, using, of course, our own illustration of how much stronger we were as a nation as a consequence of the South and the North remaining, or coming back together after our Civil War. And, I had, I guess at that point in time the best access to most of the leadership throughout the country, because one of my first assignments as Minister-Counselor was the supervisory responsibility for all of our USIS offices throughout the country. So I traveled into Enugu, into Port Harcourt, Kaduna and Kano, and Ibadan, as well as working out of Lagos. So I was making a full tour of the Federation and therefore I got to know most of the leaders and most had confidence in me, and so I could talk to them sometimes when they weren't talking to each other.

**VERNON C. JOHNSON**  
**Deputy Director, USAID**  
**Lagos (1968-1970)**

*Vernon D. Johnson was born in Mississippi in 1918. He graduated from Southern University in 1948 and later from the University of Wisconsin in 1954. He served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946. Working for ICA and USAID, Mr. Johnson was posted to various countries including India, Nigeria, Uganda, and Tanzania. He was interviewed April 12, 1994 by W. Haven North.*

JOHNSON: When I was still in the Vietnam Bureau, Mike Adler had gone out to Nigeria as deputy director and had moved up to be Director. I had been one of the persons who briefed him before he left Washington; and when he needed a deputy he asked me to come out. So I went back to Nigeria a second time and became Mike's deputy. Two weeks after I got into the country, Mike went on a long home leave; that was late in 1968. So I took over the Mission. In spite of a civil war then being fought, we still had about 200 employees-down from the 500 I mentioned before at the height of the Nigerian program.

*Q: This was two years after the first coup in 1966?*

JOHNSON: Yes, in 1968; the war was centered in the Eastern part of the country and that was always a topic for discussions at the Ambassador's staff meeting-the process of the war, who was winning, whether food was getting in, what was happening! In Nigeria even under war conditions, the effects were not very strong in the rest of the country. In other words, people kept doing their work; the universities still kept going except for Nsukka, the one in the East. The other AID projects still continued to go although the war was continuing. There was a great deal of support here (in the U.S.) for one side or the other but the Mission continued to function and the Embassy continued to function, although reports on the civil war dominated the Embassy reports..

*Q: It didn't affect the program?*

JOHNSON: Not a great deal. The people in the Ministries were still in place and the programs were still going. It was only in the East that there was great disruption; Enugu had disappeared as a city; all the agricultural research activities and the work stations had gone out of business. And the East was on a war time footing. But the rest of the country was not significantly affected. The program was still one of the largest AID programs in the world. It continued with much of the same kind of activity that had gone on before: agriculture, health, education. A lot of the work was in the North ... which in a way reflected support for the Federal Government.

*Q: Were you involved in the relief operation?*

JOHNSON: Not directly involved. There was an attempt to be neutral on relief issues, notwithstanding some of the pressures in the U.S. to support the rebels. The religious factor in terms of Eastern Nigeria was important in this regard; the Ibos were Christians; they were more highly educated. There was a great deal of support in the U.S. for them. We, of course, being accredited to the Federal Government gave no support to the Eastern Government. U.S. relief was private and purely humanitarian. The same kind of pictures of starving children that have come out of Somalia, Ethiopia, and other places since then were, of course, part of the scene in Eastern Nigeria at that time.

*Q: How were relations with the Nigerian Government?*

JOHNSON: I think they were fairly good; some of our people had quite close relationships even up to and through one or two of the Federal generals. I think we always kept a proper stance. Our Ambassador had come from Liberia... Ambassador Matthews, an excellent statesman in the sense of keeping the right balance and the right approach to things. We were on a good footing with the Nigerian Government.

*Q: I had the impression that at some point in the process the Embassy's relationships with the Government deteriorated and they weren't really communicating and only the AID Mission was really accepted?*

JOHNSON: That was probably true intermittently when rumors suggested U.S. support for the



rebels. Adler, the USAID Director, had a very close relationship, a good working relationship with some of the people. I think you came out once and may have noted good relations with Allison Aida. He was the Principal Secretary for Economic Development and Finance. He had a good deal of weight in the Government and our relationship with him remained cordial right through the war. And as a matter of fact, we were bringing in a lot of development resources. Remember this was the pre-oil period; the wells weren't flowing at that time, so Nigeria needed all the assistance it could get.

*Q: But generally the U.S. policy for supporting "one Nigeria" was appropriate from your point of view?*

JOHNSON: Oh yes; there was no doubt about that. Our official policy remained focused on "one Nigeria."

*Q: But it began to be a bit ambivalent?*

JOHNSON: Because of the tendency of trying to keep one ear pegged to Washington where there was a great deal of support for Eastern Nigeria, and certain U.S. universities that had been working in the East were certainly very strong in their support for Eastern objectives. But in terms of posture, political posture, the "one Nigeria" policy was kept in focus by the Ambassador and by his people. The Nigerians were probably a little wary about what we thought; and some of our people might have made an off remark at a cocktail party, but the policy was clear.

*Q: What was the Nigerians reactions to all of the actions of the relief operators, all the foreigners coming in?*

JOHNSON: They weren't happy about that of course (the relief flights into Biafra); they couldn't do anything; they didn't have a workable air force, although they did have a few MiG planes. However, the Easterners timed the operation so that when the relief planes came, I think the lights were turned on for one minute on the runway. If the plane couldn't take advantage of that, a plane wreck could occur.

*Q: But on the Federal side what were the relations with the relief operations?*

JOHNSON: On the Nigerian side, there was discontent even about humanitarian relief. I think the Nigerians, during the war, never accepted the idea of relief but grudgingly tolerated it. They claimed that food relief would be used for the military.

*Q: Were there any other aspects of your work at that time?*

JOHNSON: Not anything that stood out; we were just carrying out the requirements that the Embassy put on the Mission and that we as a Mission put on ourselves in carrying out the program that had been approved in Washington.

*Q: Was there change in the policy towards Nigeria while you were still there?*

JOHNSON: Not before I left in 1970. The Mission was still in place. I left Mike Adler there and John Hummon and Bill Ford came in as directors later on. I don't recall any significant change in policy. The Federal Government had won the war and they were in good spirits about that. And the East was in shambles and trying to put itself back together. Enugu, the capitol in the East, had elephant grass 15 feet high in the street.

*Q: Were we trying to help in the East?*

JOHNSON: After the war, we began to help as things opened up to the extent one could get in there to do something. I was not there long enough after the war to assess that, but there was nothing to prevent it. Otherwise, we were still training Nigerians; we were still helping with the universities; we were still doing many of the things that had commenced in the 1960s.

**MARCUS L. WINTER**  
**Junior Officer Trainee/Agricultural Officer, USAID**  
**Lagos (1968-1971)**

*Marcus L. Winter was born in 1936 and raised in Minnesota. He obtained an undergraduate degree in agricultural economics from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis/St. Paul. His advisor put agricultural issues in an international context and fostered his interest in international issues. In addition to Nigeria, Mr. Winter served in Peru with the Peace Corps, and in Indonesia and Zimbabwe. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on January 23, 1997.*

*Q: But you entered AID through the Junior Officer Training Program?*

WINTER: Yes, that's right I entered through the Junior Officer Training Program.

*Q: Did you have to take an exam or a test?*

WINTER: No. I didn't. I completed several forms as part of the application and came to Washington for an interview. The interview panel, I have to admit, seemed to be stacked in my favor. I don't know if it was deliberate or accidental, but of the four people interviewing me three were from the state of Minnesota. I don't think that hurt my chances. Well, then in the fall of 1967 I started with AID after...

*Q: With the IDI program?*

WINTER: It was pre-IDI. It was JOT at that time. Before IDI. I came to Washington in October, 1967 and entered the training program. Before joining the program I had been asked me if I wanted to go to Ghana or Nigeria. I said, "Nigeria", not because I knew a great deal about the two countries, but I had done a little reading and thought that Nigeria would be more interesting. It also sounded like it had a larger AID program.

*Q: Did you have any training or orientation?*

WINTER: Yes, I was here in Washington from October through February. I was supposed to stay a little longer in Washington, but the mission and the agricultural person I was working with at the time - Jim Emerson- suggested that maybe I should go out to Lagos. So my training in Washington was cut a little short and I went to Nigeria.

*Q: What year was this?*

WINTER: It was February of 1968 that I arrived in Nigeria. I spent the next two years and five months there.

*Q: Where were you assigned?*

WINTER: I was assigned to the Agricultural Division.

*Q: In Lagos?*

WINTER: In Lagos. But I was required to rotate to different offices as part of the training program. After an introductory period in the Agriculture Division, for the next six or seven months I rotated. During those rotations the Agricultural Division Staff were always trying to get me to come back. I remember them saying "although you're going to go to the program office you've got to keep that as short as you can because we want you back here." They made me feel like I was really an important part of the team. At the time...

*Q: What kind of work did they give you initially to do?*

WINTER: Initially in the Agriculture Division, after a short period of reading and attending meetings, I started writing and editing materials being prepared for various purposes. This mushroomed as the Head of the Agricultural Division quickly realized that I could write and re-write and edit and make materials quite readable. I ended up circulating around and working with different members of the agricultural staff on reports, proposals and internal evaluations as well as reviewing documents that were being sent to other offices in the Mission. Russell Bierman was my direct supervisor for much of the time. He was a real stickler for detail which was good.

But after about a year or so they made me project manager for a credit project in western Nigeria which enable me to start to learn how to manage projects. At the time the program in Nigeria was very broad and had...

*Q: Give us a little bit of the context of which you were working in terms of the Nigeria situation and the program.*

WINTER: The Biafran War was still on when I arrived in Nigeria. As a result, the programs in Eastern Nigeria had been canceled. One of the issues was how do we clean-up what had been started? We had Nigerians in the US that couldn't return because they were from the east. We had projects and we had contractors that were supposed to do things and they hadn't managed to

complete them. Terminating projects and people, getting reports written, wrapping up the small and large details required a great deal of effort.

Nevertheless, even without the program in the East, AID/Nigeria had a tremendous agricultural program in the sense that there were projects in everything: agricultural research including rubber, cocoa, maize and fisheries production, agricultural extension, soil conservation, range management, livestock development, agricultural planning, agricultural credit. You know it was just this great...

*Q: Ag universities?*

WINTER: Yes, there were programs to develop several agricultural universities including Ahmadou Bello University being assisted by Kansas State University and Ife University with the University of Wisconsin. To manage this portfolio of projects, there was an agricultural staff of ten or eleven people, each with fifteen to twenty years experience from around the world. I was undoubtedly the youngest person in the office by twenty years.

For me, the program in Nigeria provided a great opportunity to see the range and types of activities that AID was involved in and how we thought they should work and would contribute to economic development. And, as you probably know, some of those activities in Nigeria, and I think that was particularly true of the university development program, were trying to replicate a model that had, in effect, come from India. There was a feeling that we should be able to transfer the U.S. land grant model as it had been successfully started in India to Nigeria.

*Q: That was some of the views that some of your colleagues were expressing?*

WINTER: Yes. It wasn't perhaps the driving argument for the program, but you could see that is what happened. It is clearer to me in hindsight than at the time because I didn't know what was happening in India. But they came to Nigeria...

*Q: Some of the people you were working with had been in India?*

WINTER: Exactly. And of course we found later that conditions weren't quite the same in Nigeria. Some of the factors that existed in India didn't yet exist in Nigeria.

*Q: Like what?*

WINTER: The infrastructure. Some of the communications links, the pool of manpower. The base just wasn't the same. So when we tried implement university development programs like we had in India it didn't work as easily or as quickly. And secondly, the political divisions within Nigeria probably had an effect: the strong regional governments in the north, the west, the east created complexities for everything we did, particularly trying to do things on a national basis.

I remember when I first came to Nigeria, there was no Minister of Agriculture for the country. We had regional programs and regional offices. There was no real federal level. When the first minister was appointed, what could he do? It was hard to determine what he did and why we had

to work with him because he had no resources. He was by himself in a tiny office.

*Q: It was a federal ministry?*

WINTER: Yes, but it seemingly had no real power over anything. It didn't have any budget nor staff. The Federal aspect of the program started to change when I was there but not much really happened. Undoubtedly the Biafran war was a major reason that change came slowly.

*Q: Let's talk about your agricultural credit project first and then go into some of the other things.*

WINTER: OKAY. It was a classic credit project involving the U.S. Farmer's Home Administration. There was a technical assistance team of four or five Americans based in Western Nigeria. The project was an attempt to put in place a system that looked like our system here.

*Q: Was there a credit institution to begin with?*

WINTER: Yes. I believe it was called the Western Nigeria Agricultural Credit Corporation. The head office was in Ibadan and there were branches in several cities throughout the region. The idea was to make this organization efficient and able to lend small amounts of money at reasonable rates to small farmers. Our credit team was out there working side-by-side with the Nigerian staff in these offices. While I remember this side-by-side relationship as being very positive, I also remember it as bringing to my attention a problem that I think continues in one form or another to this day - the time counterparts are able to spend with technical assistance staff.

In Nigeria, one of the earliest complaints was that the staff the technical assistance team was working with spent so much time away from the office. They weren't there: what were they doing? Well, perhaps some of the time the Nigerian staff weren't doing what they should have been doing, but the biggest problem was the need to go to Ibadan for everything-to get paid you had to go to Ibadan, any personnel action required a trip to Ibadan, there were often special meetings in Ibadan. Each trip, by the time you left and returned, consumed most of a day. The Americans would be very frustrated at times saying, well, "We were going to do this today but my counterpart had to go to Ibadan because there was a staff meeting or to pick up some forms."

I remember trying to discuss the problem with the Western Agricultural Credit Corporation management. "Isn't there a way we can reduce the time staff are away from their job site?" Of course at the time they couldn't see a way to make any changes. They couldn't or didn't want to transfer money to the local banks. They said staff had to sign for their salaries and communications links were such that when things needed to be done, staff had to come into Ibadan. In other countries and other projects, the reasons may have differed but the result was the same - U.S. technical assistance personnel unable to do as much as they would have been able to because the counterpart staff wasn't available.

But getting back to Nigeria, we were pleased because of the volume of agricultural credit going

through the system. And we were not capitalizing the system per se.

*Q: You were just providing technical assistance?*

WINTER: We were providing technical assistance, training and a very limited amount of equipment. But we were having an impact of a modest sort.

*Q: In what way? What kind of projects were you supporting?*

WINTER: Basically the Corporation provided agricultural production loans. Funds were being lent for cash crops like cocoa and palm oil as well as for food crops like corn and cassava. I remember some loans for poultry and even a fish pond loan. The people who received the loans, and I did go out and interview a few farmers, were very appreciative. Of course they always complained about the time it took to get a loan, but they would also acknowledge that the loan allowed them to increase their production or income. So they felt they were better off and were very satisfied.

*Q: What were some of the changes the technical assistance people were trying to introduce to work better? The volume went up. There must have been something to improve the system?*

WINTER: Right. They were trying to simplify the system. Trying to simplify the basic procedural requirements: to make it so farmers didn't have to spend so much time on the application process and thus to shorten the time between the application and when the loan was actually made. The review process was simplified and standardized. Part of the reason was to ensure consistency among offices because one of the problems identified was that whenever there was any movement of staff, they didn't fit in very quickly in their new position because they either had to learn a slightly new system or they would try to bring in the slightly different system they had been using. So there was a lot of training.

*Q: People were receptive to the reform?*

WINTER: Yes, very much so. The relationships at that time with the host country personnel were really exceptional. My perception was that everyone really wanted to see things happen. Both Nigerian and American staff really wanted change to occur and you know, in many ways they lived under more difficult conditions than anyone would consider now and people didn't seem to mind. The Americans lived in cities that were not small but...

*Q: They were not in Ibadan? They were out in the country?*

WINTER: Except for the Chief of Party, the technical assistance advisors were out in places like Abeokuta. They lived there. There would usually be a small group of Westerners in the town -a missionary or two, somebody else doing something for some other international organization. But they...

*Q: These people were from what organizations?*

WINTER: The USAID-funded staff were from the Farmer's Home Administration.

*Q: So they were under a PASA?*

WINTER: Yes. It was a PASA arrangement with USAID paying for most costs but with the housing and basic furnishings provided by the Nigerian government. It was standard, Nigerian government-built housing into which AID would put in the additional refrigerator or water heater. I remember we had to put up water tanks in some locations because there were insufficient water supplies. But the advisors really were field people, excellent technical field people.

*Q: Were they essentially operating staff or were they doing mostly training?*

WINTER: They were really the advisors to the head of the regional branch offices. In that role they did a lot of on-the-job as well as more formal training. As I recall, they had come generally from FHA branch offices within the US. They were not headquarters type staff. They were really accustomed to talking and interacting with farmers in making loans and so that was....

*Q: Was that a subsidized credit program?*

WINTER: It was subsidized because the loan volume and the interest rates charged did not cover all the operating costs. But it was not that the interest rates were particularly low. They were a little bit lower than bank rates. So there was an element of subsidy provided by the Nigerian government.

It didn't occur to me at the time that the subsidy issue was a serious problem. I knew the program required one to get started and I held the view that agricultural credit programs required special assistance.

*Q: At that time you weren't concerned about whether this would be sustainable or not?*

WINTER: Yes, we were concerned with sustainability but more in terms of trained personnel, systems, operating procedures, etc. Financial sustainability was not the biggest issue. Although it was discussed and the need for all costs to be covered eventually when the loan volume increased was recognized. The plan was that when the loan volume increased to a certain level all the costs would be covered.

At that time inflation was relatively low. Interest rates were somewhat stable. I think what happened later is that inflation sky-rocketed. Interest rates remained the same and the de-capitalization of lending institutions became a serious problem. For us it was a problem that seemed manageable and which would be solved in the near-term.

*Q: One of the other issues with subsidies is that the loans don't go to the right people. You get the better off people rather than to the poor. Was that an issue then?*

WINTER: No. I don't recall that being an issue, although I do know they made some very small

loans.

*Q: What was small? What do you mean by small?*

WINTER: As I recall some loans were for a \$100.00 or less. So they were small. Compared to per capita incomes I guess maybe they were quite large, but in absolute terms they were relatively small loans.

*Q: What was the higher side?*

WINTER: I only remember the fish pond loan as being fairly sizeable and I think that was \$5,000.00. I remember that because I did a special feasibility study to see whether the fish production out of such pond could cover operating costs and pay off a loan. The analysis indicated that loan repayment was possible under a reasonable set of assumptions.

*Q: Were there any special issues, major issues that you had to deal with during that time?*

WINTER: I don't remember any special issues. I think we dealt with the issues as they came up.

*Q: Did you think the project could carry forward? I guess the inflation factor...?*

WINTER: As long as I was there, it still hadn't become a big problem for us.

*Q: Have you had any opportunity to know what happened to the project over time?*

WINTER: No. I have not. I don't think the organization exists today, but I don't know if it is defunct, currently built into another organization or has evolved into something else. I know it doesn't exist under its old name. But that project ended after I left, so...

*Q: How long a project was it?*

WINTER: It was originally a four to five year project.

*Q: Presumably at the end of four or five years it was supposed to carry on itself?*

WINTER: Right. I think at the time we felt we were moving toward that target and the only issue was the volume of loans. We thought they were doing a reasonable job of loan collection, they had reasonable operating procedures and operating costs were not excessive.

*Q: Well, now. What were some of the other things you were involved with in the Ag office?*

WINTER: In addition to the agricultural credit project, I was later assigned another project called Agricultural Planning which was a new project.

Before that, to go back to AID documentation, I drafted the first agricultural project papers in Nigeria, the "PROPS" they were called. Prior to 1968 or 1969 project papers weren't required.



They had done project documents, but they weren't project papers. When the new format was introduced I was tasked in our office with doing the first "props". The first one I did was for the Agricultural Credit Project. We needed them for all the projects so I ended up doing a several others with members of the agricultural staff just to get them done.

Then I was assigned the responsibility for developing a new agricultural planning project. We were going to work with the FAO and support agricultural planners in four regions - one in the west, one in the mid-west, one in the northeast and one in the northwest. It was regional since the division of Nigeria into states had not yet occurred. Before implementation started, however, we were dealing with State structures and we ended up with planners in five states. We put people there to work with the ministries of agriculture-they were all agricultural planners.

*Q: These were all new ministries of agriculture in some respects?*

WINTER: Right. It was a great opportunity and people seemed to be eager to work with us in agricultural planning area. We were able to recruit some very experienced, direct-hire staff for these positions. They were not contract people. So we had put these agricultural planners...

*Q: How many locations?*

WINTER: Five. Ibadan, Kaduna, Jos, Sokoto...

*Q: Enugu?*

WINTER: No. We never got to the east with a planner, but we placed one in Maiduguri in the northeast.

*Q: Were you in the mid-west?*

WINTER: We were in the mid-west, but we didn't have a planner in the mid-west. We had other projects in the mid-west. I worked a little bit on some rubber and some cocoa research activities. We only had planners in the states I indicated. I don't recall exactly why we didn't have a planner in the mid-west region. I suspect it was a matter of interest on the part of the Ministry there.

*Q: What were these people supposed to do?*

WINTER: Advise the Ministry of Agriculture on whatever plans were being developed. And of course at that time all the ministries were expected to be preparing development plans. These advisors were helping formulate the contents of those plans, trying to make sure that the economic rationale for projects and activities were sound and that the plans were not just a package of good ideas.

*Q: Were they supposed to be creating planning units in these places or simply just being an advisor?*

WINTER: In each case there was an intent to create a planning unit. And we always insisted on a

counterpart for the advisor. We also had training funds for staff development. The quality of the counterparts was mixed. I remember in the northeast, we did not have a very solid counterpart. But we always had someone and worked on developing two or three person planning units. They were not big units but, as you've just suggested, in every case we were interested in the institutional development side.

*Q: Was the advice of these specialists well received?*

WINTER: In general, yes. There were complaints by the U.S. technical advisors that they weren't being listened to like they should have been. But it seemed to me that they wanted to be listened to 100% of the time and they wanted all decisions to be made on their criteria, which was probably not very realistic. The U.S. advisors didn't have to take into account the political considerations that the rest of the ministry did, and the other factors that came into play in decision-making. And there were variations. Some advisors were more effective than others.

We probably had the least success in the Western State. They seemed to be the most difficult group to work with. A reason may have been that they had some of the best trained people. They also had more people working on agricultural planning so there may have been less need for an advisor.

*Q: Were there any particular policy issues that stood out that your people were working on?*

WINTER: I don't recall any particular policy issues they were working on. I remember we were always discussing budgets and how much funding should go for this, that or the other program. And whether or not in some regions the focus should be on cash or food crops. That debate partly stemmed from the work done with AID funding by the Consortium for the Study of Nigerian Rural Development. The consortium of US universities and organizations had completed an extensive agricultural analysis resulting in a series of recommendations. We felt that the Nigerians should follow the recommendations and encouraged our policy advisors to use the analysis and recommendations in their work.

The study didn't foresee the coming importance of oil revenues and called for an emphasis on food production in certain regions while also stressing the importance of agricultural cash crops because it anticipated that agriculture would have to be the engine of growth for Nigeria. I remember the mid-belt was where the report said that Nigeria should be really doing more on the food production.

*Q: This was led by?*

WINTER: Michigan State University with Dr. Glen Johnson as Director of the consortium. Others in the group were Kansas State University, Colorado State University, the University of Wisconsin and I believe the USDA. A very impressive group. In cooperation with a large number of Nigerian organizations and researchers, they completed a tremendous number of background studies and a detailed final report. It was a very thoughtful and analytical document. And I think history has shown that the document was still very relevant as late as the 1980's. When Nigeria had gone through the tremendous oil boom and was having difficulties, they

finally implemented some of the recommendations of the report.

*Q: Who was the report to or who used it?*

WINTER: It was to the federal government of Nigeria, to the Ministry of Economic Development. However, by the early 1970's the oil revenues were removing the need for a focus on agriculture so the report was really not used. And as you know, our programs of assistance closed down in the mid-1970's.

*Q: But you say subsequently after the oil boom ended then they realized that agriculture had not kept up?*

WINTER: Well yes, but it took ten or fifteen years.

*Q: To get the message?*

WINTER: Yes. but unfortunately the timing of the recognition was not very good. When the oil revenues were available the investments in agriculture were not made because the sector wasn't considered that important. As revenues declined, there was a realization that the agricultural sector was important but now the resources for investment were no longer available at the same levels.

*Q: Was there any more about the mainlines in the recommendation in that report that stood out in your mind?*

WINTER: No. I'll have to admit that I haven't looked at the report for maybe ten years. I remember looking at it in the 1980's because I was reading some ...

*Q: When we are finished we may want to get the title of the report and reference it. I don't know if it is in the CDIE library or not.*

WINTER: I don't either. I know I have my copy at home.

*Q: Well, what other things were you working on? What other activities?*

WINTER: At a later stage in Nigeria, I became the Agricultural Program Officer. The Agricultural Division had its own program officer located in the agricultural office. I occupied that position for awhile. I was also the Agricultural Economist for a short period. As the Agricultural Program Officer, I worked on everything including rubber research, range management and soil conservation. We worked on planning the future of these activities or their phase-out.

The phase-out planning reflected a tremendous reduction in field staff. As I recall, the reduction was driven basically by budget and program priorities. There was only so much money and we needed to reduce the program and agriculture had to bear its share. So while at one time we had 140 direct hire and contract agricultural staff in the field, it rapidly went down to ninety.

Activities just ended or were ending and they were not continued...

*Q: Even direct hire staff?*

WINTER: Direct hire and some contract staff. We had quite a number of direct hire staff in field, advisory positions and they were...

*Q: Did this include university projects too?*

WINTER: Most definitely. They were cut back or the projects that were ending were not continued. I remember a project...this wasn't a university development project...called the Agricultural Training Project with the University of Wisconsin as the contractor. The project worked in the Western Region with the government organization operating the schools and institutes that provided certificate and diploma level personnel for the agricultural extension system. I remember that project shrinking from fourteen people to four over a few months. The program at the University of Ife was cut substantially. The agricultural extension programs where we had direct-hire extension advisors in each region were curtailed. We were consolidating and shrinking most everywhere.

*Q: Did you have the feeling that this was premature? That people weren't getting a chance to finish the things they were doing? Or had things gone as far as they could go?*

WINTER: In most areas, I didn't think it was premature. I really can't explain why. I probably wasn't in a position where that was something I was asked to think about. I do recall a maize research program in the Western State that I thought we shouldn't be eliminating the advisors because they had just developed several new varieties. The varieties weren't quite ready for release but others thought the Nigerians could carry on.

*Q: Were there other projects that you worked with?*

WINTER: Well, as I said, I was the project manager for agricultural planning and agricultural credit. I also worked on an evaluation of soil conservation activities which led to a reduction of the program because the economic analysis of several activities indicated that the benefits did not cover the costs. The activities were supposed to be demonstrations but they weren't serving as demonstrations since they couldn't be replicated and we couldn't show that they were economic. The activities were just too expensive and required heavy equipment that wasn't available.

*Q: Did you come up with an alternative?*

WINTER: Well, we came up with a restructured project that reduced the high-cost, heavy equipment aspects of the program. They were impressive activities, but we scaled it back and put more emphasis on training and institutional development as opposed to actual hands-on field work.

*Q: Was there a change in technology that you were up against?*

WINTER: We were saying that we had to go to something that was lower cost. We had to think of new ways of doing some of these things that were not as expensive.

*Q: Can you give any examples at all?*

WINTER: Well, yes. Moving less earth, constructing smaller structures, putting more emphasis on planting grasses and managing the cultivation practices to prevent soil erosion. Just trying to get people to plant on the contour and to put in grass strips.

At times we didn't have really good, appropriate technologies to replace the ones being used. We started activities based on our experience and models used in the U.S. and they weren't always appropriate. Sometimes our technology was just too expensive and something that wasn't going to work. And I think I saw this later in my career as well where we continued to do some things that really were just not sustainable or replicable. As a demonstration the technology might have been fine, but people could not utilize it in their "real world".

I also spent some time, when the Biafran war was over, on the issue of what to do with the demobilized military. All these people had been fighting. Now what do we do with these people? I suppose I spent about three months examining alternatives. And these alternatives were nothing startling. Because there was a history of land resettlement schemes in Nigeria, I looked at making ex-soldiers into better farmers through training and sending them back to their home villages with some resources so they could make a living. I examined the feasibility of a rural road construction program using demobilized military. I reviewed training programs of various types, assuming ex-soldiers were not going to go back to the farm. And since the ex-soldiers were not all very well educated, what types of training would be needed to bring them up to a level where they could function in different jobs in the cities.

I spent most of my time looking at facilities, talking to people and developing plans and recommendations that were fed into the system. The only possibility I examined that I think they ever really tried to implement, because they had on-going programs, was the land resettlement scheme which I had concluded was not really very viable because it was too costly and the ex-soldiers were not likely to remain on the schemes. And I don't think they expanded it. The Nigerians did construct some rural roads through the military, but I do not know if they ever used demobilized soldiers.

I also visited eastern Nigeria to see what we might do to restart an agricultural assistance program there. I came up with some fairly simple suggestions to help get agriculture moving again. For example, I recommended distributing oil palm and cocoa seedlings from the mid-west to allow farmers to get back into production. And another small program I recommended was putting small palm oil presses back in operation. These were modest programs, because as others have probably mentioned, after the war there was not an immediate interest on the part of the Nigerian government in seeing large amounts of resources going to the eastern region. So the programs had to be very modest. Because this was near the end of my time in Nigeria, I don't know the final impact of these programs but I know they were implemented.

*Q: To step back a little bit, what was your view of the contribution, the impact of the agriculture program in Nigeria at that time? What do you think worked and what didn't? What might have*

*lasted?*

WINTER: At the time I generally believed that the U.S. had a great deal of relevant and appropriate experience in all these areas that we could in effect transplant to Nigeria. I also thought our agricultural system was a model that would work in Nigeria. And I think that was what most if not all of the agricultural staff also felt. When you looked at the extension program or the soil conservation program or even our livestock development program and the types of activities we funded, it appeared that we were trying to replicate the systems, institutions and organizations that we have here.

*Q: Was that a good idea?*

WINTER: With hindsight, I think it was not always a good idea. In some cases we were trying to put in place systems and programs that were simply too complicated, too sophisticated and too expensive. They were not sustainable. But we didn't know it at the time.

*Q: I assume some of the Nigerians wanted that.*

WINTER: Clearly. We had brought hundreds to the U.S. for training and that is what they had seen. Also I think educated Nigerians in general at that time believed development depended on the utilization of western technology.

*Q: They didn't want the rinky-dink little stuff, they wanted...*

WINTER: Oh, absolutely. We were clearly meeting their expectations and providing what they wanted. We trained tremendous numbers of Nigerians. So there were U.S. trained Nigerians who had been here, saw what we were doing and were comfortable with trying to replicate the systems there. I think we all felt it was the way to go. As I said, in hindsight, it probably wasn't the way in every instance. If we had thought it through a little more...I mean, at the time we didn't have the experience. We didn't know.

*Q: What parts of the programs had the most significant impact and lasting results?*

WINTER: I think the University programs. The Universities we helped establish are still there. They are still functioning. They are still turning out trained people and I think that is highly significant and important to the continued growth and development of Nigeria. Without our assistance, there is a real question of whether Ahmadou Bello University, of whether the University of Ife or the University of Nigeria-whether those universities would have really developed into very much.

*Q: Do you think they would fall under pretty much the same philosophy concept program?*

WINTER: As I understand it, yes. Ahmadou Bello is still trying to implement the U.S., three-pronged land grant system. I do not believe the British tradition included extension, and that research-teaching approach is the alternative. With a British educational system as the general model, the extension portion, the community service part was the hardest element to install. But I

think where we had the large projects and...

*Q: And that did eventually take hold?*

WINTER: Well, it was taking hold. And I think it, again, we have never managed to create the system we have here, which is a pretty integrated system. But I know in Ahmadou Bello a few years ago, they were still trying to do follow a U.S. model. Now how effective they were I haven't been back to see.

*Q: Apart from the University projects were there any other projects or did all that just evaporate into the results? Or that you think were something...*

WINTER: Again, I think you can look at some research projects and see organizations and programs that have continued. A base was created, people were trained and the programs have continued. It hasn't evaporated. But again, it is hard to say what we expected to have in 20-30 years or what we really expect to leave behind. Also what we expected to leave behind in 1972 or 1975 may not be fully relevant today. To me the fact that you can't find something today in the precise form we left it, doesn't mean it wasn't appropriate at the time or for the intervening ten or fifteen years. I would hope we did establish dynamic programs that were able to adapt and evolve as needs and technology changed.

It is easy to look back and say, "Maybe we could have done something differently or more effectively." Maybe for reasons of the time we couldn't have. I don't know. It is hard to see how for example, some of our shorter term activities probably like a planning unit could have been done differently to have a greater long-term impact. In fact I don't think we really know what impact such programs had. We put in one person. We provided some training.

*Q: But they were dealing with the issues of the time.*

WINTER: That's right. And I think they were training people who probably have had an impact. So I still come back to the people you work with...

*Q: How did you find Nigerians to work with?*

WINTER: I found them exceptional. They were smart, articulate, willing to really be engaged and often very capable. In addition, I found that Nigerians were hospitable and fun. I know that Nigerians subsequently gained a reputation as being over-aggressive. I thought that they were simply highly confident and prepared to argue with you, but willing to listen as well. In general, I found them to be very easy to work with. And I think that was generally the experience of the American advisors.

*Q: What was your experience within the AID Mission? How did that function?*

WINTER: It was a large organization. When I arrived in 1988 there was the headquarters in Lagos and regional offices in Ibadan and Kaduna. In Lagos USAID had its own building - the Mother Cat Building I believe it was called. I don't remember how many direct-hire staff there

were in Lagos, but I'm certain it must have been 50-60 or even more. Morale, as I remember, was good and there were USAID softball and volleyball teams and picnics and other social events.

Although I had worked in a large Peruvian organization, the AID Mission was my real introduction to a bureaucracy. At the start I didn't understand the competition for resources that always went on between different parts of the organization. And I remember how smart and articulate the staff seemed to be. People like Mike Adler, who was the Director for most of the time I was there, and Vernon Johnson who was the Deputy. In other offices I remember Bill Wheeler, Bob Huesmann, Dennis Barrett, and Lois Richards in the Program Office; Don Gardner and Bob Berg in capital projects; the list could go on. In short it seemed to be a very well-run Mission with an exceptionally capable staff.

*Q: Did you have much contact with the Embassy at all?*

WINTER: I didn't. A little bit with the Agricultural Attaché, but that was about all.

*Q: Any particular view that the attaché was trying to put forward?*

WINTER: Not that I recall. There were some PL 480 issues during the Biafran War, but relief activities were handled by a different group. So I don't remember that we were at odds in any way.

*Q: Anything else about your Nigeria time? You can add it later if you like.*

WINTER: No, I think that kind of wraps it up. It was very enjoyable and a good start to my AID career.

**HOWARD FRANK NEEDHAM**  
**Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1969)**

*Howard Frank Needham was born in 1923 and began his career in journalism with the San Francisco Chronicle. In 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. In addition to Nigeria, Mr. Needham served with USIS in India, Guatemalan, Paraguay, and Vietnam. He was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt on March 29, 1990.*

NEEDHAM: Personnel's choice was to send me out to Nigeria, to Lagos. This was during the attempted revolt, led by a gentleman named Ojukwu; generally known as the Biafra episode. Personnel had proposed me to the director for approval as a deputy PAO on temporary duty at Lagos, under PAO Beverly Carter, with special responsibilities for guidance to the State Department and the Agency. The area director, who at that time was John Reinhardt (he later became Director of USIA), was gracious and supportive in this appointment, for which I was grateful at that time, and remain grateful to this day; because it turned out to be a most



interesting and rewarding six months in Lagos.

My duties in Lagos were rather simply defined. I was to provide the State Department and the Agency with a précis, one every 12 hours, on the state of public and official opinion in Nigeria, with regard to the Biafran conflict. These telegrams were for the ambassador's signature and, of course, required his approval. This was a rather strenuous, but routine, work consisting of interviews daily with the ministries and with the president's entourage; and a review of the local press, with some personal contact with publishers and editors.

The necessity for these telegrams arose from the need for the State Department, primarily, and also USIA -- for guidance in handling the news -- to be aware of the situation in Lagos, primarily to keep a firm foothold on the tug of war in public opinion going on in both countries.

There was sentiment in America for American intervention in the Biafran situation, and there was sentiment against it. This was also true in Lagos. There were segments of President Gowon's government that felt the United States should intervene on their side, and there were others who felt that the last thing in the world they wanted to see was American intervention in Nigerian affairs.

*Q: That's very interesting, because I think you probably know that within the States there was a great tendency on the part of the media in the U.S. to side with the Biafran attempt to overthrow the central government. And I think if you could have measured the feeling in this country, at least along the eastern seaboard, they were primarily in favor of a Biafran victory, rather than in favor of the central government victory. You never had an opportunity to sample Biafran opinion, I gather?*

NEEDHAM: Well, Lew, practically no Americans got over to the Biafran side, as we call it. Incidentally, Biafra is a term that was floated by Ojukwu and his lieutenants, and came to America via press correspondents. In reality, there is no such place as Biafra. There is Eastern and Western Nigeria. The eastern part of Nigeria is that occupied by the Ibos, who are rated one of the superior tribes, historically, in that part of Africa.

Biafra is a bight of the Atlantic Ocean down at the extreme southwest coast of Nigeria, principally known through its main port, which is Port Harcourt. The only contact, that I'm aware of, that Americans may have had with the east of Nigeria during this period is, perhaps, through some of the convoys conveying medicines and foods to both sides of the conflict. Starvation had been one of the weapons against the Biafran rebels.

America had said that we would not intervene in this conflict, but that we would provide medicine and supplies to those needful on both sides of the issue. And that was done. It had a rather slow, but long-reaching, effect. It probably supported the final settlement of the conflict, which became amicable, and today Nigeria is one nation, not having been divided by this rebellion.

**RICHARD L. STOCKMAN**  
**Nigeria Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1969-1970)**

*Richard L. Stockman was born in 1940 in Missouri. His assignments included Brazil, Honduras, Togo, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria. Mr. Stockman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 12, 1993.*

STOCKMAN: I seemed to have lucked out and was assigned to the African Bureau and worked on the Nigerian Desk during the Nigerian Civil War.

*Q: The Biafran War.*

STOCKMAN: It was totally out of cone, so to speak, but to tell you the truth I saw far more sensitive material on that desk without the clearance.

*Q: What was your impression because I think this is a very interesting war? Our policy was essentially, if Africa starts splitting up all hell will break loose because of all the tribal boundaries and we had better stick to the boundaries as they are, imperfect as they may seem. Yet there were an awful lot of attacks on this policy, particularly from the intellectuals and the glamour people, etc., that you should do something for the Biafrans. What were you getting as you were dealing with this thing?*

STOCKMAN: It was very interesting because I had served a short TDY in Lomé, Togo prior to this assignment on the African desk in Washington and one of the things that I learned while in Lomé was that Ambassador Albert Sherer was wearing two hats. One of which was to go up to San Fernando Po, a little island, where a lot of humanitarian international airlifts were taking off into Biafra. Consequently there were really two points of view about this war and I do believe that most of the African specialists, who were serving on the desk, were very pro-Biafran. The lobbyist, etc. and the whole Washington scene were very clever.

*Q: They were very strong in Congress. They had some people...there was one man in particular who was a congressional assistant.*

STOCKMAN: Well, they were the intelligentsia of Nigeria, the Ebos. But you wonder some times looking at history today and the terrible mess there is in Nigeria, was that course of action justified. Should we not have lobbied a little stronger and maybe things would have been different today. Who knows?

*Q: I think the policy has been, and it is a little hard not to go along with it, that once you start saying, "Okay, if a rebellion starts, we will maybe support the rebellion," the whole place will absolutely dissolve.*

STOCKMAN: Well, you know, I think from a historical perspective over the last 20-30 years, if you look at most West African countries, or even go a bit further north, all the way from Senegal on down the coast, in nine out of ten cases the military were so corrupt and once the colonial

powers had left, things disintegrated to a terrible mess in most every case. The whole infrastructure collapsed, they were greedy, corrupt and certainly didn't develop their countries.

*Q: They are still there pretty much today.*

STOCKMAN: So, who knows. I guess the African Bureau was not unlike most of the other bureaus where everybody was a specialist and if you recall one of Kissinger's top priorities was to break up these speciality groups and make everyone a generalist, for better or worse.

**GORDON W. EVANS**  
**Assistant Director for Programs, USAID**  
**Lagos (1969-1970)**

*Gordon W. Evans was born in New York State in 1932. Evans received a BS from Antioch College in 1955 and a MA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1957. Evans joined the Foreign Service working for USAID in 1958 as an Overseas Intern. Evans worked in the Near East/South Asia Bureau, Ghana, Nigeria, India and as liaison to the United Nations. Evans also oversaw operations in East and West Africa. This interview was conducted by Barbara S. Evans in 1998.*

*Q: How did we find our way to Lagos after leaving Ghana?*

EVANS: In July of 1969, our eight year old daughter Elizabeth and seven year old son David, our German Shepherd, Bonita, and the grey parrot, Clyde, joined Barbara and me for the long drive to Lagos, Nigeria from Accra. It took us two days. Barbara was, unbeknownst to her, fighting amoebic dysentery throughout this entire period. Passing through Togo and Dahomey, now Benin, was easy, but in western Nigeria, we had to pass through six military checkpoints. Soldiers often were generally courteous, but there was always the uncertainty of what might transpire. Fortunately for the American space program and for our clearance through these military checkpoints, Neil Armstrong had just landed on the Moon a few days before our passage. Each of these checkpoints had a transistor radio. Our password really was "Neil Armstrong" or "Moon." It worked.

*Q: How did we find Nigeria when we arrived?*

EVANS: First of all, the civil war had been going on for three and a half years. It had really torn apart the country, especially the southeast, where over 10 million Ibos resided. In 1966, they had created the nation of Biafra and had declared their independence. The U.S. presence was barely tolerated in Nigeria since we led the voluntary agency effort to drop food most nights to the large Ibo population in the east. This was to prevent what would have been massive starvation which was, from the Federal Government of Nigeria's military point of view, exactly what they wanted to happen.

Mission Director Mike Adler was in fact coordinating two programs. One was an emergency

assistance program to minimize the slaughter and death in soon to be former Biafra. The other was the older technical and capital assistance projects that were in disarray in at least the southeast and in other parts of the country during the all-out civil war.

In the first six years of U.S. assistance to Nigeria (1960-early 1966), wide-ranged efforts were made to assist the country in rapid development. For example, John Hannah, then president of Michigan State University, committed MSU through AID contract support, to a broad-based effort at the University of Enugu. Hannah and that university's vice chancellor collaborated closely and MSU gave service to UE very high priority. The focus was on building the famous trilogy of crop research, graduate education, and effective extension. This was the center of the Ibo culture, often referred to as the Jews of Africa because of their intelligence and educational prowess.

Complimentary to institution-building was our capital assistance to upgrading the Calabar Road, an important north-south corridor close to the Cameroon border. A technical institute in booming Port Harcourt was likewise assisted significantly during this early stage of nation-building. But since these three and many other projects were located in what was in 1966 declared the nation of Biafra, Federal Nigeria insisted that we terminate all current assistance immediately. In 1970, these same federal officials were not about to support re-establishment of assistance to the Ibos anytime soon.

To preserve a semblance of political balance, the British had proposed a divided nation, three states, north, east, and west. Though Nigeria is a very heterogeneous nation, these three areas were heavily Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba, respectively. Fortunately for stability, the Hausa were the dominant population group and effectively controlled the military, especially after the 1966 coup d'état. Even the shifting of the capital closer to the north in the 1970s had strategic as well as political overtones.

Our U.S. assistance to the west and north was likewise crafted in Nigeria's first six years to be institution-building with heavy accent on livestock development in the latter. Since over 40 projects prevailed in agriculture, education, health, community development, industry, and infrastructure, one must credit the energy and commitment of the wave of U.S. teams who established these programs in the early years.

My responsibilities as Assistant Director for Program were to strengthen our technical assistance program in anticipation of a return to normalcy. Biafra surrendered on January 15, 1970, but the GON attitude toward the U.S. cooled considerably now that they had secured their original boundaries. It was in some ways not unlike Vietnam, where efforts to advance economic development when a war is raging get very secondary or tertiary attention from the host government.

*Q: What about the evaluation team that came to Nigeria?*

EVANS: AID/W sent out a team from the Agency proper. In fact, the evaluation unit of the Office of the Administrator selected three former Mission Directors to recommend post-civil war strategy in Nigeria. They recommended (and I'll abbreviate this) a program loan as an incentive

for a high level policy dialogue with the Government of Nigeria. It would help the GON to launch a major rebuilding effort not unlike the Marshall Plan concept, but of course, much, much smaller. From July of 1969, on our arrival, until early in 1970, I had visited every AID technician in Nigeria, over 80 of them. I probably traveled 3,000-4,000 miles around the country. Most had not been visited by AID personnel in Lagos since the coup in January of 1966. [Most of] Our technical assistance efforts were in disarray, further complicated by wave after wave of new oil discoveries. There was a large exodus from rural Nigeria to oil jobs, but also from the senior ranks of the civil service to the booming oil sector. The effort of the evaluation team to have its recommendations accepted and implemented by the then Mission Director were not successful. In the end, USAID Director Adler was quite reluctant to accept the evaluation team's recommendation. I found myself somewhat in the middle on this because I thought their recommendations by and large (and I had worked closely with the team when they were in the country) were right on the mark. I still feel that the U.S. lost an opportunity in Nigeria to engage in a reconstruction effort and a development policy dialogue. Then again, Director Adler knew the ever-present corruption and the antipathy at the end of the civil war toward the U.S. might have proven just too disruptive to a well-coordinated western development consortium.

**SAMUEL S. REA**  
**International Relations Officer, USAID**  
**Washington, DC (1970-1971)**

*Samuel S. Rea was born in New York City in 1938 and graduated from Princeton and SAIS. He served with USAID in Botswana, Senegal and Madagascar. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.*

REA: By January 1970, when the new committee turned down my thesis, we had been living off savings for a year and a half. With our first child on the way, I needed to get back to work even as I rewrote my dissertation. At that time, for an Africanist with a political science background and a penchant for development work, one challenge stood out in bold letters: Nigerian reconstruction. Nigeria's two and a half year civil war ended that month. I learned that a joint State/AID desk, on the model used then for our Latin American operations, was being set up to manage our post-war program for Nigeria. As it happened, AID was recruiting for a GS assistant desk officer who had had some economics training. While I am no economist, I was able to point to seven semester courses of economics which I had taken at Princeton and S.A.I.S., and this was enough to satisfy the requirement. So AID reinducted me as an "International Relations Officer" stationed in Washington to help with Nigerian post-war reconstruction.

*Q: What did that involve?*

REA: That involved a lot of worry about how I was going to do my job and still get my thesis written! From the time I came back to AID in the summer of 1970 until the time Columbia University finally accepted my thesis, about a year later, my preoccupation was not first with Nigeria, I'll readily confess. My obsession was getting this all-important academic requirement out of the way. I was commuting in from Columbia, Maryland, about three hours round trip each

day.

*Q: Do you recall what was going on about Nigeria at that time?*

REA: Well, I had primary responsibility on the Desk for backstopping education and manpower projects. We put together teams to review the post-war situation and to give us recommendations on how AID could be most helpful. Wolfgang Stolper, founder and head of Michigan's Center for Research on Economic Development (CRED), then famous for his book *Planning Without Facts*, led one of these teams. AID had invested heavily after Independence in 1960 in building post-secondary education infrastructure, together with large technical assistance teams – Michigan State's effort at Nsukka University in Eastern Nigeria was perhaps the outstanding example. But after the civil war we had to fundamentally reassess all these programs. We needed a new approach and a new policy.

My role, of course, was definitely at the grunt level, working on PROP reviews and contractor selection panels, monitoring allotments, writing OYB and Congressional statements -- that sort of thing. In fact, I felt with the thesis hanging over me that the less visibility I had, the better. For my first six months I worked under Don Miller who, despite his drill instructor mannerisms, was very understanding about my thesis requirement. Don allowed me to cobble together long weekends from official holidays and from my annual leave allotment, enough to give me the patches of continuous time I needed to reorganize my data and to write the new draft. Miller saw a long-term advantage to the Agency in my getting the degree, and he offered me gruff encouragement, for which I'll be eternally grateful.

*Q: Well, after you finished your thesis?*

**BERNARD LAVIN**  
**Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1970-1971)**

*Bernard Lavin entered the Foreign Service in 1952. In addition to Nigeria, he served in Korea, the Philippines, and South Africa. This interview was conducted by Mike Brown on December 12, 1986.*

LAVIN: Actually three and a half years. Nigeria was a very interesting assignment but very difficult. Nigeria, for all the great promise that it held in terms of democratic development, was an economic mess. And corruption was just unbelievable. Living conditions were kind of tough but in terms of the program I felt very rewarded even though I only stayed one year because of an illness in the family. I had to go back to Washington.

But during that one year, Jack Shellenberger was PAO and I was Deputy and Executive Officer at the same time. When I left I recommended that it is not possible for a deputy and an executive officer position to be put together because they are two entirely different ways of approaching things.

But anyway, as the Deputy I proposed working with Phil Cohen on a seminar on excellence in education for the university system. It was held at the University of Ibadan. And it came off wonderfully well. We had Nigeria's top educators there. And as a matter of fact, the Federal Minister of Education gave his full cooperation and support to this program. That had not happened before in anybody's recollection. And I looked on that as a very great accomplishment for USIS because it identified us with the educational movement and development in Nigeria which was trying desperately to improve its educational system and has done rather well I would say in the years.

**EDWARD W. MULCAHY**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Lagos (1970-1972)**

*Ambassador Edward Mulcahy joined the Foreign Service in 1946. His assignments have included Kenya, Ethiopia, Greece, and Nigeria. Ambassador Mulcahy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 23, 1989.*

*Q: Why don't we go now to Lagos. You were in Lagos as DCM for two years. Who was the ambassador there?*

MULCAHY: I served my first year under William C. Trueheart. My second year was under John Reinhardt.

*Q: Were you there at the end of the Biafran war, or had it wound down?*

MULCAHY: The Biafran war was over in January of 1972, and I arrived in August, so the war was over. But the wartime austerity was very, very much in force at the time. There was hardly a vehicle in the country -- unless it was a military vehicle -- younger than four years old. Everything was wearing out. There were no foreign imports. Sometimes, just to get simple things, we'd make an overnight trip to Cotonou over in Dahomey -- more recently it's called Benin -- to bring back a bottle of wine or a bunch of grapes or some fresh fruit.

*Q: How was it to operate there? Was the bitterness still hanging on about America's role which was at least a tremendous public relations push to support Biafra as opposed to Nigerians although our policy was to support the central government?*

MULCAHY: Very true. We supported the central government but we remained neutral in the Nigerian civil war. To a large extent our national leadership swallowed the story of virtual genocide that was being alleged by professional preachers on behalf of the Biafrans.

*Q: This seemed to be a rather interesting group of supporters of Israel, of Christian Fundamentalists and Catholics.*

MULCAHY: Yes, exactly. We had the Pope preaching against genocide the week before the war ended whereas I found that this delightful young major general, Jacob Gowon, was a true Lincolnesque figure. He'd been educated by American missionaries. He came from a little tribe in central Nigeria. He was a compromise between the Moslems in the north and the Yoruba and other tribes in the south. He was a Protestant Christian. In fact, I think his father was a preacher of a small denomination from the central part of the country. He was a soft spoken man and he quoted Lincoln to me on several occasions when I would go to see him either with the ambassador or in long periods when I was chargé d'affaires between ambassadors. He was in every sense a Lincolnesque man. He told me, for example, when the Biafrans had moved into Yoruba country of which Lagos was at the southern end, and the front lines were not much more than 100 miles from Lagos at the time, he had better get out because they were going to cut the north-south road pretty soon.

He said, "Well, as Lincoln said when told the Jubal Early's cavalry was at the north side of Washington, 'If they're going to hang me, I would just as soon be hung from one of these trees here on the White House grounds and I'll stay here until they come.'"

He was a wonderful man and never decorated. There was no decoration issued under Gowon or any subsequent head of state for any act of heroism, bravery, for simply being wounded or anything during this civil war, however great, because it was against the brother Nigerian, no medal would ever be granted.

*Q: The war was over now. The genocide had not happened.*

MULCAHY: That's right. It never happened.

*Q: You had people such as Senator Kennedy who had been vehement in his support of the Biafran cause.*

MULCAHY: So was Jesse Jackson and much of the Black leadership in the Congress.

*Q: How did this play as far as you in your mission trying to work in this?*

MULCAHY: Very difficult. You would be reminded of it at the drop of a hat when I first got there. You would be reminded of it. You would be told that it was like the civil war where you needed help from everybody who favored democracy. For the United States, of all nations, to have let them down in their hour of need had been hard to bear.

*Q: Was it pointed out that it was almost analogous to that of Great Britain, which is opposed to slavery who remained neutral, that used the same quotes that we were using during our Civil War?*

MULCAHY: Yes, you'd have that quoted back to you because a lot of them were American-educated.

*Q: All right. You are faced with this problem. How did you or could you rebuild bridges? This is*



*a case example. How does one go about this? You get into a lousy situation. What do you do?*

MULCAHY: We had it, if I may say so, even worse than that because it didn't come out until afterwards that, when Bill Trueheart was sent there as ambassador, it was told to them by, I suppose, their embassy in Washington, that he had been chargé d'affaires in Saigon when Diem was assassinated. Some important people believed that he was really a CIA spy master incarnate and others believed that he had been sent to stage a coup against the Federal Military Government there.

*Q: I also interviewed Ambassador Trueheart last week and he said that another problem was that the Nigerian ambassador in Washington was a very bitter person. He felt he had spread the word that Trueheart was a racist, he was from Richmond, Virginia, and this helped poison the well, too.*

MULCAHY: Because it was completely untrue about his being a racist or having anything to do with the demise of Diem . . .

*Q: In fact he was on the other side, you might say. How did you work under. . .*

MULCAHY: Well, there was nothing sudden or no quick turning point. It was a matter of just slow concentration upon our mutual interests. The permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs turned out to be a friend of mine. We just agreed not to discuss civil war matters or things that were past, and to build on what we could do together. We began rebuilding our AID program. We even got a few Peace Corps volunteers there, not under an ordinary Peace Corps type agreement but to let them do special work without signing a new Peace Corps agreement which they had denounced at one stage of the civil war.

We had a very personable young colonel who was our defense attaché who made wonderful friends among the Nigerian military who were running the country in a not undemocratic manner. There was another case where, granted, they had closed the parliament down and all the rest of it and there were strong strictures against public criticism of the Federal Military Government. Outside of that, Nigerians are a rather uninhibited people anyway and they kept being uninhibited. The country runs itself, regardless of the government that's in power. It's like Italy in that respect.

*Q: I was going to say, Italy has got this down to an art. The Biafran war was over. We had had a very, very strong political wing opposed to the government in power. We're talking about in the United States. With the war over, was this group, as far as you were concerned -- I'm talking about this group in the United States -- trying to play dog in the manger or were they willing to start working with the situation as it was?*

MULCAHY: They were willing to let bygones be bygones. We had problems, though. The African-American Institute has a grand gathering of African leaders in Africa most years and I've been lucky enough to be at posts where it was being held a few times and had been always invited to attend. I remember Jesse Jackson couldn't come. They withheld his visa, but issued it to allow him to attend a few days of the meeting. Whitney Young drowned there, the leader of

the Urban League. I had gotten to know him quite well over the years. I just missed being on the swimming party when he died. He wouldn't have died if I'd been there.

Bill Trueheart wanted me to go along but I said, "Look, you asked me to get this particular report done and get it in this week's pouch to Washington."

*Q: Whitney Young was drowned. He got carried away by a current.*

MULCAHY: That's correct, yes. It's moot whether he had a stroke and died of a stroke or whether he died of drowning. That has always been a moot point. In effect, he did drown, he did drown. They were swimming on a beach on an island where we had our American community club, and flags were flying warning of an undertow. I don't know whether there was no one with him who knew that when those green flags were flying, they weren't supposed to be swimming on the beach. If I'd been there, I would have known that and I would have said, "Look, it's illegal to swim on the beach when those green flags are flying."

*Q: In the rebuilding of bridges, you said that they refused Jesse Jackson . . .*

MULCAHY: Well, they held him up until our pleas at the American Embassy and at the Nigerian embassy were just overwhelming, so many big named people and the ambassador himself had to go to the foreign minister and plead the case of Jesse Jackson. I think Bayard Rustin was another one of the leading blacks whose visas were held up. Pro-Biafran sympathies had put their names on a blacklist.

*Q: The upshot of this -- you left there in August 1972. Had relations come back to normal or were there still some festering wounds?*

MULCAHY: I think by the time I left there, the festering wounds had been healed over. That would have been two and a half years roughly after the end of the civil war. You would have to be a professional anti-American to keep turning the knife that long afterwards. A lot of new things had come in . We had started a very generous leader grant program which ran extremely well. We had something like 50. . . a country like Nigeria with a quarter of the black population of Africa. We had a very generous leader grant program.

*Q: So we were making a conscious effort to get relations back on an even keel.*

MULCAHY: Exactly. We were taking all levels of Nigerian military officers to the States for long-term and short-term training programs. We had American experts being invited into this, that and the other problems as consultants.

The American oil companies had acquitted themselves well during the civil war shutting down their oil operations. Armand Hammer, the head of Occidental Oil -- Gulf was the other big American outfits there -- came in one time when I was chargé d'affaires and he announced to me -- that he'd just made an historic agreement with Nigerians. That he had taken a 49% interest and given them a 51% interest in a new concession. This was quite a surprise because he kept his cards close to his chest. They would jointly work together which meant almost all his work and

the Nigerians would get 51% of the profits. It was the first time any oil company had broken that 50-50 line.

Unfortunately, to touch again on leader grants, about six months before I left there while John Reinhardt was ambassador, the Nigerians had decided that it was not up to us to pick and choose who would go to the United States under our leader grant programs. We would tell them how many Nigerians we were going to be able to take in a given fiscal year and they would tell us what Nigerians. . .

*Q: This is something we've adamantly refused to do and this comes up in every country and for very sound reasons we've refused to let this happen.*

MULCAHY: That's correct. We always said, "We will always submit the list to you after we've chosen the candidates. You can object if you want because they are your citizens. If you have reasons for objecting, we'd appreciate knowing the reasons. But if you just object, we'll just scrap that. It doesn't mean we'll send somebody else -- your nominee or anybody else -- just let us know if you object to any people we've picked. We will pick them all across the whole spectrum of Nigerian society and as widely distributed as possible -- the Ibos, the Yoruba, the Hausa and all the little people in between." At the time I left it was a complete stalemate and, in effect, we had to close down our leader grant program again.

The Nigerians are good about things like this. They're absolutely straight forward. They have their own ideas. They were such a big monstrous territory during the colonial days that very few of them got cowed by the British colonial experience. The British gave them their heads. In fact, it was there that the British developed the business of leaving the local potentates in place and ruling through them and leaving the local court systems and communal justice systems in place and just changing whatever was heinous to international standards of civilized conduct and leaving everything in place. Property ownership and things of that sort were all just run according to customary law.

I used to have conversations with the chief justice of Nigeria. This was an interest of mine all over Africa about how you melded customary African law with common standards of Western jurisprudence. It was being done quite well in most of Africa, quite well.

We were no longer suffering because of what we did or didn't do during the civil war by the time I left there. It was just a matter of establishing and emphasizing common interests and we convinced the people we talked to [that] we had no subversive aims in Nigeria. We wished them well and we never preached to them about the kind of government they had. We gave up fighting with them and they got tired of fighting with us, too.

**HENRY L. CLARKE**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Lagos (1970-1972)**

*Ambassador Clarke was born at Fort Benning, Georgia in 1941 and was educated at Dartmouth and Harvard. He entered the Foreign Service in 1967. His career included posts in Munich, Lagos, Bucharest and Moscow and he was named ambassador to Uzbekistan in 1992. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.*

Q: *In '69 you went where?*

CLARKE: I went on home leave and in early '70 arrived in Lagos, Nigeria.

Q: *That was a little bit different?*

CLARKE: Absolutely. Munich was almost my last non-hardship assignment. This was the beginning of the real Foreign Service for me. I arrived either the same day or a few days after the street lights got turned back on in Lagos.

Q: *For what?*

CLARKE: Because the civil war between the central government and Biafra had ended in January 1970, just a few weeks before, and it had taken a little while to get the lights turned back on.

Q: *You were there from when?*

CLARKE: '70 to '72.

Q: *What were you doing?*

CLARKE: I was in the economic section and I wrote economic reports.

Q: *This was a very interesting time because there were people, particularly in Congress and in the media who had been predicting a bloodbath in Nigeria. You had very strong partisans of the African cause in the United States in the media, Congress, and elsewhere. What did you expect to find when you got there and how did you see it playing out?*

CLARKE: The nicest thing I can say about the process of assigning me to Nigeria was that they made sure I went without any preconceptions. When I went to western Germany where I'd lived and studied and all the rest of it, I still had to take superfluous lectures on western European subjects during language studies and even before. Nigeria was an English speaking country, and because the main point was for me to get there yesterday, I got no training at all. The entire continent of Africa was something I'd never studied, so I had a tremendous amount to do on my own and absolutely no preparatory work at all. My home leave address in those days was with my family in Charleston, South Carolina. I'm afraid the public libraries in Charleston are not good when it comes to the history of Africa and even worse when it comes to contemporary Africa.

So, I arrived, really ignorany, but since I was the junior person in the economic section, this was not painful. In fact, one of the useful pieces of advice I got from a friend at AID (Agency for International Development) soon after arriving, was if you want to understand Nigerians a little bit, why don't you read a couple of Nigerian novels and get into the characters a little bit, and you'll get a feel for this place even faster than through more formal approaches. Which I did. I thoroughly enjoyed this approach and found it useful.

*Q: Did you find a divided embassy when you arrived there? At one point it had been badly divided over the pro- and the anti-Biafrans.*

CLARKE: No. I think there was a strenuous effort in the Embassy when I arrived, not to provoke those in the States who were pro-Biafra and often wrong about what was going on in Nigeria, nor to appear too protective of the Nigerian federal client. But we were under a lot of pressure to report bad news. We felt that in various different ways. If anything bad was said in the Western press about what was happening in former Biafra, no matter how farfetched, the first question was, "Well how come the embassy hasn't reported that?" Even if it was totally untrue.

So one of my early responsibilities was to go and contact people in Reuters for an off-the-wall story that had appeared in the Washington Post that was only two paragraphs and not much more than two sentences long. So I trotted down to Reuters with this thing and presented it to the guys and said, "Hey, I don't remember this. Do you remember this?"

It turned out that somebody in their home office in the U.K. had pulled one sentence out of one report and another sentence out of a totally different context in another report, glued them together, and sold them to the Washington Post. These guys hadn't even been aware of it. They cheerfully agreed that the conclusion that one would draw from the juxtaposition was totally incorrect. So that was a nice reply. The front office was delighted with that. We came out looking reasonably straightforward once the Reuters people disassociated themselves from the piece.

*Q: Who was our ambassador when you arrived?*

CLARKE: That's an embarrassing question. Why can't I name him? I even occasionally worked for him as an aide, in addition to my Economic Section duties. I had no idea what an aide was supposed to do. He'd been a deputy director in INR as I recall, before he came. He served in Lagos only a couple years, and left before I did.

*Q: Was the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) still Clint Olson?*

CLARKE: Clint Olson was indeed my DCM. He was eventually replaced before I left, but he was there most of the time I was there.

*Q: I interviewed Clint. He is now deceased, but he described how he was carrying on our policy to support the central government and was getting unshirted hell from some of the officers who were serving in the Biafran area and also from a couple of true Biafran believers in the Congressional staff.*

CLARKE: I'm sure it was true of Congressional staff. There was also, it seems to me, a White House fellow or something that came out all steamed up about Biafra, who added to the flak the Embassy took from the White House. My recollection, not from the time I was in Nigeria, but from later when I worked in INR, was that indeed at the outset of the war, our consulate in Enugu, capital of the Eastern Region, later Biafra, Iboland, was really very attached to the Ibo view. So there was conflict with the Embassy. To the extent that staff was then joined to the embassy when they were evacuated, I can imagine there was some real conflict there. By the time I came, the Embassy was trying hard to restore normalcy and objectivity. I'm sure Clint was part of that.

*Q: Would you go to Biafra to report?*

CLARKE: I did visit Iboland after it was no longer Biafra. I only did that about twice in two years. It wasn't always my turn to travel, but I did.

*Q: What was your impression of the tribal balance, tribal politics of Nigeria at the time?*

CLARKE: Well, that was the politics.

*Q: Still is from all accounts.*

CLARKE: Yes. The first thing I was impressed with was the term tribe doesn't work very well. Each of the major "tribes" was bigger than certain countries in Europe. The Nigerian newspapers ran a couple of really good articles by a correspondent who had been to Europe. One was called Tribalism in Belgium, which I thought was a master stroke, describing Belgium in tribal terms. It was very apt. These were major national groups with totally different languages. Ibo was not a dialect of Hausa or Yoruba. They are totally different languages. It's hard indeed to run a central government based on democratic principles when you have three ethnic groups that are really big, and then other major ethnic and language groups, and then maybe some that are more the size that you'd want to call a tribe.

*Q: How was it as an economic officer, going around and getting economic statistics, economic reporting? How open was this society?*

CLARKE: It varied greatly in Nigeria. We still had a consulate in Kaduna in northern Nigeria, so I didn't do much reporting on northern Nigeria. I went up there once to get oriented. They produced cattle and peanuts primarily. We did not reopen a consulate in the East, in Enugu, so consequently the embassy was responsible for covering that area, and we had to go out and see people. Actually, although the Ibos had quite a line they wanted to pitch, they were quite accessible and quite interested in developing their relationship one way or the other with the United States. Whereas when I visited Calabar in eastern Nigeria on the other side of Iboland, they were very, very cautious about me and wasted effort trying to figure out why I was there. They were much harder to work with.

*Q: Had oil become the major export?*

CLARKE: My colleague, Bob Blucker, in the economic section was the petroleum officer who basically chronicled the reopening of petroleum development and the process of connecting the pipelines. The embassy, I think, was quite good at being able to predict what was going to happen as these pipelines were connected. Discoveries had already been made. As the offshore platforms were completed, we knew what oil exports would be. You couldn't always predict how negotiations were going to go with the Nigerian government. But that Nigeria would be a two million barrel a day major oil producer, we announced early on. Before my tour was out, various banks and other western organizations decided to show up and focus on this huge new source of wealth.

*Q: At the time, was corruption an issue? Were the milking of funds and the inefficiency as apparent as they became later on?*

CLARKE: I can't make that comparison very well because I never really went back. Let's just say that it was a fact of life that everybody recognized when I first got there. One of my pieces of the economic puzzle that I was supposed to follow was transportation. I was told when I first came, one of the things you really need to know about the transportation minister is that he arranged to buy five Fokker Friendship aircraft from the Dutch, for the price of six, and he pocketed the price for the sixth aircraft.

*Q: You know I've never served there, but from all accounts, it seemed that the oil money just didn't go anywhere. Nigeria is used as a worst case scenario whereas Norway is used as a best case scenario. This comes from the interview I've done about Turkmenistan, about what you do if you find a lot of oil. My interlocutor has a Nigerian example and a Norwegian example.*

CLARKE: It's pretty unfair to compare Nigeria with Norway. There's no doubt that waste is not a big enough word to describe what they did with their natural resources in Nigeria. The other thing was that their ideological blinders were enormous. One of the prominent things that came out during this period was a new five-year plan for Nigeria in which the commanding heights of the economy, phrased straight from Lenin, would be in government hands. That included some control over the petroleum industry, but it also included major projects like building a steel mill in the middle of Nigeria. So this was classic. It was not Soviet ideology. It was English – shall I say – Socialist. It was based on the assumption that the civil service could run the economy, including large-scale businesses, better than the private sector.

It was really awful. The concept that it could have ever worked in Nigeria is ridiculous in the situation with so much corruption. But that it was the right thing to do was really even more absurd. But it was the period there. I don't know how much we contributed to deliberately not looking at American models, simply because the U.S. had supported the Biafra side in the war. But I think frankly we reached a degree of steadiness in our relationship with the Nigerians partly because General Gowon was a reasonable man. Gowon was an elected military leader - elected only by the military - but elected in the sense that he was a compromise candidate who did not belong to one of the major tribes or major national groups. That he was a Christian from the north was also an interesting balance. He had a number of assets for which he could be respected by all the different groups. He had spent a considerable amount of time reading Carl

Sandberg's biography of Lincoln. He was looking at the civil war in Nigeria from the perspective of the American Civil War. It shows you that even when our policies are out of whack, sometimes American influence can be very powerful through something totally different from foreign policy.

*Q: What was life like there?*

CLARKE: This was before life became so difficult. By the time I left, the traffic jam was becoming very serious. It was during the time I was there that the first roll on, roll off vessels carrying Japanese and European automobiles began to serve Nigeria. That was stimulated in part by a substantial rise in civil service salaries. Later Lagos was the first place to get clogged once these cars started to be bought. The usual fear that people had of Nigeria in the later 1970s was highway robbery and burglary. Those occurred, and there were two attempts to burglarize my apartment, both unsuccessful because I woke up. The burglars fled. They were not armed. But that all changed. That changed very drastically as more and more burglaries turned into armed robberies and got really nasty.

*Q: Did you have any feel for what our AID program was doing there?*

CLARKE: I was very interested in the AID program because some of my functions in the economic section overlapped some of the areas of interest to them.

*Q: How did you see it? Did you see our program as making sense or was it misguided or was it just an impossible situation?*

CLARKE: I don't think their strategy, as much as they had a strategy, was all that bad. They were not looking for major capital projects to sink money into. Their emphasis was on education and agriculture, two of the obviously key things for the future of Nigeria. So the overall strategic sense was not so bad. But their tactics were awful. AID worked in a 14 story high-rise office building that towered over the little two story headquarters of the supreme military command of Nigeria. The image was awful – of this handful of senior army officers really running the country and running a war besides, and 100 Americans stacked up 14 stories high with twice that number of local people and with no program at all during the war because we gradually cut out our programs. We cut them back and cut them back and cut them back. They were all sitting there, doing almost nothing. It was an image question.

But, as I say, one of the first things they wanted to do once the war was over was finish building the teacher training colleges that they had around the country. I don't think anybody thought that was a bad idea. Somehow strengthening public education really needed to happen. They had projects in tropical agriculture which made sense to me. They provided tremendous reconstruction assistance. This gave a positive channel to pro-Biafran instincts. We had to be very careful, because there was always an American tendency to try to bulldoze these things through the Nigerian government. We realized we had to maneuver them into officially asking for it and that was hard to do there for a while. But ultimately, I think our problem was one of a poor image and inappropriate tactics.



*Q: How did you find it was dealing with the Nigerian government?*

CLARKE: I had very different reactions in different parts of the country. For some reason or other, we had good relationships with the Central Bank, which was very helpful, because they were sometimes the most serious of the economists in the country. And we had rather crusty relations with other government agencies where they were annoyed with us and didn't want us messing in their business. I had the feeling that we, as we so often do in the United States, used the catch-phrase, "Leave no stone unturned" or "Tell them the whole story and then we'll see how much they want to buy." The sense was that maximum pressure is always the best way to sell a product, because in American foreign policy a frequent handicap point in that we failed to sell a number of our products, our policies. Our assistance to Eastern Nigeria was delayed month after month after month because Washington kept insisting on going about it in a way that would only satisfy people within the Washington beltway.

*Q: Was there much coordination or good planning with the AID program?*

CLARKE: AID, then and perhaps now, liked to think that they were above and beyond day to day international relations. They were only interested in the long-term economic development of the country. But the coordination was pretty poor. The figures we were reporting on what was going to happen in the petroleum sector and therefore in the financial sector were as if it were a different country from the one the AID program was being directed to. And rightfully so perhaps. The AID people would say, "Yes, the petroleum sector was all an export sector. It did not have great linkages back into Nigeria." If the earnings were wasted, that meant they really weren't there. I think we would have wanted to show exports of benefit to the rest of the country.

I left in '72. In '72 some of the things we predicted in 1970 were starting to happen. But the wholesale collapse of institutions happened later. The one institution I remember that was in collapse while I was there was the port. That had already collapsed. That was a special case.

*Q: One would hear reports about ships being in the Lagos port for six months and paying demurrage every day and for the crew and everything else.*

CLARKE: Right.

*Q: Were you all involved in cleaning up the mess?*

CLARKE: I actually walked around the port itself and reported on this from time to time. At one point the military government got fed up and took this young, very short Colonel who had been very effective at one phase of the war and sent him in there to clean up the mess. He did a brilliant job. Everybody was scared to death of him, and all of a sudden they cleaned the port out very quickly. Then they had to return to a more commercial basis, in which people could account for property, transactions would occur legally, and damage was minimized and all those kinds of things. They gradually slowed back down a bit. But he showed how quickly things could be changed, that they were not inherently failures. The port was not inherently a failure and was allowed to run on its own.

*Q: What about social life there?*

CLARKE: There was a lot of social life within the expatriate community and not a lot of social contact with the Africans. I think people tried to have such contacts but it wasn't easy to work out. Some people were more successful at it. I was not very successful. When I invited Nigerians to events at my house or elsewhere, it was hard to persuade them to come. Maybe that was because I was doing something wrong, but I'm not sure what.

*Q: Just to be difficult. I think we might stop at this point. I'd like to put at the end here where we'll pick it up the next time. In 1972 you left Lagos and you went where?*

CLARKE: I came back to the State Department and worked as an analyst on Africa, particularly on Nigeria, but also on some other issues - some economic issues in Africa. But mainly I worked on Nigeria and occasionally substituted for people who worked on other west African countries.

**JOHN HUMMON**  
**Deputy Mission Director, USAID**  
**Lagos (1970-1972)**

*John Hummon was born in 1930 in Ohio. He graduated from Albion College in 1953 and later earned an MA and PhD from the University of Michigan. Mr. Hummon began work at the Agency for International Development in 1960 and worked in Tanzania, Nigeria, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and as the Mission Director in Botswana. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.*

HUMMON: I went to Nigeria. I remember Dr. Hannah calling me in and saying that he wanted me to go to Nigeria to be Mission Director and, while pleased, I was reluctant.

*Q: What year was that?*

HUMMON: That would have been 1970. I didn't particularly want it. I actually had my mind set on going to Indonesia as a Deputy Mission Director. I had been there and felt that would be an appropriate next step in my career. But Hannah had his mind set on having me go to Nigeria. He had a fascination with things Nigerian, and I finally said yes. My name was sent to the White House for clearance. They came back and asked for my political registration, but I didn't have any. We had moved from Virginia to Maryland and I had not registered. So I went and registered as a Democrat. I know some AID officers (I won't mention any names) who changed their registration to Republican in that period. Registering as a Democrat was the wrong thing to do if you were trying to get an important assignment at that time. So, the White House refused to clear me. And this went on for an extended period. Finally, they agreed to clear me as Deputy Director. Hannah was still under that impression that he would eventually secure a clearance for me as Mission Director, and the Nigerians thought that I was coming as the Director (I had earlier been introduced to a high-level Nigerian delegation as the new Director-to-be). But it never happened and eventually the White House was holding up other nominations throughout

the world, unless Dr. Hannah would agree to select a political type as Director in Nigeria.

*Q: But you did go out as Deputy Director?*

HUMMON: Yes

*Q: What was the situation in Nigeria at that time?*

HUMMON: They had emerged from the “Biafran” civil war. There were major animosities among the tribal groups, between the Ibos, on the one hand, and the Yorubas, and Hausa. However, there was much reconstruction that was being undertaken in the East, the former “Biafra.” I spent much of my time on that. In this I worked with Brigadier Obasanjo, who later became President and is President again now. I worked very closely with him.

*Q: What kind of projects were you working on?*

HUMMON: We were rebuilding roads and bridges - infrastructure in the East. However, the main focus of the program throughout Nigeria had been in technical assistance, and in training, and in the development of agricultural and other educational institutions. We had many university contractors working there. It was a large American presence plus a substantial number of local employees. But the situation was changing. The Nigerians had discovered sizeable quantities of oil. The considerable interest that they had in the past in terms of American assistance suddenly was muted. They began to feel that they really didn’t need our impact as much any more, although they would have welcomed continuing high levels of untied grants or soft loans. There was a diminution in interest in U.S. technical advice. At the same time, Washington started to believe that we didn’t need to be giving much money out there.

So, as it turned out, I went out there in a situation in which very early on it became obvious that there would be a down-sizing. Moreover, I still could not get clearance as Director, and it became apparent quite soon, I believe, to the Nigerians that I was not likely to take over the Director’s position. It was essentially a lame duck situation from the beginning. In all honesty, although there were many, many gratifying experiences and efforts, in many respects it was the least satisfying assignment of my career. There were days when I thought, why did I agree to take this job, given the possibility of various alternatives. But life is like that, isn’t? And the other side of the equation is that there was so much about Nigeria and Nigerians that we loved. We developed excellent relations with many individual Nigerians, and many of the people with whom we worked were exceptionally talented.

*Q: What type of work did you have to do in the down-sizing process?*

HUMMON: Well, you had to tell people that their jobs were going to be abolished; you had to tell contractors that we were not going to extend their contracts, and you had to tell the Nigerians that we were not going to be providing assistance in many areas in which there had been aid in the past. All the while, you were attempting to maintain Mission morale and hold things together. There were accomplishments. We negotiated a program loan - new in the Nigerian program, and essentially new to Africa. We worked out the parameters of a new block grant approach to

assistance which meant a sharp reduction in personnel, and coincidentally, a reduction in levels. Our aid to reconstruction in the East after the “Biafran” Civil War was an important contribution.

*Q: What was the extent of the impact that the program was having at that time?*

HUMMON: I think that the program before my time, in other words, the program historically had had quite a positive impact in terms of developing institutions within the country such as Ahmadu Bello University [agricultural and veterinary colleges] and the Zaria Institute of Public Administration. Also Ife University [agricultural college] and the development of the University of Nigeria in the East were significant contributions. There was considerable training of Nigerians. The AID presence in Nigeria had been basically a very positive experience up to that point. I think that it was at the end of a golden era, if you will, in Nigeria, which unfortunately coincided with my arrival. Things kind of fell apart; we basically phased out of Nigeria; they had discovered oil and they went their own way.

After that period, the Nigerian economy boomed for many years. By the mid-1980s, per capita GDP had actually reached a high of \$1,000. But mismanagement of resources, extensive corruption coupled with serious violations of human rights led to a major reversal in the economic situation, let alone a deterioration in political conditions. Many of the economic gains of the past have been reversed. President Obasanjo and the Nigerian people have a major task ahead in getting the country back on track both economically and politically. In recent years the USAID presence was non-existent or pretty limited, as I understand it - essentially NGOs in family planning and maternal and child welfare and attacking the HIV/AIDS epidemic. That is changing - greater participation is planned with the new democratic government.

*Q: Well you said that you met several times with General Obasanjo. What kind of person is he?*

HUMMON: He was great. Very tough. We traveled together to the East. He was respected within the Nigerian military. While he was from the military, he was very much interested in development as well. He had a wonderful wife. She was a very nice lady. They were really a very special couple.

*Q: Did you find that he was a man of integrity, a man of honesty that you could deal with?*

HUMMON: Yes, I did. I really liked him. I thought he was one of the most dedicated and competent officials. There were many, of course, who were able. But he impressed me especially as a person of real honesty. You know dash in Nigeria was an insidious item, payments to smooth the way for actions being taken. That's not limited to Nigeria, that happens in all countries, not excluding our own in certain types of instances. I felt he was much above that. I was not at all surprised when a few years later he became President, and that he relinquished power to civilian authority. I hope that he and Nigeria do well now.

*Q: His position then was what?*

HUMMON: He was in charge of the Nigerian Corps of Engineers, which was the most powerful element in the army. He had been a hero of the “Biafran” war. He was in charge of new

construction in the East. I just took it upon myself to get very heavily involved in that part because we were kind at a standstill in some of the other areas for a variety of reasons. One was that we were not getting money from Washington, as much money as we had in the past. I guess that was probably as good a reason as any. But there was also a change in the attitude of Nigerians toward U.S. aid.

*Q: What was your recollection or impression of the degree of devastation and the loss of life as a result of the civil war?*

HUMMON: Well, I was there after the fighting, of course. But there was a lot of destruction, considerable physical destruction, and, of course, the stories of the dying and starving of the Africans were very much in evidence. I think it was a very tragic situation, and I think it was one of the first times that the international community began to wake up in a humanitarian sense and say, "Something must be done about this." It was generally more the private community that answered the call and initially inspired the humanitarian response than it was the government. Governments, including our own, were not as responsive initially. But I think AID was very helpful in rebuilding the East, and, as an agency, in eventually helping focus attention upon grave humanitarian concerns world-wide.

*Q: Okay. Anything else on your Nigerian experience?*

HUMMON: I'd like to think that AID, in that period of time, had some impact that was beneficial to the country. I continue to believe that the future of Nigeria can be a great one.

*Q: Well then, you finished up in Nigeria in what year?*

HUMMON: I will add something about Nigeria. AID had excellent relationships with the Embassy, and I want to mention Ambassador Bill Trueheart and Ambassador John Reinhardt, and Ed Mulcahy who was the DCM. They were all terrific. They were very supportive in a difficult time. Mike Adler was there as Mission Director when I first went there, and he was a very good person. The Nigerians were particularly difficult with Ambassador Trueheart; his farewell was essentially a lampooning by the Nigerian spokesman, and totally undeserving. The Nigerians were feeling their oats, and the Americans were now considered somewhat irrelevant or worse.

*Q: Alright. And you left Nigeria when?*

**HOWARD K. WALKER**  
**Political Officer/Consul**  
**Lagos (1970-1973)**

*Ambassador Harold K. Walker was born in Virginia in 1935. He attended the University of Michigan and later Boston University to earn a PhD before serving in the US Air Force. After briefly serving with the CIA, Walker joined the Foreign*

*Service and served overseas in Zaire, Nigeria, Jordan, Tanzania, South Africa and as ambassador to Madagascar and Togo. Ambassador Walker also worked in the Inspection Corps and as vice president of the National Defense University. Walker was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: Off you went to Lagos.*

WALKER: Yes.

*Q: This was from when to when?*

WALKER: I left the first part of January 1970. We had just sold our first house and bought another one, which we still have. So, off we went to Lagos for me to be the number two in the Political Section. I said, "My god, I've never had a foreign posting. I don't know what to do. I know how to assess reports, but I don't really know how to write a report." I always thought, "Why would they do this without a little short course in knowing what reporting formats are?" One guy I grew to admire was Bill Whitman, who had been our ambassador in Togo. I said, "Bill, I've got to go to lunch with you. I don't know how to do this." So, we went to the Foreign Service club for lunch. It still had a dining room then. I said, "How am I going to get anybody to tell me anything? How am I going to get them to tell me secrets? How am I going to get them to level with me? How am I going to get information?" He said, "Howard, anybody who knows anything wants other people to know that they know it." That turned out to be true. I went to Lagos. I found myself as the number two in a three person section, supervising a Foreign Service officer on his second assignment. I won't name any names here, but it was at the time when the head of the section was a guy who had kind of given up. He was a bright guy who had done a book on Turkey, but he really wasn't going on all cylinders there. So, a lot of the leadership of the section came my way. You tend to either fall on your face or run very fast and get some good legs. I was given the responsibility for the former Biafra. But how do you develop contacts? I didn't know anything about that. My predecessor had left me, as I learned was the practice, the names and telephone numbers of some of his. He couldn't stay around very long after I arrived there. That was Fritz Picard, who had been sidetracked off of what was a very fast track career. But he left rather soon. But I picked up some of his contacts and found that Whitman was right: you ask them and they want to show you how much they know.

*Q: You had this battle of Nigeria that went on in the Department of State and within our government over support of Biafra. You had a very strong contingent driven by staffers in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or something like that. It was a very viscous atmosphere over this and within the embassy. Our people who were serving in Biafra became true believers in the Biafran cause. Were you seeing any of the fallout of this when you got there?*

WALKER: Not directly at my level. I did spend a month or two on the Nigeria desk before going out and that was very helpful. I tell you where I saw this. I don't know that I saw in the embassy any conflict between Biafra lovers and federal government lovers the way I later saw conflict in the embassy in South Africa, for example. It was a large embassy, particularly with our AID people. But I'll tell you very dramatically how this was brought home. The ambassador at the time was Bill Trueheart, a pro. He had been DCM in London and came to this job. He was good

for me to have as my first ambassador. He wrote extremely well, did a lot of his own drafting. I attended his country team meetings, those that a second secretary (as I was) were allowed to attend, which were the larger once a week ones. But since I was the guy in the Political Section who for reasons I mentioned earlier was doing most of the section's writing, particularly most of the analysis, I saw more of the ambassador than sometimes second secretaries do. He would edit it with his comments on a lot of mine. But I saw the things he was drafting and they were really sharp. A big issue came up. I've forgotten now exactly the substance of the instruction, but the instruction from Washington was to go in to General Gowen, the head of the federal government, and deliver a very strong message from Washington on the treatment of the former Biafra. Bill Trueheart - as I learned in my career an ambassador sometimes confronts - felt this instruction was unwise both for U.S. interests in Nigeria and for reconciliation on Nigeria. It was this kind of thing that you were driving at. But at the same time, he was a real professional who understood that you don't just go back and tell Washington that this is hairbrained. You have to have an understanding of the dynamics back there that resulted in this instruction and make your point listened to in a way that shows that you have an appreciation of all the various considerations in Washington. I thought he sent back a telegram on this that made these points very well. He argued a substantive point that demonstrated an appreciation of the bureaucratic politics back in Washington in the making of foreign policy. But Bill, being the erudite person he was, had a sentence in there: "Alright, I will bell the cat." That just, we learned later, sent people back here bananas, Under Secretary Nick Katzenbach.

*Q: He was number two.*

WALKER: He was Under Secretary for Political Affairs. He hit the roof. I remember, he came out. I wasn't involved in any of the meetings, wasn't senior enough then even to be a control officer. But the message he brought to Trueheart was, "You carry out these instructions clearly or we'll get someone else." They very quickly did. They yanked this first class officer out of there. That was the end of his career. They sent him to Maxwell Air Force Base as diplomat in residence. Bill retired after that, a great loss. That was my first experience in the conflict of a policy between the field and Washington and the very tight rope that diplomats have to walk in managing that, have to walk not only for the future of their careers but also to get a fair hearing for their policy recommendations.

*Q: This was the first African country, wasn't it?*

WALKER: The first any foreign assignment.

*Q: How did it strike you as a country and Lagos as a city?*

WALKER: I was fascinated. When we got there, we landed... We went on the Pan Am Red Eye Special. We stopped for refueling in Casablanca. Mind you, this was in early 1970. You have to remember the fashions at the time. You got off the plane for a refreshment, my wife and two young children. My wife at that time had not a miniskirt but it was above the knee. That's what they were wearing. Well, we saw all of these people at the airport in Casablanca looking at the planes come in. We learned that the King was coming back from a trip. She and the other ladies were walking in in that fashion at the time and we began to hear these hisses of disapproval from

the Moroccans. That was an experience.

We flew from there to Lagos. It was the first time I had seen West Africa. I had been to Africa when I was with the Agency as an analyst, just a field trip. It was impressive - these huge distances, especially if you flew over the Sahara. There was this huge, desolate desert. We had just gone over the ocean. I was struck by how much more difficult it was to transit that desert than the ocean. Things began to come together - why there was more connection and commerce and exchange of ideas and growth of ideas and commerce across the ocean than there was across that desert. I began to see physically why Africa south of the Sahara was as poor and undeveloped as it was. That transportation and communication route was just so difficult.

We landed in Lagos. This was about two days and two weeks after the end of the civil war. As the plane taxied down the runway, we looked out of the window and there were machine guns trained on us on the way in. A bit unsettling. We drove in to our house through this teeming city. The population density of Lagos is enormous. The poverty is abysmal. We drove in. This was my wife's first taste and my first taste. My predecessor met us at the airport and we drove to our house. He gave us the file on the house. The first couple of pages were reports of antelope knocking down the garage door. Our first night there, getting accustomed to geckos, these little visitors, coming up through the drainage of the sink... One of the big adjustments was that it was the first time in my life I had ever had a servant. He came in and said, "Welcome, Master." I said, "The first thing is that I don't want you to call me 'Master.' I don't like it." I gave him all the historic reasons. I said, "I'd like you to call me Mr. Walker or whatever. But don't call me 'Master.'" He said, "Yes, Master." But we were able to stop that quickly.

What were my other impressions? Teeming people. Poverty. But friendly, easy to get to know. What was for Africa a large diplomatic community at that time.

*Q: What were you doing? What was your actual assignment?*

WALKER: Within the embassy, it turned out that it was running the Political Section. My portfolio was Biafra. So, I developed contacts among the Biafran or Ibo community in Lagos, got to know them and what was on their minds and what they thought about developments and reconciliation going on. That was a lot of my reporting. Also getting to know people, other than Ibo, from eastern Nigeria and seeing how they thought about how that part of the country ought to fit together - and then a couple of field trips out there as well. The first time I went to Biafra I was looking for the big swollen bellies and the red hair from edema and these other illnesses associated with the war and starvation. I didn't see that. I saw some symbols of the war that I had read about in despatches. There were secret runways where the sanction breaker aircraft came in. I saw Ibos digging out their tennis rackets that they had buried during the war and playing tennis in their tennis whites. I thought, "Well, you're getting a firsthand look at how things on the ground are different from the reports you sometimes read, particularly in the media." I got my first experience with missionaries traveling through eastern Nigeria. They were generally an impressive and dedicated bunch of people.

*Q: Had the missionaries for the most part been supportive of the Biafran revolt?*



WALKER: Well, it varied. I'm thinking back... The Catholic missionaries very much were. There were a lot of Pentecostal and others who were simply adapting.

*Q: The Catholic missionaries were mostly French, weren't they?*

WALKER: No, not in Nigeria.

*Q: France got very much involved, I thought, in supporting the Biafrans.*

WALKER: Well, they did, but not for religious reasons. De Gaulle had his own axe to grind. He still bore a grudge that Nigeria held together whereas French speaking West Africa did not. There was some commercial interest in the oil of eastern Nigeria. But, no, the missionaries... It's an English speaking country.

*Q: But sometimes you have Catholics who are coming out of non-national but maybe out of France speaking English.*

WALKER: I don't remember that being a part of this.

*Q: The friends of Biafra were saying, "This is going to be a huge bloodbath if the federal forces take over. It's going to be a great tragedy." Was that in the air or had that been dissipated by the time you got there?*

WALKER: I certainly was aware of it from my time back here in Washington, that six weeks I spent on the desk. But I didn't feel as political officer in Nigeria the pressure of domestic human rights political opinion at home that I felt later in South Africa or even felt in Madagascar in dealing with something we can talk about later - human rights concerns. I didn't see that in Nigeria. Gowan had a pretty good policy of reconciliation at the time, of bringing Biafrans back in and reintegrating eastern Nigeria back into the federation.

*Q: Was Gowan looked upon as a pretty good leader first from the American embassy point of view and then others?*

WALKER: Yes, within the embassy. First of all because he did have a "no victor, no vanquished" policy. He wanted to keep the federation together and realized that he must do it by reintegrating and not occupying eastern Nigeria. He was also a member of a minority tribe himself in the middle belt. He wasn't a Hausa. I wasn't very much involved in my job with the policy and the implementation of our aid programs, but I don't remember hearing a notion among our AID people that the central government was not letting the eastern region get its due share of AID money. We had an awful lot going on food and that kind of basic human needs help.

*Q: Did you find that when you went to Nigeria you got immersed in tribal politics?*

WALKER: Oh, very much so. I was the eastern Nigerian person. We had a consulate in the north where I later became principal officer. They were following the Hausa-Fulani politics. We had a

consulate in Ibadan, which was really our Yoruba politics people. I then came to take over as well the Midwest region of the Ibibios and around Nigerian Benin and the oil producing area . But you couldn't deal at all with any aspect of Nigerian politics without being concerned about the tribal politics dimension of it. Now, at that time, it was a military government. So, tribal politics did not have the scope for expression that it has when you have a legislature and open politics. ut nonetheless, it was there to some degree within the politics of the military and certainly within the politics of Nigerians thinking about after the military government, what? It was in the thinking about the structure of the federation. It was very much involved in the eastern region between the Ibos and the Ibibios. Everyone thinks that Biafra was populated by Ibos, but it was populated by these minority tribes as well. These minority tribes happened to sit on top of the oil deposits to the extent that they were on the ground. So, if Biafra in the USA was concerned about exploitation of Ibos by Hausa-Fulani, the Ibibios were concerned about exploitation by the Ibos. You got very much involved in that kind of thing. And subgroups and subclans of that. So, it was enough to keep someone new to embassy work very busy and interestingly so.

*Q: Did you find that you could just sort of pick a person, a leader or somebody, and go out and see them?*

WALKER: They would see you. One of the other things I learned that Ambassador Whitman didn't tell me, which is true, is that an American diplomat can see almost everyone because they want to be seen by an American diplomat. So, I found on my field trips out into the eastern region when I would request the local authorities to see someone, even the second secretary was able to see them and talk.

*Q: Were you seeing people coming back together again? This was a delicate time.*

WALKER: Coming back together again? I'm not sure they ever were that much together. What I did see was that there was still very much a feeling among the people in my portfolio of the east that we've got to get our act together and take care of ourselves. Even at that time, it was clear that there were going to be regions of smaller groups. There was a leading Ibo politician who was saying, "Our eastern region is a region in a hurry." Everyone was very much involved in developing their own part of Nigeria, not in a secessionist way anymore but just getting on with developing their own. There wasn't so much a sense of national reconciliation to be a member of the nation but just to get our own part of Nigeria going in a way that recognizes the reality of our having to live together with the same national government institutions.

*Q: The Hausa seem to be so completely different from the African.. They seem to be much more attached to the desert culture and all that.*

WALKER: The big difference is all over Nigeria. I taught a course in comparative government and talked about Nigeria and the different cultural identities of people, the different personality types. The Ibos are the most cosmopolitan in the way that they quickly adapt to change and acquire the skills of change, partly because they didn't have as strong traditional societies, cultures, and structures that would hold them there as did the Yoruba in the west or certainly the Hausa in the north. There were differences.

But about this question of reconciliation... I saw the problems of reconciliation more later in my stay in Nigeria. I was in Lagos in the Political Section for the first year of my three year tour there. And then I was sent as principal officer to our consulate in Kaduna in the north. It happened in an interesting way. The principal officer there had his tour curtailed for reasons I don't want to get into. It was curtailed. This was a pretty good assignment. You're a principal officer in a consulate responsible for an area bigger than most of the countries in Africa and with a bigger population and all the rest of it. Ambassador Trueheart said, "I would like you to go up there." He told me he was impressed with my reporting and analysis and development of contacts and that was what he wanted to see up there. So, he recommended to the Assistant Secretary for Africa, David Newsom, that I go. Newsom was a pro himself. As I later learned, he wasn't sure about this idea because I was so new to the Foreign Service, but he agreed to it. So, I went up as principal officer. That was a bigger change for me than my first assignment going to Lagos. Here suddenly I had to meet the press interested in who was the new American consul coming up, photographs of me and my wife, going up and being met not only by the consulate staff but by the local television and newspapers and so on. This is a new Foreign Service in a way doing that. To have one year on the job in the field... Driver, car, nice residence, all of the accoutrements, perks, that go with the added responsibilities. But I got into this question of going up to Kaduna in the context of Nigerian reconciliation. It was the first time I really saw - more so than when I went to Biafra - the problems of reconciliation. We had arranged to come up with us the lady who worked in our house as a maid and nanny. She went up with us. She was a little apprehensive, but I said, "You'll be living right on the compound with us." She went up and told me the problems she was having. She was Christian and Ibo. Not overly dramatic, but I had not seen that before. Then I learned of the different people living in different parts of town. I sensed in a number of different ways that this question of reconciliation and a sense of different people, people who thought of themselves as different from each other, more strongly in the north. Of course, later on, it became tragically expressed in riots and killings and so on that still go on to this day.

*Q: How did you find dealing with the authorities in the north?*

WALKER: Again, I was the American consul. That was a great incentive for them to deal with me. I found the people of the north, the authorities and regular people, greatly different, much more reserved, not unfriendly, but more difficult to get to know. The Ibos are cosmopolitan. The Yorubas are a nation of used car salesman personality types - outgoing, backslapping. One of the ways I remember is, when I would go on R&R from the north, none of my friends there ever asked me to bring back anything for them. When I went on R&R in Lagos, one of my friends, a Yoruba, asked me to bring something back. I said, "What's that?" He said, "A windshield." I can't get that in my suitcase. I don't mean that as a pejorative comment. It's just that I was his friend; I was going back; this is what you ask people to do. In the north, they're very reserved and wouldn't think of asking anything like that. So, that was one part of it. The other was entertaining. Very rarely did you get an invitation to someone's home in the north. When they came to your house, if it was a mixed gender thing, they had several wives in a Muslim area - and one would be the wife for the ex-pats. She could speak some English or do some other things that would blend in with the other guests. But they were much more difficult to meet. But yet some of our most lasting friends in Nigeria we met up in the north, very genuine friends. Another

difference is just calling on the emirs. It's like going back to the days of *Ivanhoe*. I'll never forget when I called on the Emir of Kono, an interesting guy. He was a thoroughly modern man who had been Nigeria's ambassador to Senegal. But his call came to be the Emir of Kono and he knew what the better job was. So, he went back to that job of Emir of Kono. I called on him and was taken into a separate building where guests waited. In Kono it was hot. It can get to be 104-110 degrees up there. But with these thick walls, it's very cool. You wait and then are told when the Emir is ready to receive you. You walk through this garden where these guys are out there rolling on the grass in these beautifully colored gowns shouting things, singing the praises of the Emir. They're paid praise singers. I told the story to my staff when I went back, as an example of the way they should behave. So that was different to see that - not only the Emir, but the Sultan of Sokoto. We were able to get the Apollo 11 astronauts to visit. I had invited people from all over the north, including emirs. They all wanted to outdo each other. The Sultan of Sokoto came down in his Rolls Royce with his musicians holding these 12 foot trumpets blowing all the way down. So, that's part of the color.

*Q: I always think of these horsemen dressed in...*

WALKER: For the Durbars, yes. They had a great deal of that for the visit of Haile Selassie. You'd see these horses dressed as splendidly as the men, the Emirs with the umbrellas over them, and the snake charmers. The North's Hausa-Fulani embraced this *Ivanhoe* kind of pageantry, but also some of the northern minority tribes. They would be in the parade as well along with the splendidly dressed Emir and his horse and his court. You would see these guys coming from the bush whose talent was to expand their bellies half their size, the snake charmers, the acrobats, and so on. Great show. That one was for Haile Selassie and the governor of the state where we were, gave him a garden party reception. I remember going to meet Selassie and shook his hand and he had the most penetrating eyes I've ever seen.

*Q: What were our interests up in the north? Was it just monitoring?*

WALKER: It was. We had no real commercial interests at that time. Peanuts were the major export. We did some sales but not very much. It was political listening because, look, the north dominated the army and there were a couple of major military installations up there. I got to know the commanders of those very well. It was going around vast distances to all of the centers of government up there and having our presence felt and picking up what understanding one could of the north's agenda in federal government issues and federal politics issues but also among friends. I mentioned that I got to know a number of the military leaders well up there. One experience was particularly instructive to me for the rest of my career. I got to know a guy named General Bisala who lived just up the street from me. He was commander at the major military installation in the north, which was in Kaduna. What a fascinating man. He was a neighbor. I'd walk by and I would often find him after lunch sitting home listening to classical music and reading some things I wish I had read when I was a much younger man. He was experimenting with raising different kinds of turkeys and vegetables on his compound. He was a very well cultivated man. He would talk to me regarding his responsibilities and confidentialities, and we would talk in an open way. I first met at his house a certain colonel at that time, Obasanjo, who is the present president. I got to know General Bisala and his wife very well. They gave us a very nice farewell dinner. He was a person you would want to know

anywhere. He was from the northern middle belt. When I next met Obasanjo, it was a meeting that he and some others were having at the airport in Kaduna, and they were meeting in the VIP lounge. I just poked my head in there to say "Hello" to everyone and they looked shocked as if they were discussing something very, very private. Not too long after I left Nigeria, there was a coup attempt in which General Bisala was said to be involved. I remember seeing on the pages of "Time" magazine a picture of him tied up at the firing squad stake just before he was executed. I thought, "My God, I know this guy." The first person I knew in my career (I got to know others later elsewhere) for whom the stakes turned out to be so high. I thought, "What a waste of this very cultivated man, very competent man, tied up at the stake just before his execution." It made me realize the discussions we would have in the evening - when we would discuss issues, I didn't realize at the time what a personal stake he had in them. It made me reflect later in my career when I'd talk to political leaders in other countries to try to understand that aspect of their perspective on issues, that if they lose, they lose big time, they lose a lot, whereas I'm looking at it simply in terms of an analysis, in terms of U.S. interests and maybe some wider interests as well, but certainly none as fundamental as my life on the line.

*Q: After elections in the United States, you don't see Americans moving to other countries.*

*What was the role of the British government and their expatriates?*

WALKER: Commercially it was dominant in Lagos. My contact in the British embassy in Lagos was my counterpart in their political section. We would exchange views on the reintegration of the Ibos into the country. But I did that with others, too. I would not say I found the British more informed than we were on those things. I'm sure my colleagues in the embassy on the commercial and economic sides had more to do with them in terms of commercial competition. The British were dominant. There were still a lot of old connections, including with Gowan, who had gone to Sandhurst. There were certainly a lot of connections in the military, a lot of connections in the judiciary. When I was in the north, the chief justice of the high court in the north was a New Zealander. So, there were those kinds of connections. I don't have the memory of British expats in Nigeria being as standoffish from the Nigerians as my memory of the whites in South Africa being standoffish to the Africans or the British standoffish to the Afrikaners. Somehow one got the feeling that those Brits who came out to Nigeria to stay had adapted, probably more so than those in East Africa, maybe because there were not so many of them.

*Q: Was there a reflection of what was happening in French West Africa where the Americans for maybe up to today in some places are looked upon with suspicion as threatening their privileged position?*

WALKER: Not politically. I'm sure Shell-BP and others had that sort of feeling in terms of oil exploration. In other commerce, I don't think they had that much competition from the United States. But sure, they would be intent on holding their own. But I know what you're referring to in Francophone Africa, the French being concerned that the Americans were edging them out. Well, that's part of the French being French. It's also a part of French-American relations in other parts of the world. It just didn't characterize our political relations with the British.

**JACK SHELLENBERGER**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1970-1973)**

*Jack Shellenberger joined the USIS in 1955. In addition to Nigeria, he served in Japan, Iran, Vietnam, Canada, and Nigeria. This interview was conducted by Lew Schmidt on April 21, 1990.*

SHELLENBERGER: I'd been on the job in Brussels now for about four years and I got a call from Henry Loomis asking if I'd meet him in Paris. He wanted to talk to me. Well, what he wanted to talk about was the Lagos, Nigeria PAOship, which is the biggest in Africa. It would be the conventional USIS operation, as contrasted to the USEC operation. After talking it over with Jill and Katie and now Karen -- who I should have mentioned, was the highlight of our Bologna stay.

She had been on the way but then was born on my birthday, December 28, 1964, in this Bologna University Hospital. Her doctor, of course, was out for the holidays and Karen was delivered by a midwife who had no English. Jill was Rh-negative so I had this grave concern that there would have to be an immediate blood transfer if the tests indicated such. So I was yelling up and down the corridor, "Rh-negativo, Rh-negativo!" And as it turned out, it was fine and there was no transfusion required and mother and daughter did well.

And now here we were four years later, on the verge of going to Nigeria in West Africa, another totally different culture and professional experience. It was a direct transfer. The job I hold now insists that people going to post have some kind of area studies and ideally both area and language studies. But my area studies consisted of three novels that I was able to find in a Brussels bookstore, one by Chinua Achebe and one by Cyprian Ekwensi, and of course another by Wole Soyinka. And in the weeks I had to prepare for our trip, getting our shots and all that, from Brussels to Nigeria, I managed to read these. I've since decided or determined that if you're not going to get area studies, try to get a contemporary novel about the country to which you're assigned, or two or three. It can do a lot for you, filling in the gaps, especially if you don't know the region. And that certainly was the case with these books.

*Q: At the time you were assigned to Nigeria, had the so-called Biafran revolution or civil war terminated? Or was it still going on?*

SHELLENBERGER: We arrived on a weekend and Bill Trueheart was the Ambassador. He immediately invited us over to his residence for supper, just the Truehearts and Jill and me, Katie and Karen remained at home with the housekeeper. It was while eating that Bill said, "I think we'd better get the radio on, we've been getting all kinds of hints." So we turned on the radio, shortwave, fooling around from channel to channel. We came across a French report that both he and I could understand that said in effect the Ojukwu party had left what was then called Biafra by some people. And we turned to the frequency of the secessionist radio station and it was playing funereal music. So, yes, I arrived just as the civil war ended.

What struck me about that period is two things. One is that the United States was in very low esteem in the eyes of the leadership of Nigeria for being at least sentimentally favoring the Ibo rebellion. And, two, the extraordinary lack of vindictiveness on the part of Nigerians of all tribal affinities in terms of letting the Ibo come back without a lot of humiliation. And indeed, I don't believe there were any executions in the aftermath of the civil war, and a great deal of generosity was shown in terms of sharing relief supplies. I often contrast that kind of attitude with what I have seen so often in so many parts of the world in the aftermath of a civil war, which is a wretched time for the loser.

*Q: Not only in other parts of the world, but Africa has been particularly bloody when there's been a forcible change of administration or attempted coup. I think it was a very remarkable situation and probably a recognition of the great competence of the Ibos, who are generally considered to be the most intelligent of the African tribes in that country. Jack, I think you had some different thoughts about that. Incidentally, this is May 12 when we're resuming this interview. Would you pick it up from there, then?*

SHELLENBERGER: You see, the Ibos had a leg up on the other tribes, having been much more receptive to the Christianity offered by missionaries who came to Nigeria at the turn of the century, establishing educational centers, hospitals, etc. And the Ibo saw opportunities for education and took advantage of them and became the nucleus of Nigeria's civil service, both under the British and after independence. But I think the picture today is a whole lot less weighted in favor of the Ibo in terms of competence. The Hausa, the Yoruba with a Nobel prize winning author in the person of the playwright, Wole Soyinka. The present regime is mainly of Hausa extraction and has been for a good many years. The university in the north, Ahmadou Bello, is a great clearinghouse for Hausa intellectual talent.

What I found about the Nigerians was an aggressive candor in letting you know where they're coming from. It was always refreshing to sit around in a coffee shop or a cafe and rap with them, whatever their tribal background, because it was laying it out on the table. The regime of General Gowon, which was the victor in the civil war, had maintained a very cool relationship with the U.S. Embassy. In fact, Ambassador Trueheart at the time had not been able to make any more than pro forma calls on any of Gowon's chief decision takers, but with the end of the civil war, out came first David Newsom, the Assistant Secretary for Africa Affairs, and soon after Bill Rogers in one of his early trips as Secretary of State. The Rogers visit was a great success. Rogers was able to see the leadership, including Gowon, and I felt the atmosphere changed for the better with that visit. It's one of my early recollections of how a high-level U.S. visitor can change the climate, especially in countries which are ruled by a single party or a single authority.

The doors opened a few months later even wider with the arrival in Nigeria of Davis Cup tennis stars Arthur Ashe and Stan Smith who were at the peak of their careers. They were as well known to Nigerians as they were to Americans and the elite of Nigeria were tennis players. The Smith-Ashe visit was considered to be, as was the case some years later equivalent to a visit by American astronauts or the arrival of a piece of the moon, a moon rock. All of these are the sorts of things that USIS got heavily involved in orchestrating. And I think on the whole quite successfully.

*Q: Did Trueheart continue on as Ambassador very long after the Roger visit? Or was he replaced, and if so by whom?*

SHELLENBERGER: He was replaced I would say within three or four months of the Rogers visit, that is, toward the end of summer of 1970 by none other than John E. Reinhardt who was coming out of USIA as the Director for African Affairs. I think his three or four year tenure was probably the one in which relations between our two countries normalized to a greater extent than had been the case for some years, perhaps since independence. In Nigeria we had branch USIS posts in Kano and Kaduna in the north, in Benin City, which is right in the middle of Nigeria, and Ibadan, which is considered to be the most populated sub-Saharan city in all of Africa. USIS maintained there centers which had informational materials and films which were patronized by students, especially, and by academics and to some extent the media. One of the prized programs that we contributed to as an Agency was Floyd Arpan's program at the University of Indiana which welcomed foreign journalists for a combined study and working visit at a U.S. regional newspaper. We nominated the editor of the most independent of Lagos' many newspapers who benefited from the program and came back to Nigeria and organized a journalist study center which became an institution. His own fortunes brightened when the return to civil rule took place and he was named governor of Lagos state. As for today, I just don't know.

*Q: The one and only time I came to Nigeria was shortly after you had become the PAO there. I remember I spent two or three days in Ibadan at that time. In those days the university at Ibadan was, I understand, considered the principal university of the country. Is that still the case or was it still the case when you left?*

SHELLENBERGER: I would say it is second probably to Lagos University by virtue of Lagos' proximity to the present-day capital. But all this can change if the Lagos administrative capital is shifted to another part of the country, more central part of the country. That move is supposedly in progress but it is rather slow. Ibadan no doubt was the intellectual center of Nigeria with people like Soyinka and others pretty much rooted there. And when visiting scholars came to Nigeria, it was Ibadan to which they headed. Ibadan also is the home of a tropical agricultural institute which is funded by the Ford Foundation and has been doing outstanding work in crop productivity and eradication of pests and other problems.

One of my -- I suppose I had made three very close friends in Nigeria that continued well after I left. Babatunde Jose was the editor and publisher of the Lagos Daily Times, which was the paper of record, if there is a paper of record. Cyprian Ekwensi. Cyprian is an Ibo. He had survived during the war; he didn't leave the country as Chinua Achebe did but Cyprian, like Chinua, was a very well known novelist. And after the war he was given the state library to oversee. And of course I was helpful in getting reference materials for that library. We became good friends and he would come to Lagos periodically and we would do the town. In Lagos, doing the town begins at 11:30 at night. And then it's still pretty early for the bars. They really started happening at 1:00 in the morning or after. And that was great fun.

The other friend was from Benin City and he was the editor of the newspaper there. His name was Pious Agun. He also was a writer, and a highly idealistic man with whom I felt total rapport.



So there were three people in the communication arts, if you will.

I remember when we organized an African writers conference, Cyprian was in the forefront of that effort. From the United States came John Updike and his wife at that time. I looked for some feedback from that two or three day event in Updike's subsequent work, including The Coup, but there's no trace of his Nigerian experience in his subsequent writing.

*Q: Do you think that Updike used the general African background that he found in Nigeria as a leader or base for his work The Coup or did it seem not to be related at all?*

SHELLENBERGER: It didn't seem related at all, as I looked through The Coup.

*Q: I read the book but it's been a number of years now and I've rather forgotten. It seemed like a sort of comic opera kind of treatment.*

SHELLENBERGER: Oh, yes. It was -- whereas he was all seriousness at the conference. And I think he was doing a lot of listening as he heard from fellow writers and their agonies. He was again like Ashe and Smith but in a different way, tremendously successful as a personality.

Our stay in Nigeria, 1970 to '73, coincided with the oil boom and by the time we left Nigeria was awash in the stuff and importing like crazy. We would go out to Tarkwa Bay where the best beaches were and look out in astonishment at the waiting line of freighters, endless number of freighters, waiting admission to the port to offload what the big money had ordered, Mercedes or the like. And the demobilization of the military troops after the war of course meant there was a lot of unemployment. These people had retained their weapons, so security deteriorated rapidly. There were constant break-ins. We went on home leave to an SPCA farm and brought back a Labrador retriever who was the gentlest thing in the world, but just the presence of an animal like that would deter people from entering our yard.

As '73 turned, I was wondering what next would be on my plate. I had been offered a Deputy Directorship for the East Asia area a year before, but I wanted to work with John Reinhardt another year and so I said I'd stay. Now there wasn't a similar opportunity. Finally they called and said there's a policy job at the Voice, which I was reluctant to take because I had always felt that policy articulation can be a very subjective thing, and when it is decreed from across town, as was the case in those days, this is what you will do and this is what you won't do, without a whole lot of why, you felt like you were being a mouthpiece, a peddler of somebody else's product and not being in on its creation.

*Q: Before we go into the continuation of your thought there, I'd like to ask a couple more questions about Nigeria. Some of them are substantive and one or two of them are more just factual. Was English still the prime language of the country? Was it the official language?*

SHELLENBERGER: Yes, it was the official language and it was the prime language. It was taught everywhere. And would remain so in my view because if one or another of the languages spoken in Nigeria were to rise ahead of the others, it would engender lots of feelings of resentment.

*Q: How long did it take for whatever bitterness remained from the war to more or less dissipate? First of all, with reference to the American point of view, and secondly with reference to the natural feeling of resentment that might pertain against the Ibos by virtue of their insurrection?*

SHELLENBERGER: There would be scattered instances where Ibo communities would be attacked. But usually based on misinformation. Nigeria is a country of marketplaces where the rumor mill is constant. And rumors feed upon rumors and can lead to flare-ups. It may be Hausa directed, it may be Ibo directed, it may be Yoruba. But as the months passed I felt that the overriding animosity dissipated and was displaced by the more localized flare-up, based on maybe an accusation that somebody stole or somebody charged the wrong price. Or a clandestine radio broadcast that said Ojukwu's coming back. That was broadcast on April 1 one year and it was an April Fool's thing. But it was taken seriously by some people.

As for the U.S., I thought we were on a continual rise from the moment I arrived, having nothing to do with me, but the receptivity to us and to our policies was more and more apparent.

George Bush was the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and he came to Nigeria. We thought this was going to be a very tough visit because George in the U.N. had made of course known that we were anti-apartheid, but taking sweeping sanctions against the regime was at that time not American policy and we were fairly isolated, at least in terms of how black Africa felt. There was a roundtable arranged at the Center for Foreign Affairs in Lagos which would feature George Bush defending U.S. policy. You can imagine the number of movers and shakers who wanted to get into that event and would be ready to tear him to pieces, at least verbally.

I remember a ranking member of the regime was Colonel Obasanjo who later became the head of government in Nigeria. He was articulate and vehement, but George Bush was also articulate, and also very steady. And as they talked, I saw the character of the negotiator in Bush more magnified than at any other even in which I had been in his presence. He was in the mode of, "Come, let us reason together." And pretty soon Obasanjo's rhetoric began to modify and by the end of two hours the two were if not in agreement there was a sense of understanding and respect and let us work together to sort of carve out a relationship between ourselves that will tend to ameliorate the condition in South Africa. It was quite an unusual -- well, quite a display of statesmanship on the part of the then American Ambassador to the U.N. Barbara Bush was with him, and because I believe Mrs. Reinhardt was away, Jill had a lot to do with Barbara Bush, at least a good chunk of her schedule. I remember coming home as Barbara Bush was leaving a luncheon that Jill had organized and I talked to her a bit. Jill told me later what a refreshing and warm personality she had been with this group of high achieving Nigerian women, that she was really a trooper. And this was not the first stop, this was well into a tour of some duration.

Another personality I should mention is now the president of the General Assembly of the United Nations. His name was Joe Garba. He was head of Gowon's, not palace guard, but his special security group. Garba's great love was basketball. I discovered there was an ex-Peace Corps basketball coach teaching in the sports program at Ahmadou Bello University in Kaduna. And he came -- Garba arranged for him to come down to do something in the barracks where the head of state was living and to help with their basketball program. I mentioned the idea of

bringing the Peace Corps back. The Peace Corps had been unwelcomed in Nigeria since the start of the civil war because the volunteers had been active in the Ibo area. Why not a sports Peace Corps program? Well, that would fly. I believe the next year they brought in 5 Peace Corps sports specialists.

Now I'm to the VOA?

*Q: Couple of more questions. What did you think was the main thrust of your policy program in the Nigerian country while you were there? What were you trying to achieve in addition to improving the reputation of the United States in the period just after the civil war?*

SHELLENBERGER: Well, clearly to promote reconciliation, and to do so by explaining what the United States intentions were with respect to Nigeria and Africa in general. They were objectives with which Africans could find some solace.

*Q: Did you have anything to do with trying to explain our policies with reference to South Africa at that time? Other than the Bush session that you just discussed.*

SHELLENBERGER: The Agency arranged for a group of I think seven PAOs from various parts of Africa to go to South Africa and spend two or three weeks meeting with all of the opinion groups and to go to Soweto, to go to the heart of the Afrikaans institutions. We met with the liberal people, Suzman, and we met with Alan Payton. So we had a very full picture of what was going on in that society and came back sorely troubled by it and not sanguine as to what was going to happen.

Now whether that equipped me to defend U.S. policy in Southern Africa, I don't know. But I do know that our Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, who had been my predecessor in Nigeria, Bev Carter, tall, good-looking Black American, had gone to South Africa and preached the anti-apartheid gospel. And that of course was replayed throughout Africa and I think was a very real help to our image with respect to that issue.

**VICTOR D. COMRAS**  
**Economic Reporter**  
**Ibadan (1971-1972)**

*Victor D. Comras was born in New York State in 1943. Comras graduated from Georgetown University in 1964, the University of Florida Law School in 1966, and promptly joined the Foreign Service. While in the Foreign Service, Comras served overseas in Zaire, Nigeria, South Africa, France, Canada and Macedonia. He also worked on the Law of the Sea negotiations. Comras was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

COMRAS: I had a very positive view about ACDA and the important role it played in building the foundation for WMD stability in a dangerous world. Some very positive steps were taken at

that time to reduce the nuclear threat. These included the SALT agreements, which represented the first major reduction in nuclear weapons. During his first 4 years in office Nixon was a very strong, respected president. Of course, Watergate followed, and destroyed his presidency. When the Watergate scandal broke, I was already overseas again. This time in Ibadan, Nigeria.

*Q: You went there from '71 to when?*

COMRAS: I arrived in Ibadan in the summer of 1971. I left Ibadan on a direct transfer about 10 months later. I was supposed to stay in Ibadan for a 2 year assignment. I was not unhappy to have the chance to leave earlier.

In my view Ibadan was a post too many in Nigeria at that time. Apparently the State Department agreed and marked Ibadan for early closing. In 1971 was hit by a major budgetary crisis. The Department began looking at how it could downsize its presence overseas, particularly in Africa. There was discussion about consolidating posts and establishing regional embassies. Of course, special attention focused on the need to maintain consulates in addition to embassies. While Ibadan had been important during the period of Nigeria Confederation, it had lost most of its political importance following the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War. That War really ended confederation in Nigeria, and led to the centralization of political power in the capital. There was very little interest in our reporting from Ibadan. In fact, the Department even complained that our consulate - which then had 7 officers was 'over-reporting' items of marginal interest. The Department decided to either downsize or close Ibadan, and I was direct transferred to Durban, South Africa, where a vacancy needed to be filled quickly.

*Q: Let's talk about Ibadan, '71 to '72. What was the situation there? This was in Biafra?*

COMRAS: No, Ibadan was the capital of Nigeria's Western Province (Yorubaland). I was there just at the tale end of the Biafran War.

*Q: Biafra is not even a term that's used anymore.*

COMRAS: The war did not touch Ibadan, or the Western State directly. It was centered in the Eastern Province, then known as Biafra. But the Biafran war had an enormous impact on all of Nigeria and changed dramatically the whole way in which Nigeria governed itself. It changed the country from a confederation to one where the power resided with a military click in Lagos. Before the war the various provinces or regions held most of the power with a relatively weak central government in Lagos. The Biafran secession had led to the strengthening of the central government at the cost of the regional government and capitals. All power ended up in Lagos with the regional governments playing a decreasingly important role. When Nigeria had become independent, it seems appropriate for us to have consulates in each of the regional capitals. That rationale lapsed after the Biafran war. By the time I was assigned to Ibadan, the Yoruba leaders were no longer playing an important national political role. Control was in the hands of a military government in Lagos. What was happening in Ibadan was of less and less interest to policymakers in Washington. So, the decision was made to close that post.

*Q: What were you doing while you were there?*

COMRAS: Not much. We had 7 American officer at Ibadan, Nigeria. What we were doing mostly was squabbling among ourselves for whatever there was to do. There wasn't enough to go around. I was mainly responsible for economic reporting. I took a number of field trips and tried to keep Washington and the Embassy in Lagos aware of the deteriorating economic conditions in the interior of the country. But, much of the reporting we produced as a post was of only very marginal value.

*Q: Where did the Yorubas fit in? How would you characterize them?*

COMRAS: The Yoruba's constituted one of the more important groups in Nigeria. They had provided Nigeria with some of it's most important political leaders in the post-independent period. But, here was also a building tension between them and the Hausa Fulanis in the north. Yoruba's were mostly Christian. Hausa Fulanis were uniformly Moslem. They felt they were being disposed by the Yoruba leadership when it came to running the country. The Hausa Fulanis, however, did control the arms forces. It was almost inevitable that they would take over the government. The Biafrans, like the Yoruba's feared the growing power of the Hausa Fulanis. Since Biafra controlled Nigeria's Oil Wealth, they thought they would be better off pulling out of the Nigeria confederation, precipitating the Biafran War.

The Yorubas will always be a major player in Nigeria, but they are likely to be held in check by Nigeria's military leadership, which is much more strongly oriented towards the North. With movement of the capital to the north of Nigeria, there has been a diminution of Yoruba authority even more. Where that will go in the future, I have no idea. I've been away from it too long. This is a 1970s perspective of Nigeria.

*Q: Did you feel that you were becoming an African hand by this time?*

COMRAS: I thought it was likely that I would remain in the African Bureau. I enjoyed it. I didn't know how I was going to take to South Africa, after having served in Zaire and Nigeria. I was also concerned that serving in South Africa might be a negative in building a career in the rest of the African bureau. At that time South Africa was a world apart. I could not help but wonder what I would do after South Africa. My record in Durban was a very strong, and I thought I had left a very good impression on those leading the Bureau at that time. Maybe not. The next assignment that came out of the system for me was to the international Spokane Fair. To this day, I have no idea where that assignment came from.

*Q: Who was our ambassador when you were in Nigeria?*

COMRAS: Ambassador Reinhart.

*Q: Were you watching the absorption of functions by the military in Yorubaland at that point?*

COMRAS: What we were seeing were the frustrations of the political leadership of the Yorubas. They felt powerless to deal with the issues in the way that they wanted to deal with them. The military had taken hold of the whole country. A Military Governor was appointed to run the

Western Region. Civilian politicians appeared powerless. Some of them sought to build pressure to push the military out, but they were not strong enough to do that. They were simply frustrated.

*Q: Had the oil wealth begun to hit the area? One heard about the tremendous backlog of ships and all this.*

COMRAS: Oil was at a standstill because of the Biafran war. It was just coming back on line while I was there. But, remember, while oil was important to Nigeria, it was a coastal commodity. It had no direct benefit at that time for the economy of the Western region. The only oil up where we were was cocoa oil - and the price for Cocoa was down at that time.

*Q: You were doing economic work. What was the cocoa market like at that time?*

COMRAS: It was not that good. This was not a prosperous period for Ibadan or Yorubaland.

*Q: Was cocoa sort of taken care of by a cocoa board in London?*

COMRAS: Yes, but of course we reported on local attitudes on the crop, on projections on the crop, other economic activities, whatever they might be. But it was a pretty depressing story at that point.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the cultural life of the area?*

COMRAS: Very much. Of our 7 officers, 2 of them were U.S. Information Service officers. Ibadan also boasted a good university - the University of Ibadan, which was a major cultural center for Nigeria. The Yoruba people are a very artistic people. They have produced a number of Nigeria's most famous artists and the world's most famous artists of African descent. So it was a rich cultural life.

*Q: How did you feel about going on? Did it bother you too much to be leaving there?*

COMRAS: No, I was delighted to be reassigned for a number of reasons, most important of which was boredom.

**FREDERICK E. GILBERT**  
**Evaluation Officer, USAID**  
**Lagos (1971-1973)**

*Frederick E. Gilbert was born in Minnesota in 1939. He graduated from the University of Minnesota and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Upon joining USAID in 1964, his assignments abroad included Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Tanzania, Sudan, Ivory Coast and Mauritania. Mr. Gilbert was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.*

GILBERT: After Ghana I went to Nigeria.

*Q: And what year was this?*

GILBERT: And I went there as Evaluation Officer in February of 1971.

*Q: What was the situation in Nigeria when you got there in 1971?*

GILBERT: Mike Adler was still Mission Director. John Hummon was the Deputy Director. I was one of several people who reported to the Assistant Director for Program (AD/P). I believe that position had recently been vacated by Gordon Evans. Besides my new position, the AD/P supervised a capital development staff, an economics staff, a training staff and the Program Office per se, which was the core and largest unit. The Program Office was headed by a Chief. As I recall, Bob Huesmann was Chief of the Program Office and Acting Assistant Director for Program. (It's possible that Bob had been confirmed in the AD/P role). Dennis Barrett, as the most senior Assistant Program Officer, was at least the Acting Chief of the Program Office and may have been confirmed in that role. When Bob Huesmann left shortly after I got there, Bob Berg, head of a capital development staff, served for a time as Acting Assistant Director for Program. Eventually Walter Furst came out as Assistant Director for Program and everyone reverted to their normal places. I was there as Program Evaluation Officer and all these Program Office ructions affected me very little, except that they generated uncertainties and tensions.

But Mike Adler was transferred back to Washington or to another overseas assignment; I can't remember which. And John Hummon was Acting Mission Director for quite a long time. (I'm sorry for dredging all this up – it must be like listening to the “begats” in the Bible. Unfortunately, it's the way my retrieval system works.) This was an extremely difficult period in the relationship between the U.S. and Nigerian governments.

*Q: Why was that?*

GILBERT: It was because the U.S. government had adopted a neutral posture during the civil war. To the Nigerians, that amounted to supporting Biafra. And they felt, in effect, that the U.S. government owed them something like reparations. They never went so far as to say that explicitly, but they made it plain that by their behavior that they thought we owed them something.

Meanwhile, the U.S. government's collective mind was oppressed by the knowledge that the Nigerians' substantial oil revenues were being largely squandered. Their oil revenues made the Nigerians impervious to donor influence. That being so, it was hard to justify continuing to spend heavily on a wide range of quite good institutional development projects around the country. So, USAID needed to phase down this technical assistance program. Meanwhile, the Nigerians felt we “owed them” an increased level of assistance. When they realized which way the wind was blowing, the Nigerians were resentful.

AID's intent to cull and compress may have a factor in the decision to add a Program Evaluation Officer to the Mission's staff roster. Be that as it may, I found myself pouring my energies into

that process during my first year in Lagos. A schedule was set up calling for me to lead evaluations of most technical assistance projects. I spent a lot of time on Nigeria Airways that year. I also met a lot of new people – most of whom were less than pleased to see me coming.

*Q: Doing these evaluations yourself?*

GILBERT: Yes and no. I was the point person in USAID Nigeria, but the methodology called for the evaluation process to be participatory – not just for warm fuzziness' sake but because one couldn't hope to get it right without the cooperation of the technical division and the project technical advisory team who were mostly, but at this point in time, not exclusively contract people. I was also backed by an embryonic evaluation staff in Washington. I was among the first group of fulltime evaluation officers. We used an evaluation methodology that had been developed by a contractor called Practical Concepts International (PCI). Larry Posner and his colleague, Leon Rosenblum, I think, were the principals. I got to know Larry pretty well. He was extremely smart and a great trainer.

The methodology that Rosenblum and Posner developed was based on something called the "logical framework" It's probably inappropriate to couch it in these terms since it has literally become a household expression throughout AID and much of the wider international development community. The term "innovative" was used too freely and loosely even in those days. But this was truly innovative, a breakthrough. Now it seems obvious that a project can't be evaluated (or even properly implemented) unless there is agreement as to what problems and opportunities it is directed at, how it is to affect them and how one defines the desired outcome. Before then evaluations tended to focus mainly on whether the inputs were delivered. The new methodology asked the additional question of whether the "development hypothesis" was born out, i.e. did the inputs (resources plus actions taken by the implementers) produce the predicted outcome?

And as I recall, Bill Kontos and Allison Herrick were the moving spirits behind this in Washington. And there was a conference in Addis Ababa for the new recruits – mostly younger program officers - who were tasked with dealing with the latest AID/W "fad". Well, about the only good thing I could see about it at the time was that I got to go to Addis to be indoctrinated. Most of us at that workshop arrived highly skeptical. By the end of it, we were impressed with the methodology, but still skeptical about the prospects for shoehorning the amount of evaluation activity the new guidelines called for into the programming cycle. Although Bill, Allison and the PCI guys all emphasized how little staff time would be required, it couldn't have been more clear to us "sherpas" that they were either mistaken or blowing smoke. So, when I arrived in Lagos to be one of five-to-ten fulltime Program Evaluation Officers around the AID world, the only preparation I had was this session in Addis. And I think I had a "handy-dandy" little packet of materials.

When I got to Nigeria I was pleased that the Mission actively wanted its technical assistance projects evaluated. I was very busy from the get-go. I remember being distressed that I didn't have time to hold up my end of the only dispute I ever had with an Executive Office about an unreasonable housing assignment. (I made it work by having triple-decker bunk beds made so our three boys could all fit in one bedroom.)



I remember going up to Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) at Samaru near Zaria and evaluating the Kansas State University (KSU)–implemented Faculty of Agriculture project and the University of Pittsburgh–implemented Institute of Administration project. Later on we also evaluated the ABU School of Veterinary Medicine (that was delayed because KSU insisted on having an outside consultant participate on the grounds that USAID had no resident veterinary expertise). We went on to evaluate most of the other important projects that had significant time to run (say, more than two years). It was kind of interesting because, given the need to create a logical framework, you had to work with someone who could tell you what the project was supposed to be about. And I'll tell you something: the project documentation typical of those days wasn't much help. It was mostly just "blah, blah, blah..." And it was my experience that the grumpy people you started with at the beginning wound up embracing the process to the point of ownership. In fact it often turned out that it was difficult to get them to stop fiddling with the "Log Frame". One had to be on the lookout against their sketching out a new project design rather than using it to depict the existing project concept. Try as one might, it was inevitable that creating a Log Frame involved adding rigor to the project concept, but this mostly resulted in "raising the bar" for the purpose of assessing project performance.

The project evaluations gauged project performance, and also provided foundations for project phaseout plans that would permit accomplishment of essential institutionalization and capitalize on the sunk investments. Nigerian and U.S. contracting institutions were usually a bit disappointed but mostly accepted the outcomes as products of a collaborative exercise carried out in good faith. And so that was mildly satisfying. However, there were a few cases where decisions not based on our evaluations were taken by the Mission leadership. These were always more draconian than we recommended. We would then have to go back to the drawing boards to figure out how the decision could be respected with as little as possible prejudice to the future viability of the host institution.

So I did that for about a year. During that time Bill Ford replaced Mike Adler. This was a big shock because most of us thought highly of John Hummon and expected that he would be confirmed as Mission Director. Bill was new to AID, having come from directing a large voluntary sector program in Detroit.

However, Bill Ford arrived and life went on. Things were more or less okay for a while. John really seemed to throw himself into working closely with Bill and supporting him. To all outward appearances theirs was a good relationship.

But then we learned one day that Steve Christmas would be coming out to replace John as Deputy Director. This was in either late 1971 or 1972. Martin Luther King had been assassinated a few years before and race relations in the U.S. had been inflamed ever since. For one reason or another, a large number of blacks had been assigned to USAID Nigeria. I don't think it was coincidental that both Bill Ford and Steve Christmas were blacks. Most of these individuals were competent and, for lack of a better expression, reasonable in their publicly expressed views and moderate in behavior. But a minority of Blacks within the Mission were angry, not very discriminating in directing their anger and prone to acting out. And I would say that the mission became fairly polarized. I'm sure this was a challenge for the front office. Their efforts to deal

with the situation were not visible to the likes of me. The situation remained tense during my whole time in Lagos, but the lid pretty much stayed on.

I've always felt that it was unconscionable that the personnel system condones, facilitates or promotes – I don't know which – the placement of disproportionate numbers of Black staff members in units headed by Black managers. It may happen with other minorities, but there haven't been many non-Black minority managers in the Africa Bureau. Nor have there been many non-Black minority staff.

But even if the lid stayed on in some sense, the last part of my time in Lagos was one of the worst work experiences of my life. There were many dimensions to this. Walter Furst, the Assistant Director for Program, disliked Nigeria and didn't get along at all well with Bill Ford and Steve Christmas. He thought them a bit naïve as well as inexperienced. They in turn disliked his intellectual aggressiveness and outspokenness. He bluntly challenged any proposition that didn't stand up to his analysis. It had to be very tiresome, but they were wrong in viewing it as insubordination (and I believe that, after a time, Bill Ford came to appreciate that and hold Walter in genuine affection). Walter was a product of an earlier AID culture in which the Program Officer, as the development philosopher in residence, coordinated the thought processes of the Mission. In that culture Program Officers who weren't confident to the point of aggressiveness often got “chewed up” by their Mission Directors. Meanwhile, Bob Berg - the Capital Development Officer who had acted in that position before Walter arrived – seemed to compete with Walter and, whether intentionally or not, to undercut him occasionally in senior staff meetings. That didn't do anything to improve Walter's user-friendliness. Norman Mosher was the head of an economics unit that also contained Patrick Gormely.

So things were tense enough when the departure of Dennis Barrett left the Program Office Chief (head of the core staff of the Program Office) position open. I was assigned to act in that position. I think Walter left before I was confirmed in that position. That made me responsible for supervising five or six professionals, including a training officer who had been discussed as candidate for the Program Office Chief job and a couple of International Development Interns (IDIs). One of these was an extremely bright and capable young Black woman who was brand new to AID. It soon became obvious that the front office was toying with the idea of either making her the Program Office Chief or dividing things up in some way so that she would be responsible for program operations and I would be responsible for evaluation and program analysis.

This situation may have been the last straw for Walter, because he got himself transferred back to Washington. His replacement was a much younger guy named Ed Nadeau, who had been on the fast track in the Latin America Bureau. He died at least ten years ago at around age 50. He was technically extremely good, a born leader and little inclined to the nitty gritty of management. Like Walter before him, he resisted the idea of making the young woman Chief of the Program Office. The atmosphere became charged with tension. Whether or not they did so to prove their case, the front office saw to it that the young woman was given some challenging and high visibility special work assignments. After a few weeks she suffered a nervous breakdown and had to be evacuated.

I've often pondered why this happened. I don't think it was because of the tasks she was given. She acquitted herself quite well. I think other sources of stress were more to blame. Though somewhat troubled by mood swings, she got along well with most of her Program Office colleagues - including, I think, me. She also had little experience with, or stomach for, the more operational aspects of program office work. This meant she would have derived little satisfaction from the performance of her core responsibilities. I know she also felt conflicts about being the front office candidate in opposition to several candidates, including me, whose qualifications were - at least, by conventional standards - were objectively superior to hers. Yet, given the atmosphere in the Mission, she probably didn't feel she could decline. Had she done so, she would have been made to feel that she was "letting the side down". She was the main casualty and the main victim. It took a lesser toll on my bosses and me. In that atmosphere, I didn't have the nerve to actively lobby for the job. I believe that my bosses, Walter and Ed, favored a technically based selection. We didn't talk about it much, but I feel safe in saying that it cost the three of us a lot of sleep.

Shortly after the poor woman's nervous breakdown, I was confirmed in the Program Office Chief position. And for the remainder of my time in Nigeria I managed the Program Office.

*Q: Were we just closing down projects or were new initiatives taken?*

GILBERT: I can't remember any initiative except the "Block Grant" that AID/Washington decided should become the centerpiece of the Program once the conventional program phased down. As I recall, discussions of the Block Grant with the Nigerian Government started before Steve arrived. He came out on TDY to discuss the concept with the Mission and the Government before he arrived as Deputy. However, I don't believe active negotiations started until about eighteen months after I arrived in Lagos. They were handled almost exclusively by the front office and seemed to proceed in a parallel universe with little Program Office involvement (although Ed Nadeau probably knew more about this than I needed to know).

After I took charge of the Program Office roughly at the beginning of my second year in Lagos and based largely on the work I had led during that first year, we had negotiated new project agreements with the government and the beneficiary institutions. And we were implementing those agreements. Though they had approved these packages, the Africa Bureau couldn't allocate the budgeted funds on a timely basis. I sometimes had the feeling that they were trying to force us to wrap these projects up faster than the revised agreements called for, but this was never made explicit. I think this might have occurred during the period when the federal budget process got so dysfunctional that the fiscal year had to be shifted so that it started October 1 rather than July 1.

This Program Office staff consisted of Jim Anderson, Terry Liercke, Tom Tyler (who left the Agency shortly afterwards), Doug Broom and me. Each of the other four was responsible for a sector of the Nigeria program. The slow release of our approved budget in "drips and drabs" forced us to develop a method of gauging right down to a gnat's eyelash what the operational funding requirements of these projects were. This enabled us to allocate the scarce available funds to those projects according to operational need. And, though forward funding for some projects fell to about six weeks before we were able to add funds, we managed to keep these

programs going as agreed based on the revised project plans. But it was quite labor-intensive and a bit nerve-wracking because funding of some contracts occasionally risked falling beneath the amount needed for demobilization, if it had come to that. Keeping this crazy process on track made us a bit “demanding” in our relations with the Controller’s Office, the technical divisions, the institutional contractors and even the front office of the Mission (whose approvals and signatures we frequently needed). Obviously the contractors felt that they were being poorly treated. Suffice it to say that our efforts weren’t universally appreciated.

Nigeria is a fascinating country. I hate the way the word “dynamic” is bandied around, but that word really applies to Nigeria. More than any African country I know, it is a cauldron, and history is conjuring with it. I think, like India and Brazil, it will have ups and downs – perhaps more dramatic ones than either of those two countries – but will begin to cohere in the next decade or two into a strong economic and political force in Africa and, eventually, beyond.

I really think that AID did a lot of good there. We laid important foundations for future development through our investments in institution building. These investments were made in the form of technical assistance and training under contracts with Michigan State University for the University of Nigeria in agriculture, with Wisconsin for the University of Ife in agriculture, New York University for Lagos University in public administration, Kansas State University for Ahmadu Bello University in agriculture and veterinary medicine, and with Ohio State and Wisconsin in the education sector in the north. That’s only a partial list. There were other contracts in the education, agriculture extension and agricultural research sectors that I can’t recall specifically.

As a result of these long-running projects thousands of people received training and hundreds were groomed through academic and on-the-job mentoring for leading roles in the targeted institutions, each with a key role in the development process.

And — I would love to research this — I believe that, if we looked at the development of the other Nigerian universities that occurred during the seventies and eighties (as the number of States in Nigeria grew from four to around twenty and, later, to forty odd), we would find that a lot of the Nigerian leaders in that process were people who gained training and experience under the earlier generation of AID institutional development projects that were focused on the smaller number of pioneering institutions.

The Nigerians can really be very difficult people to work with because they are strong minded, energetic, tough and tenacious — whether they are in the right or the wrong. But you know, I think we at times sold them short. For instance - we talked about the bitterness between the Nigerian and American governments after the civil war - one of the things that generated this bitterness was the position taken by the U.S. and the international community concerning the management of the relief and rehabilitation program for former Biafra. The donors wanted to manage that program directly because they were convinced that there would be a blood bath. But the Nigerians categorically refused. Their position was, “These are our people, and we will care for them ourselves”.

Finally, the US and the other donors backed down. And it turned out there were decent and

dedicated Nigerians to take on that task. A guy named Olusegun Obasanjo, then a Brigadier General who commanded the Nigerian Army engineers, was given the job of running the R and R Program as we called it. He ran it very well. I never heard a word of criticism of his performance in that role. There was certainly no blood bath. It drives me nuts that positive news seldom gets out through the media. Our diplomatic reporting and internal discourse are regrettably not free of a tendency to depict whole populations as caricatures of the extreme types among them. And those perceptions sometimes influence our policy and decision-making.

*Q: Did you deal with Brigadier Obasanjo?*

GILBERT: Yes, but not substantively. I met him about twice. I can't say that we ever got to know one another. He frequently visited USAID Mission offices in the Mother Cat building (the name given it by the Yoruba landlord), but dealt mainly with the R and R staff and the front office.

*Q: But then we had a rehabilitation program going on at that time?*

GILBERT: I believe it continued for most of my time in Nigeria. The office that ran the R and R program, comprising around ten professionals was, I believe, the largest substantive staff unit in what was surely the biggest USAID mission in Africa at that time. As I recall it, they were engaged in running a program of grants to various NGOs, including a food aid program. I think it also involved operating something like a Commodity Import Program. There was a supply management group that was mostly engaged in supporting the R and R program. But the Nigerian Army was certainly responsible for the overall administrative framework and much of the hands-on effort.

*Q: Any idea what the scale of our rehabilitation program was, how much money are we talking about?*

GILBERT: No exact idea, but it was significant. I think our pre-replanning technical assistance budget was 19 million dollars, which still seemed pretty substantial in those days in the Africa context. I think the total R and R program, including food aid, was more than that.

A propos the fear of a blood bath, I remember being struck by the fact that almost all of my contacts in the Nigerian government were Ibos who had been in Biafra during the war. And the other thing I remember is that they weren't particularly thankful to be reemployed. They seemed to take it for granted. And one of them expressed to me a grievance that he said was shared by his confreres. It was that they hadn't been promoted with their age group peers while they were serving the Biafran cause. And so, in terms of grade and salary, they were a few years behind their colleagues who had entered the federal civil service when they did. I personally had a hard time sympathizing with them on that issue. It certainly wasn't a blood bath.

*Q: They came back?*

GILBERT: Yes. And half of the drivers in the USAID motor pool were Ibos who had come back. As far as I can tell, they and other Ibos who returned to higher positions in the

administrative and general services area were all reabsorbed in many of their prewar functions very quickly. As I recall the dispatcher and assistant dispatcher were Ibos. I never noticed any particular tension between the Ibo and non-Ibo drivers.

On the other hand, I couldn't observe the real relations between them. My impression is that West Africans are very preoccupied with peaceful relations between individuals and groups. On the whole, they are considerably more polite than we Americans and Westerners as a group. The politeness serves an important social purpose. Few West Africans live in areas that are not multiethnic in some important degree. And even within their own ethnic groupings, there are all manner of subgroup, including caste, distinctions. I'm convinced their regrettable inability or unwillingness to hold one another accountable is probably related to the extreme care they normally take not to crowd one another. The question "why?" when it is asked of an individual concerning his or her acts, seldom elicits a useful response. When asked by an African it is generally a rhetorical expression of frustration, and no response is expected.

One of the most fascinating people I met in Nigeria was a man named Clement Onyamalukwe who was married to an American girl and, knowing him, probably still is. During the war he was in charge of civil aviation in Biafra, particularly the airport that was so central to the relief effort. And, as I recall, he held an important federal post in civil aviation after the war. But he was the guy who managed to keep that airport open so all those planes could get in and out.

*Q: The relief?*

GILBERT: Yes. I forget the name of the airport.

*Q: Uli Airstrip.*

GILBERT: Yes, something like that. And there were a lot of pretty wild stories about how they did things on the Biafran side during the Civil War. And I would think that quite a few books would have been written about that. But I haven't noticed any. The Biafrans were doing technologically ingenious things such as running vehicles on coal and steam, let's say. I've only heard sketchy references to the things they did. Come to think of it, I believe Clement Onyamalukwe told me that he or others would be writing a book.

I enjoyed being in the country even though in some ways it was one of my least happy office working situations.

*Q: In our program, we were phasing out projects?*

GILBERT: A lot of the projects were phased out. I don't remember if any actually had closed down before I left during the summer of 1973.

*Q: Did we go back the eastern region and the University of Nigeria project and things of that sort?*

GILBERT: No. I don't think the University of Nigeria resumed functioning during my time

there. This is something that I would want to be cautious about, but I think it was because, to the Nigerians, that University symbolized the seeds of the civil war. They saw it as a hotbed of Ibo nationalism and chauvinism and, worse in their eyes, as the devils workshop in which remarkable technical capacities had been added to the Ibos enterprising, can-do attitude. I'm pretty sure that people, like Carl Eicher, who were instrumental in the development of the University through the AID program, could not get visas to visit Nigeria for a long time after the civil war. They were on a black list. They were somehow all tarred with the Biafra brush.

I visited "soon-to-be" Biafra during a TDY during March and April of 1966. Later, apart from my official travel, our family traveled around much of Nigeria by road. We visited the Western Region, the Midwest, the Middle Belt and the main cities of Northern Nigeria, but I never got back to the Eastern Region. I had no official reason to go there because the R and R program was all we had there, and it was exempt from the concerns that caused us to replan the technical assistance program.

*Q: Well, anything else on that? You can add it later but I think you have given a good picture of the situation there. Anything more about these institutional development projects in terms of their impact or their function?*

GILBERT: Well, you know, when I evaluated our institutional development projects, we didn't go into the question of impact in terms of, say, the numbers trained by the beneficiary institutions or the subsequent contributions of those who had received the training. We didn't have the time for that, nor was AID/W open to rethinking the retrenchment that they had already decided upon. And we didn't have the time or resources to assess the quality of the training they provided. We mainly assessed (a) the degree to which institutional goals were being met and (b) the types and amounts of additional assistance that would be needed for the achievement of the most essential goals (particularly institutional viability) to be either attained or within reach when U.S. project assistance ended.

*Q: On the whole, were the institutions pretty well established and staffed by Nigerians at that time?*

GILBERT: I would say so. Our advisory teams were chiefly covering leadership positions while the Nigerians slated to fill these roles permanently were either still in training in the U.S. In a few cases the top Nigerians had returned and were receiving on the job mentoring from senior Americans. We considered that phase out should not occur until the leadership positions within faculties and departments were filled by people who had completed their academic training and had functioned in those jobs for one or two years while being coached in their new roles by the often-quite-distinguished advisors who led these AID-financed university contract teams. Our first idea was that there should also be a plausible alternative Nigerian candidate for each senior Nigerian position, but I think this target had to be sacrificed later for budgetary and timing reasons.

Since we have been discussing some of the evaluation work we did while I was there, I want to complete that discussion before we go on to other matters. The Amadu Bello University Faculty of Veterinary Medicine evaluation didn't turn out to be as valuable as I would have wished.

Veterinary education posed issues that were quite distinct from those surrounding the agriculture faculties at ABU and the University of Ife. Also, the USAID Food and Agriculture Division had no veterinary medicine education expert on its staff. So we agreed when KSU requested that a Professor of Veterinary Medicine participate in that evaluation. The KSU Chief of Party and the USAID division chief nominated the individual we selected. I'll not mention the Professor's name, but as soon as he hit the ground it was clear that he was an old friend and colleague of the Chief of Party and that he had no intention whatsoever of operating according to the new USAID evaluation precepts or of being collaborative. My experience with this guy was an eye-opener. It was my first and most dramatic encounter with what I came to call a "fraternal evaluation". The draft report made no pretense of objectivity. It was essentially a polemic on why we should go along with everything KSU wanted to do plus some expensive and time-consuming things that they hadn't even thought of. We obviously didn't implement the recommendations. It was the operational equivalent of kicking over the card table and shooting out the lights. By this time the demand for systematic evaluations was abating, and I couldn't prevent the resulting report from being a muddle. We wound up planning project assistance to the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine much less rationally than in the preceding cases. As I recall, we "split the difference" between what KSU wanted, as reflected in the fraternal evaluation, and what others and I thought made sense based on the kind of analysis that we normally used. It was a lesson for me.

*Q: Well, maybe that covers it for Nigeria for the moment.*

GILBERT: Yes.

**JAMES P. THURBER, JR.**  
**Assistant Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1971-1973)**

*James P. Thurber, Jr. was born in 1928 and raised in Massachusetts. He graduated from Stanford University in 1950 at which time he was drafted into the U.S. Army. When his term of duty was completed, he returned to a job at The Wall Street Journal, then back at Stanford. In addition to Nigeria, Mr. Thurber served in Tanzania, Malawi, Pakistan, and Canada. He was interviewed by his Emily Thurber, his wife, in December 1990.*

THURBER: After about 16 months in Malawi, we were visited by the Area Director who I think was Bill Hutchinson. It could have been John Reinhardt, but I think Bill Hutchinson, who asked me if I had had enough of a small post and wanted to move on.

I must have screamed a "yes" at him, because he departed for Washington and, the next thing I knew, I was sent orders to move within two weeks to take over as Assistant PAO in Lagos, Nigeria, and that's about what we did, a direct transfer, on the spur of the moment.

We actually ended up going on the July 4th weekend 1971, by way of South Africa where, if I hadn't mentioned before, my brother was living with his family. We did make several trips to



Johannesburg to see him and travel throughout the northern part of South Africa, expanding our knowledge about the country and learning a bit about the problems they were facing.

In July, it was on to Nigeria and what is probably one of the most difficult or unpleasant posts that the Foreign Service can come up with. Our housing wasn't very good. We had a block concrete duplex that you would think twice about before renting in the United States.

Traffic was absolutely unbelievable. The airport, on an open road, was about 20 minutes away but the trip could take up to three hours and did, many times. It had a big embassy with very little support for USIS even though John Reinhardt was our ambassador at that time or was, shortly after we arrived, and the country was just coming out of a civil war.

Nigerians are, on the whole, very friendly, outgoing people, who love to party, and the parties go on until all hours of the night, but they can also be very difficult. They are opinionated. They want to have their own way and they don't want to have anybody telling them what to do.

It was at this time, also, that we, in the field, started to see a real shift in Agency emphasis from meeting a large variety of people in a country and trying to tell our story as broadly as possible, to where we were supposed to start working only with target audiences, a small number of people who we could become very close friends with, and go into all sorts of discussions and really get to know them.

The system had two flaws in it. One is that people in Africa, it's been our experience, particularly in Nigeria but I think the same would be true anywhere in developing countries, really weren't prepared psychologically and otherwise to become very close friends with Americans. We came out of a completely different culture and society and really didn't understand their needs and aspirations and what they wanted to do.

So, we got to be friends with a lot of Nigerians and, later, with Pakistanis and so forth, but the friendships were very shallow and didn't go nearly as deep as some dreamer in Washington thought they would be.

Secondly, on this whole thing, it was assumed that if we developed a good friendship, say, with an economist, after reading a few briefing papers from Washington, we could talk economics and bring him up to date on what was going on in the United States, the money flow, the latest changes at the Federal Reserve Bank and so forth.

This was utter nonsense and USIA should have realized this a long time ago. One doesn't become an expert on these subjects and be able to talk in great depth on science or economics or any field in which one hasn't specialized, yet, even to this day, the Agency is still running somewhat that type of approach.

I solved it during my career in USIA by finding experts, whether they were visitors or embassy people and bringing them to do the talking and I would be the catalyst, but that isn't what was planned and that isn't what they wanted us to do.

Another problem with Lagos was the size of the embassy. It was a very busy place. The Biafra War had just ended. The oil boom had restarted. The United States had some financial interests in Nigeria and Nigeria was important. A quarter of all Africans are Nigerians and it's overwhelming in its size.

We didn't get much support out of the embassy. Possibly the PAO, Jack Shellenberger, did, because of his close relationship with the ambassador, but certainly not the rest of us.

Lagos itself was a depressing city to live in. It was very poorly managed. It was filthy dirty. It was terribly overcrowded and, as I mentioned, had travel problems. For myself, it wasn't bad. I had a good job to go to every day.

I had a driver and I worked inside. Jack made me the inside person, running the administration of the post, and also, though, I did cover the branches and administer them, basically, in Lagos, I was inside. I didn't have to face all these problems and I had air conditioning when it got impossible.

But, for my family, they were caught up in the daily life of Lagos and they are the ones that really found it the roughest. The saving grace for Lagos was a little boat called The Yankee Doodle and a beach house. On Sundays, often on Saturday afternoons -- we worked Saturday morning, but always on Sunday -- a small group of us from the embassy would traipse down to the dock, board The Yankee Doodle, and half an hour later, end up at a beach near the mouth of the Lagos Harbor, where we spent the day in relative comfort, lovely sunshine, and the children playing in the water and on the beach and so forth. If it wasn't for that, the city would probably have been impossible.

Also in Lagos, I experienced my first real inspection. We had had one in Malawi which turned out to be two very senior officers coming out there and I was by myself. They spent a week there in Malawi telling me and instructing me on how to run the post and to do some of the things I knew nothing about. It was marvelous. I couldn't have appreciated it more.

In Nigeria, we ran into the first full-fledged inspection and it was a disaster. It started by planes being late or arriving early and inspectors not being met -- and remember, these were the days that the inspectors wrote an OER on you. I had an OER written on me by one of the inspectors who had asked no questions, knew very little of what I was doing and it was devastating. In fact, it was so bad, it was thrown out.

While we were in Lagos, we moved to the office. We were thrown out of the building we were in, which was a very comfortable, efficient building about three stories high with a nice library on the ground floor, to another building where we went in with AID, occupied two floors of a multi-floor office building, which worked out fairly well, but it put our library upstairs.

Today, security would love it. In those days, it was a pain in the neck because people didn't know where it was and to come up the elevator discouraged a lot of the type of drop-ins that we wanted to get at that library.

The interesting thing is that shortly after we moved to these quarters, and spent a considerable amount of money redesigning them to meet our needs, they canceled our lease on that building, and AID and USIS had to move out to other quarters at quite great expense.

Another high point of the Nigerian experience, outside of continuing our program to get to know as much about the country as possible and traveling to most sections of Nigeria, was a multi-media election program which I developed with Jack Shellenberger's help, as an attempt to explain how the U.S. electoral process worked for our foreign audiences.

The program was so well received in Lagos, the Agency sent me on the road with it. Emy and I traveled to Ethiopia and then up and down the entire west coast of Africa, from Zaire all the way up to Sierra Leone, including Ghana, Liberia, Ivory Coast and so forth.

It not only was a fun type of program to give, I think it did help a little bit to explain the 1972 elections, and it also gave me a good knowledge, a wide knowledge of Africa and the wide diversity within the continent and some of the many problems that were going on in that continent.

Emy is now back and we're going to let her fill in a bit about the wife's point of view.

*Q: Jim has mentioned that we were transferred directly from Malawi to Lagos, Nigeria, and we were very excited to go to west Africa with all the dynamism, the dancing, the music, the art and so forth, but it did prove to be a difficult post. Our housing was not very good. We had no closets, I remember, and I had to line foot lockers up in the hallway and cover them with cloth and put all the linens and sweaters and things in them.*

*Traffic was horrible. It was very hard to get around. A few times, I used the embassy driver to take the children and me places, knowing that it probably wasn't wholly legitimate and yet, I was afraid to drive and I figured if they were going to send us over there, that the government would have to help the family adjust.*

*The school was not bad for the children. It was an American-type school, run out of Tacoma, Washington. Jim got involved and was on the school board. I think he became president of the school board. It wasn't a terribly demanding school, but it was adequate.*

*Socially, Lagos was a little more difficult for us. Jim's job as DPAO was a good job, but he had no specific target audience so we never knew whom to invite, to parties. The press were covered by the Information Officer and the people in the universities by the Cultural Affairs Officer.*

*The PAO had the top dogs and we always had difficulty in finding our social niche with Nigerians, even though we did make some friends and did a fair amount of entertaining.*

*We had some funny times with servants. We had a man named Charles who worked for us who was quite an interesting chap, but it turned out he was really mentally deranged. I think we were surprised when he told us one day that he had written to the President of Nigeria, telling him that the Thurbers' cook was trying to poison us, and he had alerted the president so that he could*

*take action. At that point we made sure that Charles left the house quite quickly.*

*One really funny incident that we had which really gave us momentary connection with some of the government officials, the president's sister came down to assist in a cultural program and the CAO, Pete Peters, who was a bachelor, didn't think it would be appropriate for her to stay with him, so she stayed with us.*

*Our two children, especially Alex, who was then, I think, about 11 or 12, really cozied up to her and told her how he really admired her brother, the president, General Gowon, and she very happily said, "Well, I'd like to have you and your sister come to tea with the president." Alex was excited, and I said he ought to ignore that. Nothing was going to happen.*

*Lo and behold, two days later, Mrs. Audu, the sister, drove up in a state house car with two beautifully dressed guards and said, "Are the children ready to go to tea?" Well, they did indeed drive off, leaving Mama sitting at home looking rather forlorn, and they had a marvelous time.*

*They spent 30 minutes with the president and his wife and their youngest child. Alex said that he engaged General Gowon in conversation for at least 20 minutes. They discussed the affairs of the world and what Alex was going to be when he grew up, et cetera.*

*Then we received an invitation to State House for the next day for the celebration of National Day, (to which we had never been invited before) and we, indeed, met the president, using our son's name. He remembered Alex all too well, stating that Alex told him he was going to be President of the United States someday. That story made the embassy rounds for weeks with much laughter and amusement.*

*Lagos was reputed to be a post that really depressed people. Before we came, the DPAO's wife had some kind of a breakdown. In fact, that's why we came as we did. I think while we were there, someone else had to be evacuated for mental reasons. It just was a difficult post.*

*I even found myself getting slightly depressed. Jim came to my aid by establishing a part-time job for me, where I put together a DRS file. It was one of the early ones. We used a key sort method, where you pulled out your target people by putting a needle through holes in cards, so I spent, oh, maybe ten hours a week putting together the most important people in Nigeria, who was who in the music world and in the arts and so forth, which we hoped would give people some historical sense when they came to the post.*

*When we had arrived, there was nothing. We didn't know whom to contact and nobody seemed to know who we should, so I hope that was of some use. It certainly helped my morale.*

*The two children and I left early from Lagos with Jim, and came back for our oldest son's wedding in New Mexico. Then Jim returned to Lagos and we had the pleasure of going to Washington, buying a car, and buying a house without him, which is something that didn't happen often in those days. It was surprising to have such a great responsibility. This probably occurs quite regularly in the Foreign Service, but not necessarily in other walks of life.*

**ANDREW STEIGMAN**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Lagos (1972-1975)**

*Ambassador Andrew Steigman joined the Foreign Service in 1958. In addition to Nigeria, his assignments included the Congo, Libya, France, and Gabon. Ambassador Steigman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.*

*Q: You were assigned, obviously moving up in the area, as a political counselor which is the equivalent to the top political reporter in Nigeria in 1972-75. Could you describe the situation in Nigeria at that time? It was, again, a rather important period.*

STEIGMAN: It was a very quiet period. It was the post-Biafra period. The war had been over for two years. Nigeria was still under military rule. It was the Gowon regime. It was a period, by and large, of political stability. There were no civilian politics. We were essentially watching the administrative development of Nigeria. We were looking at the civilian institutions that were permitted like trade unions and other groups. We were talking to the people in the military regime to try to get a sense of where they were going. It was not a period of high political activity or heavy reporting responsibilities for a political section. We were trying to do some longer-term appraisals. We were trying to look at where Nigeria might be headed. John Reinhardt was the ambassador, and with his encouragement, we did a long piece trying to analyze the way the Nigerians look at the world, the Nigerian outlook, the Nigerian political outlook based on extensive interviews and research and input from the whole embassy to try to provide a framework for political analysis. We were able to do that kind of thing.

*Q: In brief, how would you say the Nigerians looked at the world at the time?*

STEIGMAN: As a series of concentric circles. They were primarily concerned, as most countries are, with their internal development, if you will, a certain amount of gazing at one's own navel, their immediate neighbors, then the rest of Africa and only after the problems of Africa were dealt with did they then look beyond. Even then, there are just a couple of countries in the world that were really of major importance to them, the U.S., the U.K., the OPEC countries and the Soviet Union and peripherally China.

But most of the rest of the world really didn't engage their very active attention. Nigerians also have a wonderful mixture of arrogance and insecurity which governed all their behavior and which had to be taken into account, very self-assured on the surface but if you scratched deeply they had some real ego problems. They really weren't that self-confident and you tended to get the blustery or sharp reactions because they weren't sure how to react. It was an interesting process of analysis. The political section had an awful lot of business with the Nigerian government on foreign policy issues, on U.S.-Nigerian relations. Much of what we were doing was the bilateral relationship and U.N. issues and African issues.

*Q: How did they view the United States? You were in a period of, really, fence- rebuilding,*

*weren't you, after the Biafran War about which there was a lot of resentment? Although we supported the central government, there was a tremendous movement to help Biafra.*

STEIGMAN: There was a lot of pro-Biafra sentiment in the U.S. That stirred a great deal of resentment in Nigeria. It was a period of fence-building, but, by and large, we had a very positive relationship with the Nigerians. We all had a lot of Nigerian friends, and I never detected any basic hostility to any of the embassy people because we were American. We had very good working relationships.

*Q: Could you talk a little bit about John Reinhardt as an ambassador, how he operated?*

STEIGMAN: John's a consensus builder, at least as ambassador. I think he took some tough decisions while he was at USIA, I gather, which offended people, but within the embassy in Nigeria, he tried to avoid having to make people seriously unhappy. He tried to avoid confrontation and to build consensus. He's fairly low-key as ambassador.

I remember, for example, I think John basically believed our AID mission was overstuffed and overstaffed and given Nigeria's oil wells probably should be phased down and have its program scaled back. He would smile benignly when I would suggest things like this in staff meetings, and over time the AID mission was scaled back, but I don't think he ever confronted the AID mission director or pushed very hard himself for it. I think he may have had a feeling that this was one of those things that was inevitable, it was going to happen, he didn't have to get into a confrontation on it, and he was delighted when other people pushed the process along. But the whole place had a fairly low-key leadership.

*Q: Did you, as the political counselor, deal with Gowon who was then the chief of state?*

STEIGMAN: I met him a couple of times, but I never did business with him, no. Nobody saw him very often. Even the ambassador didn't see him very often.

*Q: Politically though we saw this as a government in power working without much of a challenge.*

STEIGMAN: No, there was no external challenge to government. Our political predictions were that this government was immune to external challenge, that the challenge, if any, would come from within the military, and if one group within the military decided it didn't like Gowon it probably could remove him fairly easily -- but that we would have probably no foreknowledge of this, no warning, and we would simply report it when it happened. In fact, that's just about what happened three weeks after we left. Gowon was away and he was replaced while he was out of the country and he went back to school in England in exile. It was peaceful, very Nigerian. I wasn't there at the time, but my guess is that it came as a total surprise to the embassy when it happened unless somebody had come around to the attachés the day before and said, "By the way, just so you know, it's going to be very bloodless. While Gowon is away, we're going to replace him. We just wanted you guys to know so that you won't be upset, and there won't be any change in policy." They may have told them the day before, they may not. But if they chose not to tell the embassy, the embassy was not going to know it.

*Q: Did we have any problem with Nigeria? Dealing with the United Nations, this always has been one of our tasks of each embassy going out and trying to get their delegate in a country to vote on a particular thing.*

STEIGMAN: We made our pitch. We would go and make our pitch every year on the U.N. laundry list, but they voted their interests, not ours. The Nigerians couldn't be bought or swayed away from what they thought was in their interest. We did our best to persuade them. We would argue on certain points that this would really be in their interest or that they had no particular reason or no Nigerian national interest on this one, you know, could they please accommodate us, things like the Puerto Rican decolonization issue. We'd say, "Now why do you want to make the U.S. mad at you. For heaven's sakes, you have no real interest on this one." I don't even remember whether we won or lost. The Nigerians were not unreasonable. The Nigerians were not flaming radicals. By African standards, they are relatively conservative. They are a bunch of flaming capitalists and a relatively conservative bunch at that.

*Q: You came two years after the Biafran War, and if you recall we were inundated with this is going to be a slaughter when the Central Nigerian government comes over and from other interviews I understand that you had the Jewish lobby which was using Biafra as a model for what would happen to Israel, if the Arabs took over there would be a blood bath. You had the Catholics and you had the Protestants, as well as show biz, all pleading the cause of the Biafrans. So you much have been monitoring the situation somewhat after this.*

STEIGMAN: Oh, but this is two years later. Reconstruction had not taken place on a large extent in the east. There were still blown bridges and the roads hadn't been repaved, the Onitsha Market hadn't been rebuilt yet, but people were living fairly peacefully, and there were Ibos all over Lagos again. We had good Ibo friends . . .

*Q: You were saying that the Ibos weren't being discriminated against two years later.*

STEIGMAN: Not visibly. I suspect that because there were fewer Ibos in senior civil service positions they may have had a harder time getting government contracts than they had enjoyed before. I'm sure there continued to be tribal favoritism and certainly a great deal of corruption. But in terms of the way people were living, we drove all through the east several times, and life seemed to be flourishing again. As I say, the roads still had a lot of pot holes that needed to be repaired. There were bridges that needed to be rebuilt. There were markets that needed to be reconstructed. The flow of funds for reconstruction of the east had been slow, but that did not mean that people were not living fairly comfortably.

I remember in Paris in early 1970 when the Ibo resistance collapsed. I remember getting a phone call at the embassy from one of the French deputies who had been very pro-Biafran saying, "The U.S. must intervene to save the lives of the Biafrans. They're all going to be slaughtered."

I remember telling him on the phone, "Mr. Deputy, I'm reading telegrams from Nigeria even as we speak, and I'm reading press reports from Nigeria even as we speak, and it is clear that there is no genocide going on, that people are not being killed, that the Nigerians are sending food in.

It is just the contrary of what you are saying."

"Oh, no," he insisted. "That cannot be true. They will all be slaughtered. The U.S. must act."

I said, "Mr. Deputy, we have no evidence to support your allegations. I'm sorry, the U.S. cannot act on your allegations because the evidence is to the contrary." But people were really just wild for this.

*Q: I understand one time Secretary Rusk told the Nigerian desk officer, "Well, at least you've succeeded in having the Protestants, the Catholics and the Jews all against our policy."*

**JAMES K. BISHOP, JR.**  
**Deputy Director, West Africa**  
**Washington, DC (1972-1976)**

*Ambassador James K. Bishop, Jr. was born in New York in 1938. He received his bachelor's degree from Holy Cross College in 1960. His career has included positions in Auckland, Beirut, Yaounde, and ambassadorships to Nigeria, Liberia, and Somalia. Ambassador Bishop was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 1995.*

BISHOP: As the result of the oil price increases of 1973, Nigeria received an economic windfall. There was some hope that the government might use some of these new resources to substantially improve the lives of its citizens. At the time, the estimate was that one out of every four Africans was a Nigerian (estimated to be 100 million). As it turned out, corruption continued to syphon resources away from the masses and into the pockets of the privileged few. A great number of irrational economic decisions were taken, including at one point the importation of so much cement that the Lagos port became largely unusable because there were so many cement carrying vessels waiting to dock that there wasn't room for any other ships. The government did begin some infrastructure projects--e.g a road network. It greatly increased its expenditures on education, which it failed to maintain in subsequent years.

Our relationships with Nigeria was testy at the time Nigeria became independent. I spent some time with the Foreign Minister. He loved to bait Americans in the early 1960s when racism was even more prevalent in our country. Soon thereafter, the Nigerians went through a fierce civil war; we refrained from involving ourselves and that was resented by the government which believed that we should have supported its side. When General Gowon brought peace to Nigeria, he did it in a manner that I think Lincoln would have liked to have used to settle the aftermath of Civil War here. Admiration among American African observers for Gowon was unbounded. There was a desire to support his efforts, but we couldn't do much in terms of economic assistance because there was legislation which prohibited US aid to any country which was a member of the oil cartel. So our efforts were directed to encourage American companies to invest in and trade with Nigeria. American companies had been prominent in the Nigerian oil industry and became more so as time passed. We consulted with the Nigerians on African issues,



including Southern Africa which was the dominant African political issue for successive American governments. We sent some of our better professionals to our posts in Nigeria.

We did provide a fair amount of technical assistance through various mechanisms. I don't recall the details, but we were active in helping the Nigerians on technical matters. We tried to facilitate Nigerians acquiring some of these technical skills from the American private sector. Our military assistance program was a government-to-government program, which gave the Nigerians the benefit of our military technical know-how. As part of that process, I think corruption within the Nigerian military was cut down so that they made much more rational choices of equipment to be acquired. We had a military training program which brought Nigerian officers to our military schools; we also sent trainers to some of their military institutions.

**CLIFF SOUTHARD**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1973-1974)**

*Cliff Southard entered the Foreign Service in 1952. In addition to Nigeria, his assignments included the Philippines, and Burma. Mr. Southard was interviewed by Pat E. Nieburg on February 25, 1988.*

*Q: We are going to cover Cliff's Nigerian experience. He was PAO in Nigeria from 1973 to 1974, a relatively short tour cut short by medical problems. Cliff, what was the emphasis of your program in Nigeria?*

SOUTHARD: It was a very large program. We had three branch offices at Kano, Kaduna and Ibadan. We had a very nice large library in Lagos. We had one of the few remaining one country magazines. We had a very active cultural program. Lots of leader grants, lots of Amparts, lots of lecturers coming into the country.

Pete Peters was the cultural affairs officer and he had a wide circle of contacts. This was at a time when AID -- the aid program -- was being phased out altogether in the country. We were sending as many as thirty or forty leaders to the U. S. each year.

Now, at that pace, you soon run out of university professors and other academics and the usual fare of leaders grantees so we were being used by the Embassy to take Nigerian business- men. In some cases, we were bringing in businessmen with the additional hope of -- we even had a commercial angle -- developing buyers for American products.

That was the second time I had worked as a PAO under an ambassador who had been a former USIA officer, John Reinhardt, who as you know, later became the director of USIA itself, not long after he left that job in Nigeria, as a matter of fact.

*Q: Let me ask you, in the information field, what was the emphasis or what did you do there?*

SOUTHARD: We had Nigerian television which was a state-owned operation, as was Nigerian

radio. We obviously developed contacts with the national Nigerian TV people, placed films on television, provided other materials to Nigerian national radio. There were several newspapers in the country. We had a very active wireless file and feature service for the newspapers and magazines -- newspapers particularly.

**JULIUS W. WALKER, JR.**  
**African Affairs**  
**London, England (1973-1974)**

*Ambassador Julius W. Walker, Jr. entered the Foreign Service in 1956. In addition to the United Kingdom, he served in Egypt, the Congo, Burundi, Libya, and Nigeria. Walker was interviewed Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 2, 1992.*

*Q: What does it mean to be the African man in our embassy in London?*

WALKER: It means a number of things. The position is in the political section. What the person does is liaison with the British at all levels on any questions that have to do with Africa. Then the Nigerian civil war (the Biafra War) was underway. Also Rhodesia had made its unilateral declaration of independence from Great Britain. The presence of our consulate general there was under debate. We wanted to close it to say that we didn't recognize the government, we didn't want to close it because it developed a lot of information. But we finally had to close it.

There were a number of other problems in Africa I dealt with. This meant that I was at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office sometimes two or three times a day and when I went I might have one, two or three appointments because I was also covered Latin American affairs. There were many days when I wrote six or eight reporting telegrams.

I also looked after people who came through London en route to various African assignments. I saw to it that they got appointments, reservations...of course the administrative section helped with the later. If they were high level, I met them at the airport and got them through the formalities quickly. Savannah and I might have a dinner party or reception for them. The job entailed a lot of meeting and greeting and gave me access to many top-level Brits.

It was a busy job and interesting. I knew many people at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and knew them well. I probably spent as much (if not more) time there than anyone else in the embassy. A few times I was in discussions with the Foreign Minister, and twice in 10 Downing Street for discussions with the Prime Minister.

*Q: What were these on?*

WALKER: As I recall, the subjects were Rhodesia and Nigeria each time. You see the United States approached that Nigerian civil war in a peculiar manner. It confused the hell out of us. We didn't know which way to go because the political extremes in the United States were supporting the Biafrans and there seemed to be little solid support anywhere in the US for the Federal

Military Government.

*Q: You had what might be called the liberal left of Senator Kennedy, but also you had some of the extreme fundamentalists because of the Christian Ibos.*

WALKER: That is right. So those who were on the extreme right who felt this was an indication of Africa going to pieces - proof of Senator Ellender's contention - and wanted to encourage it in any way they could.

*Q: The Jews were involved also.*

WALKER: Yes, they were because largely they favored the Biafrans.

*Q: I think there was a little vignette in somebody's interview saying, it was either Dave Newsom or somebody, saying Dean Rusk was saying, "You know, I have to hand it to you, you have the Protestants, the Catholics and the Jews all after me on this one."*

WALKER: And that was right. Well, to deal with this a special ambassador was appointed, a fellow named C. Clyde Ferguson, a Black American, who was to administer U.S. relief. This was during the Nixon administration. Ferguson frequently went to Biafra with Jim Pope, his advisor and another Black American. Jim was a USIA officer, Ferguson was from academia and is now dead. He frequently came through England en route to Nigeria and needed to see the Foreign Minister or the Shadow Foreign Minister. Most of this happened under a Labor Government. Alec Douglas Hume was the Shadow Foreign Minister. I handled all the appointments and attended virtually every meeting. It was really a great job.

**W. GARTH THORBURN**  
**Agricultural Attaché**  
**Lagos (1973-1977)**

*W. Garth Thorburn was born in New York in 1928 and educated at Hampton Institute. His career included posts in Paris, Sao Paulo, Bogota, Brasilia, Lagos, New Delhi and Ankara. He was interviewed by Allan Mustard in 2006.*

THORBURN: We worked with the State Department and Commerce, so that there were usually three of us representing the U.S. government at these meetings. After that, I was assigned to Nigeria, the armpit of Africa is what it's called. I spent three and a half years there, and it was probably the most difficult assignment that I had. I covered Cameroon and Ghana from Nigeria, and it was eye opening, to say the least. It was a good three and a half years. Two of my children were born when we were in Nigeria. And fortunately, they weren't born in Nigeria. After Nigeria, I was transferred to India and I spent seven and a half years in India as the agricultural counselor.

*Q: Could we go back to Nigeria a bit? What were the things that really made it difficult in*

*Nigeria, and what kind of impact did things like the corruption in Nigeria, or just the general difficulty with doing business in Nigeria? Could you talk about it a little bit and how you coped with it?*

THORBURN: Okay. Living facilities. We had a three-bedroom house which the government had to pay \$100,000 a year for the lease, and we had to have a three-year lease in advance, so we put up \$300,000 to begin with. The Canadians used to run the electric power facilities. The Nigerians decided they would do it themselves, so when we got there, you could hardly count on having electricity in the house. If you were going to have a reception, you would have to go to the substation, pay someone about 40 naira in order to please have the light on at my house from 7:00 to 9:00 at night. So we had to do that.

That was also with the telephones. If we wanted to make a telephone call, we had to go to the substation, pay somebody five or 10 naira, and they would run the call through for you. As a matter of fact, they would run the call through, and when the call was finished, they would call the central station and say, "The call didn't go through, so please cancel that," but you still had to pay them 10 naira.

Food. It was 25 percent hardship and 25 percent differential. You paid about \$6 for a dozen eggs, and they looked like pigeon eggs. Lettuce was about \$3 or \$4 a head, with three or four leaves of wilted stuff, and, in general, it was rather difficult to work, to get wholesome food. We used to have a storage unit where the embassy brought in certain items and stored it, and then we could buy it. The Nigerian government said that that was not right, so we had to close that storage unit.

Going from Lagos to the airport took anywhere from 30 minutes to five hours, so you had no idea whether you were going to catch the plane, if the plane came in. In the north, when we were flying into the north, we would fly into one of the towns up north and we were coming back to Lagos or wherever we were going, we'd see a plane coming in. You'd grab your bags, you'd run on the tarmac, and that might not be your plane, so you'd have to turn around and go back and wait for the next plane. It was pretty difficult.

We used to drive from Lagos over to Ghana, and we went through two very small ex-French countries that were ruled by France.

*Q: Former colonies?*

THORBURN: Former colonies. And we would love to go there, because we would drive and we would get fresh cheese and some fresh bread. It was just wonderful. The only problem is you have to get through the Nigerian border, then the Dahomey border, and then the other border, and then leave that border and get into Ghana, and Ghana at that time was in a very, very, very bad situation. But, anyway, it was nice to get out of Nigeria to visit some other country. It was an interesting, trying time.

*Q: What were your major responsibilities in Nigeria? What were we doing in Nigeria at that point?*

THORBURN: Well, I covered the Cameroon and Ghana, and Ghana was at that time the largest producer of cocoa in the world. It isn't now. They just flubbed everything. They produced coffee in Nigeria, and in the Cameroon. Nigeria was a good market for parboiled rice, and Uncle Ben had a rep there, so what we were trying to do basically was expand our markets in Nigeria, particularly. We had some success until the Thai and parboiled rice hit our markets there.

I had a couple food shows. They didn't work very well, because a lot of the stuff came in, and by the time it came through customs and came through storage, half of it was destroyed and rotted and stuff like that. But that's what we were trying to do, really open those markets. What we were basically trying to do, I think, in the agriculture sector was to try and establish good relationships with the Ministry of Agriculture, and I think to some extent we were successful. Many of the people in agriculture, including the principal secretary, had graduated from universities in the United States.

We had an entrée there, but it was so corrupt and the politicians, I mean, it was just unbelievable. It was a learning experience and you do the best you can under difficult circumstances.

**DONALD B. EASUM**  
**Ambassador**  
**Nigeria (1975-1979)**

*Ambassador Donald B. Easum entered the Foreign Service in 1953. In addition to Nigeria, he served in Zimbabwe, and Guinea. The ambassador was interviewed by Arthur Day on January 17, 1990.*

*Q: Bill Schaufele came in and the whole scene during that year of the shuffling of the Assistant Secretary slot really kind of reflected badly, I think, on Kissinger's interest in Africa, and on the U.S. ability to cope with it.*

EASUM: I agree. I think that's a good way to put it. I would only add to that, that it showed, I think, a demeaning kind of attitude toward Africa, and in the minds of Africans. It was demeaning to them that these kinds of things happened on their beat.

So I went off to Lagos and we can talk some more about this perhaps another time, but I can just tell you that the story didn't end because for the next year before the change of administration, I was dealing with Kissinger from afar, and my concerns about Africa, and his approach to Africa, were very much echoed by Nigerians. I didn't have to suggest anything to the Nigerians. They came up with their own analysis of U.S. policy toward Africa. They were incredibly critical of it, and every time I would submit their criticisms to Washington, I'm sure that the Secretary felt I had egged them on to do this. So much so that one time he called me back. He called me back with a telegram from, I think, Khartoum, or maybe Nairobi, where he'd been to a UN meeting. Bill Schaufele was with him, and Schaufele drafted the telegram of Kissinger's instruction, and it said, "I want to see you in my office as soon as I get back to Washington day after tomorrow. Why is it that every place I go, my African policy is maligned by the Nigerians, and they seem to

have got there first. Now is the time to be more assertive on behalf of U.S. policy, and less considerate of your clients." It was a message that said virtually that. I've joked with Bill Schauffele about that since. I said, "Bill, I don't want to think you wrote it." And Bill has said sort of, "Well, I knew what I had to say."

So I went back to Washington, went in to see Bill, and said, "Bill, it's time for the appointment. Let's go." And he said, "Don, this is your meeting with the Secretary." I said, "Bill, you've got to be kidding. I'm your Ambassador in Lagos, and I don't think it's right that I should go up there and face whatever this music is. It affects the whole Bureau, and it affects our relationships with Nigeria and, of course, those are important to us. You can't bug out on me." And he said, "Well, do you really want me to go?" And I said, "I sure do." So we both went up.

*Q: Don, the last time we ended the interview roughly with your return as Ambassador to Lagos. Perhaps we should start, in general, from that point today although it might at times lead to some repetition. I think it's a logical starting point for us. Why don't you just pick up the scenario at that point, and continue.*

EASUM: Okay. I had had a most fascinating year as Assistant Secretary from April of '74 until April of '75, exactly 12 months. And in April of '75 I went off to what I think Henry Kissinger figured was some kind of an exile, to Lagos, Nigeria, and arrived virtually in time for the deposing of the then current head of state, General Gowon. A remarkable individual, but he had not been able adequately to handle the incredible oil boom that had hit Nigeria in the early '70s. Thus, when we arrived, the economy was in a state of full bloom, but absolutely out of control with 800 ships hanging outside the port of Lagos. It was said one-eighth of the entire world merchant fleet was there. There were highways, airports, schools, skyscrapers being built and he was deposed while out of the country at an OAU meeting. There was no blood shed, and I think as people look back, they consider it one of the smoothest transitions to take place in Africa, except those that take place by election, which aren't too many, and many of them aren't very smooth.

So I arrived there in April. The change of guard took place at the end of June, and a new military administration took over in Nigeria headed by a very progressive, radical, pan-Africanist kind of colonel named Murtala Muhammed. The story that I want to continue to tell really is, the way in which our Ambassador in Nigeria, namely myself, related to the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, during the ensuing year, an election year back home. A year during which Kissinger was the Secretary of State until January of the following year, 1977.

So, Kissinger was, in fact, in office for two years during the time I was there, and those were most interesting two years because of what was happening in Nigeria, and what was happening in Southern Africa, and what the U.S. policy was in Southern Africa, and particularly in Angola.

The first five or six months of my tenure there were largely uneventful. Murtala was a real hustler. He wanted to deal with the United States. He wanted to have the representatives of American companies come out and talk with him personally, not with any of his associates, and contracts were being signed right and left with American companies. I can remember that Mack Truck signed one of the largest contracts they'd ever signed anywhere abroad. Ford Motor

Company came out, talked directly with Murtala and sold an incredible number of trucks and other vehicles to the Nigerian army. Another company, Genesco, from St. Louis, made a major contract to produce and send to Nigeria all the shoes and the uniforms for the Nigerian army. It was a very exciting time in many ways for us although in a sense it was a false prosperity, and a false feeling of confidence that we had.

The first major change took place in October. In October of that year the South African military forces invaded Angola for maybe the first of about 14 subsequent invasions over the next ten years, or 15 years. And I was summoned to the Foreign Ministry, then headed by Joe Garba -- in fact, he's here right now as the Nigerian High Commissioner, or Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Joe Garba was the Foreign Minister. He'd been the person who had announced the deposition of General Gowon because he'd been commander of the palace guards. He said, "Donald, I need something from Henry Kissinger in a hurry. You've got to get for me a denial from him that the U.S. is supporting South Africa in Angola. We understand the reports are that thousands of South African armored troops have entered Angola." At that time there were three contending forces. There were the FNLA from the north supported by Mobutu. There was Savimbi in the South, UNITA. And there was the MPLA government which had been recognized by many countries, but the issue was still in dispute. The South Africans sided with UNITA, and as we know, they continued to do so for some 15 years. He said, "Get a denial that the U.S. is supporting South Africa and UNITA. Because if you can't, I have to tell you that something is going to happen here that's going to be very important. I can't tell you what it is, and I don't want you to imply that I've said this to you, but its going to be difficult for the United States and Nigeria if you can't get a denial." This, by the way, is reported in his book that he published two or three years ago.

I, of course, sent a message back to the State Department explaining what he had said to me, and I got virtually no response. I got nothing within the 24 hours that Garba had asked for, and what I eventually got was something that was not useful and not very informative. As a result of that failure on my part, a few days after that the government of Nigeria announced that, instead of being neutral with regard to the Angolan struggle, and instead of trying to use their own best offices to bring the three groups together -- in fact, Joe Garba had invited the three of them to Lagos, was in the process of organizing a conversation between the three -- instead of that the government of Nigeria said, "We're going to opt for the MPLA. It is clear that the MPLA is defending itself against the racist South Africans, and there is no way we can continue to be neutral. And the U.S. is evidently assisting the South Africans." So the Nigerians did precisely that. They sent a high level emissary, who was in fact the chief of the secret police -- I don't remember his name, it will come to me -- as the personal representative of Murtala Muhammed to Augustino Neto in Luanda, and arrangements were made to ship massive amounts of surplus Nigerian military equipment to the MPLA, and the die was cast. I was instructed -- the MPLA is the current ruling party -- I was instructed by the Department to protest this. I did the best I could to explain the U.S. position to the Nigerians, but they were impatient with me, not wanting to understand what the U.S. policy was, and I had some problems understanding it myself, but I did what I was told to do without great success.

In December the South African military forces were still moving hard in Angola but were coming up against some very stiff Cuban resistance. In December I learned that at the upcoming

meeting of the OAU, which would take place in January of '76, I think in either Nairobi or Addis, I can't remember, the Nigerian head of state was going to deliver a very tough speech, insisting that all of Africa opt for the MPLA; that it was clear that that was the only way to withstand South African aggression. And that speech, it was clear to us, was going to give the United States a lot of heartburn. I received a personal message from the Secretary of State asking me to go, at the highest level, to the Nigerian government -- on a weekend it was -- and try to do what I could to moderate what we thought was clearly going to be a very tough speech to be made by Murtala.

Subsequent to that...and I did that, again without great success. I did not go to head of state. I went to the Number Two, General Obasanjo who was chief of staff of the army, and subsequently, as I will tell you, became the head of state, and is now a retired senior statesman. A few weeks after that the West African Ambassadors, that is, the American Ambassadors in West Africa, were summoned to Abidjan by Bill Schauffele who was then the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, where we had a special meeting with Bill at the residence of our Ambassador. And he said, "The situation in Angola is getting very dicey, and we're very much concerned about the upcoming meeting of the OAU, Organization of African Unity, and we want all of you to deliver a letter from President Ford, which you will be getting in a few days. You must deliver it to your head of state, and it will put forward our concerns about what is now happening in Angola. The letter will in essence put forward the thesis that, whereas the Angolan government has a security concern with regard to South African military incursions in the south, the South African government has a counterpart, or analogous security concern, because of the presence of the Cubans in Angola."

As I thought about that letter in our residence in Abidjan, it seemed to me that given the tenure of opinion in Lagos, and given the personality of the head of state, Murtala, that letter was not going to be received in a friendly fashion. I knew from what I'd learned about Murtala that he was not at all ready to be patient with the concerns of South Africa with regard to anything in Angola even if it was the presence of Cuban, communist, Marxist troops. I knew that Murtala would argue that that was the concern of the Angolan government alone, that they invited the Cubans to come because they felt threatened by the South Africans. I knew that was the way Murtala would respond, and I felt that delivering that letter might well be counterproductive for us. And I explained my concerns to Bill who, of course, listened to them sympathetically without agreeing that they were proper concerns on the part of the Nigerian government. And I can remember his reply. He said, "Don, you've got to deliver it. After all, how many times in our careers do we get a personal letter from our President to deliver to the host country president?" I said, "Well, Bill, I'll deliver it but I just have to repeat that I can't predict the response."

I did not deliver the letter personally. I knew Murtala would not receive me. I simply sent it. And the very next day, in all of the Lagos newspapers...and this must have been maybe the first week of December, maybe the second week of December, 1975...the very next day headlines appeared in all of the major Nigerian newspapers. Now I mean that's a lot of press. The Daily Times alone printed something like half a million copies a day -- that's the size of what I think the Philadelphia Inquirer turns out -- and this is a city of five million, and I'm speaking just about what happened in Lagos. In the other cities of the country there were, I'm sure, similar printings of the full text of President Ford's personal note to the Nigerian head of state. The headlines read



as follows...one of them I can remember said, 'Insult to Black Dignity'. Another one said, 'American President Lectures'. That was the tone. And there's a humorous aside. The text was printed perfectly, and it was within quotes, but every time the term 'Prime Minister Forster' or 'the Pretoria Government', or the 'South African Regime', anytime that kind of terminology appeared in the text of Ford's letter, the word 'racist' was put in front of it because that was the habit, if not the instruction, of all Nigerian press people in those days. Whenever they referred to South Africa, it was always Racist South Africa, the Racist Prime Minister, the Racist Regime of Pretoria, and so we had President Ford being quoted as using the word 'racist' something like a dozen or 15 times in one letter.

That letter provoked demonstrations the next day in front of our embassy. And they were not trivial demonstrations.

*Q: Excuse me, Donald. Would these have been genuinely provoked by the letter? Or would they have been organized by the government in Lagos?*

EASUM: I do not think that the military government organized those demonstrations. That's a good question, and I've thought about that a lot. The reason I don't is, that as best we could tell the bulk of the demonstrators were students, and young intellectuals. They were not labor union people. They were not the kinds of people to whom one might expect the military regime would go and attempt to crank up something. I don't think, given the independence of the Nigerian students, and the Nigerian intellectual community -- not all of whom had great love for Murtala, some of them thought he was a really crazy, wild, radical, violent kind of fellow, and he had that reputation. I think it was not turned on. However, it was not prevented. It might have been because it took some organization for them to get themselves together and march down, and they were not harassed by police on the way, or accompanied by police.

The Marines behaved with moderation under our instruction, and locked the place. And the only real damage was a lot of windows were broken by rocks and bricks that were thrown through the windows. The next week or two went by without too much new event. Of course, I had to report all of this to Washington, and I explained the reasons behind this growing Nigerian attitude of hostility toward the U.S., now being picked up by the intellectual community, and the students, based on the feeling that the U.S. was in effect siding with racist South Africa against the legitimate government of Angola. [The U.S. was now providing military assistance to UNITA.]

Murtala went to the OAU meeting, and I told you of the instruction I had received which had been designed to try to get him to be moderate. That, plus the Ford letter, obviously did nothing, if not maybe fortify his determination to give a tough speech, and he did provide the leadership for his African colleagues to opt, all of them, for the MPLA at the time when Portugal was still trying very hard to bring the three groups together, and many other people were too. But the situation in Angola was fast deteriorating with warfare that was on a rising scale. More Cubans arriving with Russian military and logistic support, and more South Africans arriving. And therefore the possibility of bringing three groups together was pretty much lost. Murtala's speech was...the thrust of it was, "Let us all opt for the MPLA and give them all assistance and support on behalf of the OAU." That, in fact, yes, was a very close vote. There were others who felt that there were ways still. More moderate African countries -- Senegal, I think, was the leader of the

group trying to bring the more moderate African countries together in an attempt to stop the fighting, and to bring the three groups together in some kind of national unity coalition. It was a vote nonetheless that was a great disappointment to the United States, and Murtala was the reason for it.

He came back and was assassinated. It wasn't quite that simple, but indeed a month later, just on a street about three blocks from where I lived, he was shot down in an ambush prepared for him by an army major named Dimka, and some of his young military associates. They shot him in his car, moved off to the radio station where they had already prepared a tape, and the tape was broadcast saying, "We've got rid of the tyrant. Revolution is all over the country. There will be a curfew from dawn to dusk." This was not a very bright major. "There will be a dawn to dusk curfew"... in fact he was speaking in pigeon English and his broadcast said, "We have now taken over and it is all over the thirteen states." Now, nobody knew quite what he meant. We think, in retrospect, he meant that he had people and his fellow plotters, planted in each of the capitals of the thirteen states, and that they were going to assassinate the heads of government in those individual Nigerian states. That didn't work. It was not "all over" the thirteen states, although they had made a faint attempt, there were some killings, maybe a half dozen or so, in two or three other states. The revolution hardly caught hold. But the country went into a state of really serious mourning partly because of his tough personality, and what he had done at the OAU, had developed in a very short time, a very fanatic devotion on the part of Nigerians, young and old.

And interestingly enough, we were hosting, at that point, the first major international tennis tournament that Nigeria had ever organized, and I'd been very much involved in assisting eight or ten American professionals in getting there. I was involved in the planning for the tournament. It was sanctioned by the ATP, the Association of Tennis Professionals, and it was the first time a Nigerian tennis tournament would permit participants to win points on the world computer in the sky. Arthur Ashe came, Stan Smith, Tom Okker of Holland, Karl Meiler of Germany, El Shafei of Egypt, Dibbs and Stockton, and Solomon from the U.S., Fibak -- he was then from the U.S. We had a tremendous international tournament, which that very morning of the assassination was supposed to pick up its third day. Ashe didn't have to play that day, so he was on the golf course, which was right next to the place where the assassination took place, and he heard shooting. The tournament of course, and all sports events, were canceled while preparations were made for the traditional Muslim burial of Murtala in an open, unmarked, grave in a field in the north of Nigeria. So for four days all activities of that sort were suspended. No one knew where the assassin was. He fled from the radio station. The army managed to get back in charge during the day of the shooting. And it was clear that the revolution did not succeed, and that the government was back in control. But during that first day things were pretty dicey. We had tennis players in one hotel, and the army came in and went all through the hotel rooms, and some of these kids had never had this kind of experience before, and they got scared and we managed to send transportation through the roadblocks, and so on, and get everybody out to my house where we had about 15 professional tennis players. We had British journalists, and we had all kinds of people hanging around for two or three days until we were able to house them, not in hotels anymore, but in the homes of Americans and others. Nobody could get out of the country for a week. Even Pele, who was supposed to give demonstrations in the national stadium, couldn't move. He was stuck at the home of the Brazilian ambassador. All that is just a little local color and not really very significant. The key point is...well, I can tell the story, it will move to the key

point.

We were finally, after about a week, instructed to resume the tournament. Instructed by the government, and we did. Ashe was serving to Borowiak at one-all in the second set after taking the first set 7-6, when troops came into the tennis stadium with guns, yelling, "Get out! Get out!" We didn't know what was happening. There was panic. Fortunately nobody was killed, but a few people were beaten up by the police. We managed to get people in their cars, send them home, and I walked from there, with a young Marine guard, a corporal in civilian clothes, who was scared to death. He didn't know what to do. He knew he was supposed to protect the American Ambassador, but he had never had an experience like that. We started walking toward our embassy, which was only five blocks away, and we suddenly saw this demonstration coming toward us, and the crowds were such that we couldn't get out of the street. And so we just had to stand there. And this parade walked right through us. They didn't harm us at all, but the big signs...the first one we saw was, "Down with the CIA." The next one said, "Hang Dimka" -- he was the assassin, and he was on the run. "Yankee, go home." This was fairly heavy duty stuff.

And the next thing that happened was, within a day, another demonstration at our embassy. And this time they went to chase the Brits first. The British High Commissioner was just next door to ours, and the assassin had made a major mistake. He had gone, after securing his radio station, and putting his tape on the radio, he had gone to the British High Commission -- just walked in in his military uniform, with three other soldiers, all of them with guns, walked right into the office of the British High Commissioner -- and somehow it wasn't very well protected that day by his staff -- and said, "Sir, do you know who I am?" And the British High Commissioner, who was a very starchy, formal kind of fellow, said, "No. Not only that, I don't know what you're doing here." And Dimka said, "Well, I'm surprised you don't know who I am. I was just on the radio. I'm the person who assassinated the head of state." And the High Commissioner talked with him for something like 15 minutes. Dimka then said, "Well, I've got to go back to the radio station." So Dimka left, and the High Commissioner made a serious mistake. He did not notify the government that he had just talked to the assassin. Instead, he sent his -- I've forgotten what they call them in the British system. We would call them our SRF types. He sent his intelligence people out to try to find their police counterparts, and their counterparts in the local FBI -- I've forgotten what it's called, CID maybe, something like that. And they scurried around and couldn't find out very much. Lunch time came. The High Commissioner went home to lunch, and on his way home he encountered the Reuters correspondent, and he said, "Hey, Bill, you know what happened this morning? Dimka came into my office and talked with me, and he asked me to contact General Gowon (who was in exile studying in Britain) to tell General Gowon that the deed's been done, and he was waiting for instructions." And Reuters put that on the wire, and by the afternoon the Nigerian government was hearing on the radio that the assassin had talked with the British High Commissioner, who was asked by the assassin to contact Gowon in London -- outside London, Suffolk, or some place, for instructions.

Well, you can imagine what happened to the High Commissioner. He was thrown out within about three days after that.

*Q: I'm surprised he wasn't yanked out.*

EASUM: Well, he probably should have been for protection. He should have been yanked, but he was thrown out but not before we had the second demonstration. And this one was a lot tougher. First, they went after his place. It was on a Saturday, and they got inside, and they just ripped it up. They threw over the typewriters, and ripped up the counters. They didn't, I guess, get any secret information but they really tore up the downstairs.

Then they came to us, and we were right next door, and it was a lot tougher this time. We hadn't yet repaired most of our windows and so those windows were fair game for people to get in but fortunately...I guess they must have been barred, I can't remember now, because they didn't try to get in the windows, but they broke all the other windows. And then they went after the flag pole which the Marines had greased with lard because the first time around the youngsters had managed to climb up the flag pole and get the flag -- and you know how the Marines feel about the flag. This time they had greased the flag pole, and the youngsters couldn't climb it. But they managed to figure out a way to yank on it, and they managed to bend it somehow. But they didn't get the flag. The Marines still view this as their great triumph. But they almost got inside. They were pounding on the door, and the Marines asked me to throw tear gas, and I refused saying, "No way. If any Nigerian is hurt out here, we're in real trouble, and I think the police are coming." The sergeant called me. I was at home and my telephone didn't work, of course, but I did have a radio, and the sergeant told me on the radio, "Sir, the police didn't come." I said, "Well, give them another ten minutes." And I know he thought that I was a useless pacifist. He wanted to throw that tear gas so badly. I had instructed them to lock up their weapons. So at any rate, the police did come. They threw tear gas and the crowd was dispersed.

Now, to get back to Henry. That's the environment of early 1976 when he, back in Washington, finally decided Africa was important. Mind you, all throughout 1974, as we told in the other tape, I had been laboring valiantly to try to get him to pay some attention to Southern Africa, and he hadn't been interested. Now he was, and he decided somehow he could be useful with his own particular snake oil, and genius, in bringing some kind of resolution to the Rhodesian problem. In Rhodesia we had unilateral declaration of independence which was viewed as illegal by the British, and so you had a white minority regime headed by Ian Smith. Meanwhile you had ZANU and ZAPU, those were two independence movements, nationalist movements, "terrorist" groups in the minds of some.

We're now at the beginning of 1976, and I've just recounted the deep trouble in which the U.S. found itself then, all to be attributed to the policies of the U.S. in Southern Africa, and particularly in Angola as perceived by the Nigerians.

The purpose of this little chronology has been to come back to Henry Kissinger who, during the previous year when I was his Assistant Secretary, refused to take Africa seriously. People used to say to him, "You don't have any Africa policy. What are your people doing in Africa? Why don't you come up with an Africa policy? You've got a Middle East policy, you've got this policy, that,..." And he used to say, rather proudly, "How can I have an Africa policy when there are 51 countries out there? It's impossible." And I would, from time to time, try to say things to him, and once I wrote a memorandum to say, "It is simple to have an Africa policy. We don't have to agonize over this. It can be based simply on two things, and they're valid for every country, and every situation. One, is respect for, and concern about human rights. And the other is concern for

the economic development future of Africa, and the role that the U.S. can play in assisting that economic development. It's easy. We can construct a policy for you along those lines." He didn't want to. He was afraid of the human rights one, and he was also all bottled up by his previous belief that minority white regimes were here to stay in Africa. He'd been quoted on that before when he was National Security Adviser to Nixon. And he also had a thing about populist revolution when it became violent. He could handle the revolutions of Germany in the middle part of the nineteenth century, but he could not handle the nationalist movements fighting against the Portuguese in the five territories. He couldn't handle that. Nor could he handle what was happening in Rhodesia.

However, to his credit, belatedly he came to recognize it was important. And I think Bill Schauffele deserves some credit for this. Bill took my place after the unfortunate three or four months of Nat Davis. Bill, or somebody, persuaded Kissinger to take a look at Southern Africa, and he did. He decided that he could play a role with regard to the independence struggle -- call it independence struggle -- in Rhodesia. And he went to Lusaka, just next door, the capital of Zambia, and made a major speech. The first time he'd ever made a policy speech on Africa. And in that speech he said some very brave things, brave for him. A lot of us had been saying them for a long time, but for him this was quite revolutionary when he said that he thought that the future of Rhodesia depended on majority rule. And he managed to persuade Smith to fall back from where Smith had been before. Smith had previously insisted stubbornly, "There will be no majority rule in my lifetime." And Smith made a statement when Kissinger was there indicating some flexibility -- I wish I could remember the exact statement -- I don't. It was a good speech [Kissinger]. It sounded a lot like a speech that I had made a year previously. And Don Peterson, bless his heart, or maybe it was Wil De Pree, at any rate one of our fellow Africanists, told me that in fact his speech writers had borrowed from that speech I'd made a year earlier. At any rate, I don't want to insist on that because I'm not sure it's true. I haven't checked out the text.

So Kissinger made that speech, and he sent me a telegram saying, "I would like to come to Nigeria and explain to your Nigerian colleagues our new policy toward Africa, and particularly towards Southern Africa." I couldn't even get to first base with that request. Of course, I tried valiantly, but the Nigerians were no way going to receive him. The excuse that they used was, that if he came there would be student protests, and the military regime did not want to use military force against the students in Lagos. That was the argument they used. The real reason was, there was no way they wanted him to come because they were persuaded...first of all, they weren't all that excited about the speech which for Kissinger was a very liberal speech, but for the Nigerians, not at all. It certainly did not opt for the MPLA in Nigeria. It did not pledge undying opposition to apartheid, except in ritual terms, and it did not speak about the independence struggle in Rhodesia in a fashion that most Africans considered adequate. It was very conservative in that regard even though Smith viewed it as a pretty dangerous speech. So I had to tell him "no".

However, before sending that message back, in the meeting I had with General Obasanjo, who had taken the place of Murtala, when Murtala was assassinated and Obasanjo was the head of state for the ensuing four years, I asked Obasanjo were there someone else who could bring the Kissinger message if they would not accept Kissinger. And they said, of course, which made it clear it wasn't so much the message they were worried about, it was their personal antipathy to

Henry Kissinger that kept them. And I said, "For example, he has with him John Reinhardt." John Reinhardt had been the U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria prior to my arrival. He had been a splendid ambassador. He was in Lagos for something like three years, and he was part of the intricate switch that Kissinger orchestrated in sending me to Lagos. He sent me to Lagos to take John's place. John Reinhardt was brought back and made Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, and Kissinger had the wit to put John Reinhardt on his team when he went to Lusaka. So I sent the message back to the Secretary saying, "They would prefer John Reinhardt." And he sent John Reinhardt. I wonder what went through his mind when he did that.

John came, and John and I went to see General Obasanjo and talked about the new approach by Kissinger to African policy, and Obasanjo found it unimpressive, but interesting.

That's the first time that I had to say "no" to a Kissinger request to come to Lagos. In June of '76, Kissinger was visiting Europe. He was already clearly sensitive to the Nigerian attitudes because he sent me a message saying, "I'm going to be in Europe anyway, do you think that you might be able to get me in? Do you think the Nigerians would receive me if we could, in effect, say, 'Well he's in Europe anyway, and he'd just like to drop down'". Well, that didn't sound to me as if it paid much attention to the Nigerians. And I was on the point of sending back...I waited a day or so, and I was on the point of sending back to him a message suggesting there might be some other way to couch this request, when he, maybe by telepathy, canceled. He sent me back a message saying, "Never mind." If I'd been able to go back quickly and say, "Come ahead," I'm sure he'd have come. But the delay, I think, made him think, "Oh, oh. I'm going to get another negative" and he didn't want to have that on his record. So he said, "Never mind. I can't make it."

Meanwhile, our situation in Lagos was moving reasonably well. The British ambassador had been thrown out. Our contacts, and my personal contacts, were excellent. I think because the Nigerians recognized that, although I was a faithful supporter of U.S. policy in my official contacts, I had a lot of personal concerns with it. So I had excellent access, and the British, in fact, were saying, "How come Easum has all this access when our guy got thrown out?" Well, for whatever reason, we were beginning to be able to build some new U.S. economic relationships, and some new cultural exchanges, and I felt we were getting somewhere even though there was this grave, grave difference of view with regard to U.S. policy in Angola where we were still assisting UNITA, and with regard to an inadequate -- in the Nigerian view -- an inadequate adoption of the African National Congress in South Africa which we, in those days, didn't really talk with very much. They felt we were essentially much too friendly with, and concerned about, the problems of the Pretoria government -- notice I did not say, "The racist Pretoria government," although they are.

This takes us now to September, and this was a fun adventure. This was the third request of Henry to come to Nigeria. He and Bill Schaefe were at a UNCTAD meeting October '76, in Nairobi -- or in Khartoum or Addis just before our election. I think it was Nairobi. Nairobi is more logical. He put a third request to me, and for a third time the Nigerians said "no". Now I understood, and was not unsympathetic with the first two refusals, but I was a little annoyed at the third. I thought the Nigerians were pushing their luck pretty hard. Mind you, the first time in April the Nigerians managed to persuade the Ghanaians not to take him either. And Shirley Temple Black was our Ambassador to Accra, and she just loved Henry Kissinger, and he just

thought she was the greatest thing in the world. And he had sent his request there, as well as to Lagos. And Joe Garba, the Foreign Minister of Nigeria, went to Accra shortly after sending his own negative response back, and talked to Acheampong, who was the head of state...talked to Acheampong, and in effect, I think, I don't have fact for this, put some economic leverage on the Ghanaians who were then importing a lot of oil from Nigeria. And Garba said in effect, "We don't think any of us should see this person, and if you do, it's not going to look very good." And so Acheampong sent back, through Shirley Black, the most asinine excuse. He said he had a boil on his neck, and he would have been very uncomfortable, given his physical pain, to receive the Secretary of State. Can you imagine?

So, of course, Henry Kissinger never saw Foreign Ministers except in European countries, and I guess even there not all that often. Never would he go to a developing world country and see anybody other than the head of state. Of course, that tended to gravel some of our developing world people, too, and in particular such proud ones as Nigerians who felt, "He's your Secretary of State, why can't our Secretary of State see him? Why does it have to be that he insists on seeing our head of state?"

Okay, so the third time, refusal. And I sent back a message to Kissinger in Nairobi doing my best to explain the reasons. I got an immediate rocket back, which Bill Schauffele admits to have drafted, but under instruction from Kissinger, which said something like, "It is time for us to be less concerned about the sensitivities of our host governments, and more concerned about insisting on the U.S. national interest." Some such message. And it ended up, "I want to see you in my office day after tomorrow in Washington." Ha-ha! So Easum thinks he's going to be fired for the second time. So I dutifully go back and the first person I go to see when I get back, to check up on the appointment, is Larry Eagleburger. And I say, "Larry, what's this all about?" And Larry says, "Don, I don't have to tell you. You've been a thorn in Kissinger's side for the last two years. He just doesn't understand why the Nigerians are so nasty to him, and he's going to tell you that." And I said, "Well, are you going to be in there with me?" And he said, "No way. This is your scene, buddy." So I go down to Bill Schauffele, the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, and I said, "Bill, what's going on?" And he said essentially the same thing. And I said, "Well, you're going to go with me, aren't you?" And he said, "I don't want to go with you. Why should I?" I said, "Bill, come on. You're the Assistant Secretary of State, this is not a personal thing. I'm out there doing my best, and Nigeria is an important place. They're sending us half of our imported oil..." and that meant 25% of our total consumption..."You know how important Nigeria is. I'm out there doing what I can do. This is not an issue of...even if the Secretary may think it is...this can't be permitted to be an issue of personal animosity. It's got to be looked at in terms of U.S. interests with regard to Nigeria. As long as I'm there, as the Ambassador, I have things to say about that country and you are my Assistant Secretary, and I think you should go with me." And so Bill said, "All right."

So we had our meeting with Henry. And the first thing he said is, "Don, you tell me. Why is it that every place I go in Africa, trying to explain my new policies, the Nigerians have been there first bad mouthing me?" And I said, "Mr. Secretary, I've tried to explain in my despatches and so on, why they feel the way they do. I'm doing my best to explain our policies, but they're not ready to listen." So he said, "What can we do about this? We've got to do something about this. What can we do?"

Now, Bill and I had anticipated that, and we decided that Bill and I would go up to New York where Joe Garba, the Foreign Minister, happened to be at some kind of UN affair. And we would meet directly with him, and try to present to him some of our concerns, and some of the Secretary's concerns. And so Bill said, "Mr. Secretary, Don and I have a plan to go to New York in a couple of days and see Joe Garba." Immediately the Secretary interrupted, and he said, "Joe Garba in this country? And I can't go to his country? Can't we keep that son of a bitch out of here?" Of course, we said, "Mr. Secretary, he's the Ambassador to the United Nations. You can't keep him out of the UN. It's a different scene." He said, "Why won't he let me into Nigeria?" And I said, "I've tried to explain, but for one thing he doesn't want to have riots in the street." And Kissinger said, "I didn't know I was that important." And immediately we're beginning to see a little bit of his wit, and his egocentricity, and he's beginning to cool down a little bit. Somewhere I've got some notes on that conversation. But that was the tenor of it, and he then began to soften up considerably, and he said, "You know I've just got to succeed with this new policy on Southern African." That was an interesting statement because there was no way he could succeed with the policy as he'd put it together. It didn't have any substance to it, and the main problem with it was, in my view, he had no credibility with Frelimo which was the independence movement in Mozambique, then in charge of the new independent country. He had no credibility with Mugabe and his ZANU part of the patriotic front in Zimbabwe. He had no credibility with the more radical Africans, or with the Nigerians. And he hadn't talked with any of them. He had talked with no Africans about his idea for some kind of negotiated solution of the Rhodesian problem. He'd had no conversations with anybody except Smith, essentially. And I indicated something like that to him, putting it as nicely as I could. And then he said, "Well, what I need is a Sadat. I'm looking for a Sadat." He said, "Do you think maybe Nyerere could play that role?" And, Pete, you would understand this better than I would. He was using his Middle East -- obviously his shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East -- as his model.

I think he was beginning to think that he could do something like he'd done in the Middle East in Rhodesia. And that statement, "I'm looking for a Sadat, could Nyerere be that person?" was so indicative of his mind-set. I don't remember much more about that conversation. He did not fire me again. It was actually the best conversation I had ever had with him on Africa.

*Q: This was after the election? At this point he knew...*

EASUM: No. It must have been just about at election time. He was still thinking that maybe under the next administration, if Republican, that he would be able to really go to work on some kind of shuttle diplomacy between Washington and Harare, which was still called Salisbury. Fascinating. And then shortly after that, of course, we had the election and that starts a whole new story, and in a sense it's a real watershed when he left. A real watershed with regard to U.S. relations with Africa, and particularly with Southern Africa. It was like night and day when the Carter administration came in.

*Q: How did this come to you first in Nigeria? How did you first detect the shift? You were certainly anticipating it, but what was the grass roots look of it?*

EASUM: Well, I can tell you a quick story about that, that I think answers the question very



directly. In December of that year, the election having taken place, but Carter not yet having been inaugurated, Dick Clark, Democratic Senator from Iowa who had been, and was at that time, the splendid chairman of the Senate Subcommittee for Africa -- the Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Relations. He had taken a trip to East Africa, to Tanzania, maybe South Africa -- I'm not sure -- and he was now in December visiting me in Lagos on his way back to the U.S. We sat around my swimming pool one evening just talking, the two of us, about ways in which the Carter administration might sketch out a different approach to Africa. Mind you, Andy Young had been to Lagos by then already a couple of times under my regime. I'd been there almost two years. Andy had been there a couple of times, and had put forward his own particular views of how he thought a Carter administration, if elected, would approach Africa. And it was already clear that there would be a human rights flavor, or thrust, or foundation, to the policy that would be very, very different from the previous Nixon-Ford-Kissinger approach. Dick Clark put forward the same kind of prediction as to the way the administration would move, and he paid tribute to Andy Young, and to the role Andy had played as a personal associate of President Carter's in talking about civil rights, and human rights, and so on, in the United States, but also alerting him a bit to the African scene. And Clark said, "Don, I think what we really need to do is get the President very quickly face to face with one of these wonderful African heads of state so he can hear directly about some of these concerns, and what would you think about Nyerere coming as one of the first heads of state to visit President Carter in the new year, 1977, the first year of the administration?" And he said, "I've just talked with Nyerere and he's just an absolutely incredible person." Clark, of course, knew Nyerere already. Clark had traveled widely in Africa and knew a lot about it, and had as his staff aide Dick Moose, who soon became the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. And Moose had been with Clark on this trip but had left from Lagos, had not been able to stay for the Lagos part. I said I thought that was a great idea. I said, "But let's talk about this again after we've seen General Obasanjo." We were scheduled to see the Nigerian head of state, General Obasanjo, the next day. "Because you'll see there a person who's the antithesis of Nyerere, and yet who in many ways represents the same kind of approach to human rights, and development, in Africa that Nyerere does, but from a completely different philosophical standpoint. Nyerere is an ideologue. He's a convinced egalitarian. He's a socialist. He's a school teacher by training and trade. He impresses you as being unable to swat a fly with a flyswatter. Not only because he isn't strong enough, but because he is just a complete pacifist in his approach to problems. Smiles constantly. Witty conversationalist. Obasanjo on the other hand outweighs him three times, physically. Has arms the size of tree trunks. Is a general in the army who accepted, if not produced, the surrender of the Biafran troops. Not an ideologue at all. He doesn't like ideology, and philosophy. He's a pragmatist, hard-nosed soldier, who wants results. Let's think after you've seen Obasanjo tomorrow, whether we could get both of them, at different times of course, in to see Carter during the first year, and see what kind of results that might have in helping President Carter shape his new approach to Africa." And I remember Clark's answer after we saw Obasanjo. As Clark left the meeting, he said to me, "This would be terrific if we could get both of them together." He said, "I'll talk to Fritz about it," Fritz Mondale, of course, being the Vice President. He did talk to Fritz, and I wish...you know memories are faulty...I can't remember whether Nyerere went before Obasanjo went, or after, but indeed the strategy played out. It worked.

I had the challenge, once I heard back from Washington that the idea was worth exploring with Obasanjo...we, of course, didn't want to put the official request to him before we knew he'd say

yes. You don't want to say, "Our President wants you to come," and then get yourself up against a negative answer.

And so I played it out with the Foreign Minister with whom by then I had a really good relationship. This was Joe Garba, the one I mentioned to you before, whom I first got to know on a basketball court. Sports keeps coming into my career. He had been the captain of the Nigerian National Basketball Team before he announced the deposition of General Gowon, and the first thing that happened to me in Nigeria when I arrived several years earlier, was to be invited to a basketball game where the national team, captained by Colonel Joe Garba, whom I didn't know, was to play a young team of American missionaries who not only played basketball, but brought their guitars and sort of evangelized the crowd during half time. And forgive me that I digress again, but it's fun. I'm seated there on the bench with the young Americans, and I'm watching this first half of the basketball game, which is played out-of-doors on a cement court -- miserable circumstances, but it's the National Basketball Stadium, so called. And I see this tall dude out there, whose launching these shots from mid-court, a kind of combination of overarm baseball throw and a push shot. And they never go in, and he's stepping out of bounds all the time, and the referee is not blowing the whistle but he's clearly in charge. And I find out as the game goes on, that that's Colonel Joe Garba, the commander of the palace guards, and he's the captain of the team, and he's an inveterate optimist. He always thinks these shots from mid court are going in. They never do, but he keeps thinking some day they will, and nobody dares blow the whistle on him when he steps out of bounds -- that was Joe Garba. And his team was completely exhausted by first half time. These are the best players they had in those days. I don't know where Olajuwon was. He wasn't around obviously, and the score was something like 40 to 20 in favor of the young American missionaries, who then take over at half time -- breathing quite normally -- playing their guitars, singing songs, and then they go out and clobber the poor Nigerians the second half. The final score -- they tried to keep it down, of course -- was something like 80 to 50. And we had a reception at our house afterwards, and Garba comes to the reception, and I meet him. And a few weeks later he takes the radio and says, "We've just overthrown General Gowon." So it shows you how sports can introduce you to key people. You never know how they're going to be important later on.

At any rate, where are we now? We've got to bring us back to the visits. I worked out with Garba this idea. I said, "Joe, if we were to put a request to Obasanjo (this is late '77 now, the summer of '77), if we were to put a request to him, what do you think the response would be? Is it too soon for him" The heritage of our difficult times was still very much in all of our minds, of course. And he said, "I don't know, but let me try, and I'll come back to you." And after a while, a period of weeks, he said, "Don, I think it will work. Let's try it." So, of course, I communicated with Dick Moose, the Assistant Secretary, and he got the necessary authorizations. And I'm then authorized, still informally, to go to Joe Garba and say, "Yes, we will invite Obasanjo to the White House if you can assure me he'll say yes." So after a day or so Garba says, "Yes. He'll say yes."

So then back to Moose over in the White House. I'm sure Moose goes one way or another, or through the Secretary, and we get a letter from President Carter inviting General Obasanjo to make a state visit. And he does. I go back, of course, as is the practice, and the visit went awfully well. Obasanjo recognized in Carter somebody who was really committed to work for change in

South Africa, not just talk about it, and to pull out our assistance from UNITA, as did happen under the Clark amendment. No more assistance to any military groups in Angola. He also saw, he sensed...Obasanjo did, that under Carter the U.S. might really push Britain to push Ian Smith to sit down with the Nationalists, and work out some kind of majority rule scheme for Rhodesia. So the visit went beautifully. And we sensed that probably Obasanjo would then invite Carter. So this was all dramatic change -- black and white from what I'd experienced under the previous administration.

We left off with the Obasanjo visit to Washington. Very successful. Obasanjo's return to Nigeria, and our orchestration then of the return visit with Obasanjo calling me over, I don't know, I suppose a month or so after he returned, and talking to me about his desire to bring Jimmy Carter to Nigeria. Mind you, no American President had ever visited independent black Africa in history. We knew a visit, if we could arrange one, would be historic. So, of course, we went back, our embassy did, to Washington and indicated there were very promising signs, that Obasanjo would invite Carter if Carter could give us a tentative response indicating he'd be willing to consider an invitation. He did that. And to make a long story short, President Carter visited two African countries, Liberia and Nigeria, in late March and early April of 1978. And those were historic visits.

We were very uneasy about the visit to Nigeria. Nigeria is a country with great proclivity for sudden violence, for breakdown of public order. Mind you, a city of five or six million crammed in to a very small geographic area. An infrastructure that doesn't work. Telephones don't work. Just to get messages around the city you have to send them on a motorcycle, or you have a whole elaborate system of walkie-talkies and radios. The power system still -- but at that time even worse -- is very undependable. So that every home, or residence, of any standing has its own private stand-by generators. The Central Bank of Nigeria had a whole floor of car batteries hooked up together to provide emergency power to the computers of the bank, and the car batteries would heat up so much that they had something like 127 electric fans hooked up to blow air on the car batteries. No elevators work. You're constantly tramping up anywhere from five to thirty-five stories. So we were very much worried about this visit. And, as you know, for visits like that the U.S. government sends out a team in advance, and they walk through every single thing that the President of the United States is supposed to do. And they do this about six weeks in advance, or two months in advance. And that team came out, and they were horrified. Absolutely horrified by everything they saw in spite of the fact that we were doing our very best to assure that it was going to work. And we felt it would work.

Reluctantly they...I don't know what kind of agonies they went through, but they said, "All right. We'll try this." But we were scared to death until it was over. Well, to make a long story short, it went absolutely to perfection. It was absolutely splendid. The streets were blocked off when necessary. We had, for the first and probably the last time in history, we had, we felt, control of the Nigerian police. Our people did. They were talking to them through their little microphones in their wrists, and the Nigerian police were absolutely fascinated because they were all given all this equipment. And for the first time in their memory, they all had telephones, they all had walkie-talkies. We used to take Nigerian Ministers for fun, up to the top floor of one of the hotels where all the communication gear had been set up, and we'd give them a tour of the gear, and then we'd say, "Do you want to telephone anybody?" And they'd say, "What do you mean

anybody? Anywhere?" "Yes, anywhere." I can remember the Minister of Economics, three times he wanted to telephone some relative in Texas, and we were able, of course, to put him through just like that.

And I had my own exciting experiences because I had telephones in the house that worked for a change. I even had a phone call from Jody Powell when the advance team left Rio and he called me on the telephone when they were airborne from Rio, and talked to me in my residence in Lagos. Well, today, of course, all that stuff is normal but when you're in -- as you well know -- when you're in the developing world, and you can do something like that, and mind you this was thirteen years ago, that's pretty exciting stuff. Well, anyway, the visit went absolutely splendidly. And to show you how a powerful country can be turned around in a year and a half from riots in the street, death threats to me, jailings -- I didn't mention this -- jailings of American businessmen without our knowing it. And they'd spend the night sleeping on a table in a security chief's office with one bare light bulb up there, and be questioned about what they were doing where. If you wore a camera around your neck, you were immediately arrested. American companies were being just automatically rejected on contracts. And you know, it's heavy duty stuff. And to have this kind of change take place so fast. Why? Well, because a different policy on human rights. It's as simple as that. That's the simplest way to put it. Make it a little more complicated and explain it a little better, a different policy with regard to racism in South Africa.

And then the personality. Who could be more different than Kissinger on the one hand, and Carter on the other? Or Carter and Vance on the other? Here were two decent, humane individuals, willing to listen. On the other side, I won't use adjectives, but you had somebody unwilling to listen, only interested in pushing his own particular brand of policy which he would argue was in the service of the U.S. I won't argue about that. With a style that was seen as manipulative and untrustworthy, and a style that Nigerians felt, and many Africans felt, was derogatory to them as people. So much for that.

We had a meeting that was an extraordinary meeting. Obasanjo talked with Carter about the need to support the Patriotic Front in Rhodesia. The Patriotic Front was the alliance between Mugabe and his ZANU on the one hand, and Nkomo and his ZAPU on the other. They were now fighting from safe havens in Mozambique, which was now independent, and from Zambia. And they were putting terrible pressure on the Rhodesians, and the Rhodesians in turn were escalating the level of their warfare, and you had a terrible situation. And Britain had not yet come down hard in favor of getting everybody together, and talking over for a new future based on majority rule. That was the situation at the time.

Obasanjo said to Carter, "I like very much what I hear you saying about the Rhodesian situation." "As you know," he said, "at the moment we're at a stalemate. We can't get the ZANU and ZAPU people, the Patriotic Front people, to talk with the Smith people, and we can't get the Smith people to talk with them. What we're pushing for is All Parties Talks. That is the big issue and nobody can seem to produce it."

The Foreign Minister and I had arranged that in Lagos at that very same time would be the Foreign Ministers of the Front Line countries [Southern Africa]. We didn't tell Washington in advance. In fact, Garba really confronted me with a fait accompli. He simply said, about the day

before Carter was going to arrive -- and this was very clever of him -- "Donald, I've arranged for all of the Front Line Foreign Ministers to be here. And I hope you can get Cy Vance to talk with them." Well, it was a genius move on his part, because that's exactly what Vance wanted to do. And after Obasanjo and Carter had sort of agreed together on the approach to the Rhodesian freedom struggle issue, it was the natural thing for Garba to say to Carter, "Well, sir, we've got the Front Line Foreign Ministers here, why not let Cy Vance talk with them while you and General Obasanjo do some other things?" And that's exactly what we did. We had side conversations that included Andy Young and Don McHenry, and Brzezinski, who wasn't really on the team philosophically. I didn't sense he was really with it. And, of course, Dick Moose, and myself, and Tony Lake, and one or two others.

We had those conversations, and based on an agreement Carter and Obasanjo made, we agreed a team would go to Dar es Salaam as quickly as possible [to talk with the Patriotic Front if the Front Line Foreign Ministers could arrange it]. That we would persuade David Owen from London to come down, and we would try to get the All Parties Talks resuscitated. This all was as a result of the fact that Obasanjo found Carter attractive, philosophically speaking. And, indeed, that's what happened. I'll tell you about that in a minute.

The other thing we agreed was on Namibia where Carter explained what the Group of Five was trying to produce a democratically elected government in Namibia, withdrawal of South African control, and the UN's sponsoring this in resolution which finally became Resolution 435. Obasanjo liked that, and he said, "Have you put it to the UN Security Council yet?" And Carter said, "No. We're planning to, we're worried about the Russians." And Obasanjo said, "I will lean on them not to veto." And he did. He called in the Russian Ambassador, and he told him, "Don't you people veto." And he sent the Nigerian Ambassador in Moscow in to see his counterpart to say, "We, the Nigerians, do not believe you, the Russians, should veto this which is sponsored by the major five allied powers. We think this makes sense." And they didn't veto.

That was a really interesting example of how a powerful Third World country -- much more powerful then than it is now for economic reasons -- a powerful Third World country, Nigeria, could play our game, in a sense. But it was also their game. So it was a tremendously successful visit. The British High Commissioner from my telephone, which again worked -- well, yes, it was working then because the U.S. telecommunications people had insisted that it work -- we telephoned David Owen in London and woke him up. I didn't wake him up. I was standing there and the British High Commissioner, Sir Sam Fowle, woke him up, and said, "David, can you show up in Dar es Salaam three weeks from now to talk to Mugabe, and Nkomo, and Chikerema, and Tongarara, and the other Patriotic Front leaders?" And David Owen said, "It sounds useful but they haven't been willing to talk to us. Who's guaranteeing they'll be there?" And Sir Sam Fowle was able to say, "General Obasanjo, and President Jimmy Carter, because they're right here, and we just met with all the Foreign Ministers of the Front Line states, and they guarantee that they will deliver these people. The only quid pro quo is, that we deliver Smith and Muzorewa subsequently in Salisbury." And so it happened. And I was asked by Vance to go.

So I went. Dick Moose was there, Andy Young was there again, Cy Vance, McHenry, David Owen, and all of the Patriotic Front people that I've mentioned. And we sat for three days under Nyerere's hostship and talked about the All Parties Talks. What would the Nationalists need to

have to really come to Salisbury and sit down with Smith? After we got that more or less sorted out, we went to Salisbury and we met with Smith, Muzorewa and some of his people, and talked with them about what they would need. And we then went to Johannesburg, and talked with the South Africans about the arrangements. All that just because we had cooked up -- I like to put it this way, but it's much too egocentric -- Dick Clark and I sitting beside my swimming pool, and saying to ourselves, "The way to get Jimmy Carter started right, is to get him to talk to some African leaders," and Nyerere and Obasanjo were the first two. So here's this wonderful sort of bringing that wheel full circle. That's really the story, Pete.

We could talk about other things at some other time perhaps, but I think this is essentially a story that connects an American Ambassador with his Secretary of State -- with two of them really. First of all Henry Kissinger, and then secondly, Cy Vance, who was a tremendous colleague in all of this, who took a great and sympathetic interest in Africa, and with Dick Moose, and Don McHenry, and Andy Young, and above all, President Carter who managed to fashion some policies that I felt were very wise, and that proved very productive. Unfortunately the Angolan-Namibia part of it was frustrated when the Reagan administration came to power and took eight more years to spin out.

*Q: How long were you in Lagos then after this visit?*

EASUM: After the Carter visit to Lagos, which was in the spring of '78, I was there until October of '79. And I chose my time of departure to coincide with the handing over of power by the military regime, headed for one year by Murtala, and for three years by Obasanjo -- the handing over of power to a civilian elected regime. Murtala had pledged, "In four years we're leaving. We're going to spend this four years setting up a new constitution, a new system for the country patterned somewhat on the U.S. with bicameral legislatures in the states, a unicameral legislature in the federal capital." And that worked itself out all the time I was there. And in October the election took place. Shehu Shagari, a civilian from the north, who had been a Minister of Finance in previous governments, was elected president. The military regime stood down, a civilian regime was elected, and I was then offered the presidency of the African American Institute. So I retired then the Foreign Service and came back to New York, and I've been here ever since.

*Q: That was really a very interesting period that you were in Nigeria, because you covered a tremendous earth shift in American policy which unfortunately shifted back again to some extent after that.*

**HARRY A. CAHILL**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Lagos (1975-1978)**

*Harry A. Cahill was born in New York. He graduated from Manhattan College, where he majored in English. It was at the Army Language School in Monterey that he developed an interest in the Foreign Service. In addition to Nigeria, Mr.*

*Cahill served in Norway, Poland, Yugoslavia, Uruguay, Columbia, and India. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 29, 1993.*

*Q: What was the situation in Nigeria when you got there in 1975?*

CAHILL: The country was awash in oil riches, hellbent on spending them and siphoning off as much as possible for those in power. Chaos on all fronts. A total of 420 ships were stuck in Lagos Harbor, most of them carrying molding cement. European contractors collided with each other in doing infrastructure projects. Newly installed telephone lines were ripped up by other contractors who had different projects in the same area. There was non-stop gridlock on all roads. Agriculture was abandoned as everyone flocked to the cities where the big money was. Essentials like electricity and food were in short supply. Inflation rocketed up.

Within the embassy we were blessed with Don Easum, the most genuine, lovable, unpretentious and generous guy you could imagine. He was extremely intelligent and hardworking, but was a gentle, relaxed leader. I wore three hats and loved my work. For Don, people would do their best. There were ten people in my section. Almost all of them extended their time in Nigeria despite its difficult conditions. I take pride in this. A highlight for me was being charge of the mission for a month. The diplomatic corps had been confined to the city of Lagos for weeks because of the assassination of Head of State Muhammed, and my first act was to call a meeting of heads of mission to demand lifting of the ban on travel. Our united front won.

*Q: What was the political situation at that time?*

CAHILL: One week before our arrival, Head of State Jack Gowon was deposed. He had brought the country together after the end of the civil war a few years before. A Muslim general from the north, Murtala Muhammed and his army clique took over. Business as usual.

Once the coup was over, the real action in Nigeria was economic. It was a fascinating experience for me. The challenge was to make Nigeria think in terms of American goods and services. Nothing was easy. With traffic totally stalled, I would sprint from chancery to my meetings at Defense, Economic and other ministries. Then, as in the Defense building, I would climb 12 flights of stairs. Eight days after arrival at post I met with the Army chief of staff. I had seen no American trucks anywhere. I told him that his army was almost immobile, but that we could solve the problem by bringing in execs from America's largest auto motor firms and allowing him to choose the most powerful trucks in the world. Back in my office I sent off cables to Detroit, etc. and orchestrated an incoming parade of sales chiefs. The result was the largest truck/vehicle export deal in the history of the United States, hundreds of millions of dollars. Nigeria wanted to buy everything on wheels and paint it army green.

Building on the base of trust that ensued, I would recommend that the government buy other marvelous American products. It happily bought in huge amounts from boots for soldiers to prisons for criminals. Boot volume was astronomical. I suspect the Nigerians were supplying our footwear to every liberation movement in Africa. We sold more and more. Government officials told me that I had become their Crown Agent and they expected me to tell them what to buy and from whom. This honor I ducked.

*Q: I have heard stories that the port of Lagos was so blocked up that nothing was getting in. We might sell, but how about absorption and real use of what they were getting?*

CAHILL: In December 1975, an American company was hired and solved the port impasse by quickly dredging a creek and opening auxiliary ports. The supplies rolled in. New major berthing facilities were built in mid-harbor. Jimmy Carter, the first American President to visit Africa officially, came in April, 1978. We wanted him to see the progress in the port and the American input. I asked Delta Lines to race a ship into Lagos, and they sent one at war speed to greet the President. The President was a big hit in Nigeria. His warm humanity was much appreciated. He and current head of state Obasanjo became great pals and agreed to go into chicken farming after retirement from public office. Obasanjo did so - with American-supplied technology.

*Q: Was the money during the time you were there getting spent well?*

CAHILL: There was incredible waste and corruption. Ridiculous prices were paid for imports to cover the bribe portion for middlemen. Large projects were poorly designed. An enormous concrete stadium was built in the city center. I kept thinking, "We are going to see great sports events!" But there was a cement floor, no grass. Not good for football. Then we learned that the whole damned thing was for military parades, not sports or anything else. A crazy boom time mood was everywhere.

*Q: How did the problem of corruption play on your operation? We were just beginning to be aware that the United States wasn't going to put up with this as far as American firms and all, or had that started?*

CAHILL: The Carter administration put down clear guidelines. Our foreign competitors thought we were hopelessly naive with our anti-corruption legislation. What saved us was that the Nigerians really believed in American quality and were set on buying. Too, as we have seen in these past 20 years, much of the negotiations and arrangements are done through foreign partners or agents. The American supplier is not always aware of all details of sale.

In December 1976, *Forbes* magazine had a cover story on booming Nigeria and was very kind to us. We were the "hardest working embassy" the magazine had ever seen and I was billed as "America's non-stop salesman". A quote from me was printed to the effect that a most effective way to build bilateral relations was through commerce and the recognition of American skills and quality. Nigeria was a delightful commercial testing ground. I used the empty embassy parking lot on weekends to display various American equipment, oil drilling machinery to autos. We even used the econ section's corridors for clothing exhibits. It was wild, was fun, got great results.

*Q: There was also analysis. What was the impression with the ambassador and you and others about whither Nigeria?*

CAHILL: We had faith in the future. Americans usually do. Roads, universities, ports, phone systems were going up, costs notwithstanding. Student exchange programs were expanding. We



brought in the Corps of Engineers to survey the new inland capital and the River Niger. Maybe even nature could be tamed. We had no indication that the oil wealth would ever ebb. We had not quite fathomed the depth of the corruption, but we knew that real sustained progress depended on the integrity of political leaders and the awareness and involvement of the people. We believed that they were working steadily towards a civilian government which would be balanced, informed, sane and favoring free enterprise. When I left in 1978, a date for transition had been set. But we were to see later how endemic were greed, self-indulgence and childish irresponsibility. The civilian government proved hopelessly inept and corrupt and was soon replaced by a more corrupt, brutal military regime. Steady deterioration has followed.

*Q: What about your impression of the Nigerian? I realize it is a very mixed society with many tribes and all, but as entrepreneurs and their education, what was happening?*

CAHILL: The Nigerian, if I can generalize, tends to be aggressive, quite full of passion, hearty. He can laugh uproariously, but he can be difficult and obstinate with a tendency towards violence. There is a history of violence, a country brutalized by slavery before the white slaver came. The many tribes often were in conflict.

*Q: Slavery was done by Nigerians...?*

CAHILL: By different tribes to other tribes. And then the whites arrived. Nigeria was known as the Slave Coast. They would park their ships off the coast and the blacks on shore would bring and sell human cargo to the ships. The leading square in Lagos is named Tinubu Square after Madame Tinubu, a prominent local woman slaver. The best entrepreneurs in Nigeria have often been women. Contrast the Nigerian personality with the gentler Ghanaians. Trace back the history and topography of Ghana. The coast line was rocky and hard to penetrate. Slavery was less. There were many little kingdoms in Ghana. The Portuguese and others made treaties with the rulers and were more intent on gold than on slaves. Ghana was called the Gold Coast.

*Q: What about Nigeria's civil servants?*

CAHILL: Some were good - honest, capable, dedicated. Usually these came from the east and south, parts of the country that had formed Biafra. There education was emphasized. They had been trained in Catholic mission schools. Another aspect to watch among civil servants was the emerging group trained in the US. During my tour of duty the number of states increased from 12 to 19. I visited the state governments and found a big difference between young UK-educated and US-educated administrators. The latter were far more positive, organized, results-oriented. The former were negative, supercilious, more interested in posturing. But all civilian officials suffered from the military regime. Not matter how able and high-ranking they were, they could be cowed by a brash second lieutenant who would walk into the room and intimidate them, flash his uniform and tell them they were all fools. Long ago I thought military government had advantages. But it is deep flaws and can be just as corrupt as any civilian group.

**SAMUEL B. THOMSEN**

**Cultural Attaché, USIS  
Lagos (1976-1979)**

*Samuel B. Thomsen was born in Minnesota in 1931. After serving in the US Army from 1952-1954 he received his bachelor's degree at University of California Los Angeles in 1956. During his career he had positions in Vietnam, Laos, Washington D.C., Botswana, Nigeria, and an ambassadorship to the Marshall Islands. Mr. Thomsen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996.*

*Q: Then you left there in '76. Whither?*

THOMSEN: Left for Lagos, Nigeria to be the cultural attaché .

*Q: That's sort of a switch, isn't it?*

THOMSEN: Well, it's an interesting thing and goes back a long way. When I went to India, you may recall, a project with India when I was in college, USIA was very helpful to us. They were kind of a sponsor for us. So I'd always been interested in USIA. And I was responsible for the USIS operation in Botswana, where there was no USIS officer. So I ran the library, hired my wife, she did a great job of decorating it and bringing it up to snuff. I ended a Fulbright program which cost us about \$50,000 a year and got USIA to agree to give us ten leader grants instead. I saw the leader exchange program as much more effective. I used the wireless file for the first time at the post. I would cull the wireless file, and I had a communication assistant, a local, who would based upon my marking, would put articles in an envelope and address it to the president, to the Foreign Minister, to the Minister of Finance, to the local newspaper, and every day virtually I would spend a half an hour disseminating information through that. And, again, got very good reaction from it. In many cases it was our point of view on an issue which they had gotten no other way. In any case, I saw USIA as being a very valuable tool. The post was inspected by USIA inspectors, and at the end of the inspection they encouraged me to consider a USIA assignment. I'd always been intrigued by USIA, their possibility of an exchange assignment.

The next thing I knew they had offered me the biggest cultural affairs officer position in Africa.

*Q: Sam, so we've come to the point you were in Nigeria. You were there from when to when?*

THOMSEN: I was there from 1976 to 1979.

*Q: You were doing what?*

THOMSEN: I was the Cultural Affairs Officer.

*Q: What was the situation in Nigeria when you arrived there?*

THOMSEN: There was a military dictatorship, General Obasanjo, a Baptist Yomba, was the head of state, and they were beginning to move, as they would during the three years I was there,

toward a civilian government, but it was still a military regime. However, most of the government was composed of civilians, and the people I worked with were mainly civilians.

*Q: Did you notice any fallout from the Biafran war at that point?*

THOMSEN: The Ibo, who were the losers in the war, were in some respect second class citizens although they were involved in government, and certainly in commerce. I would say the fallout was becoming minimal. It was reducing. It didn't interfere greatly certainly with what we were doing.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

THOMSEN: Don Easum.

*Q: And could you describe his method of operation, something about how you found the embassy there? You had come out of a different world.*

THOMSEN: Don as relaxed, highly energized, pleasant guy. He was a superbly effective ambassador. He had been the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs just prior to going out. He was very comfortable with his role as ambassador. He'd begin early in the morning and end late at night. I was fascinated by his style. Just go from place to place, and be the ambassador in the best sense. He was a superb tennis player, and my cultural attaché position let me engage in cultural activities of an athletic nature. I happen also to be an enthusiastic tennis player, so we had that in common and did a number of things in that area. He had very close relations with Obasanjo, and I think had a great influence on our bilateral relations in terms of trust and respect.

*Q: What did you see as your objectives? And how did you go about them?*

THOMSEN: First of all, our relationship was much dependent upon oil. We took about half of their oil exports, about a million barrels a day, and that accounted for about 15% of our oil imports. It resulted in a fairly significant balance of payments deficit on our part. I quickly saw my role in a non-traditional way as a cultural attaché, although I think I did a good job in the traditional role. But I really focused quickly on higher education. The Nigerians were very, very eager for American education and training, and I quickly established relationships with the vice chancellors of the 13 universities, and with the head of the National University's Commission who was a very, very impressive, Hausa, a man from the north. But he later became the oil minister which shows his influence and his growing importance in their government.

We established a relationship which allowed us to do a number of things in higher education. One of the strong thrusts regarded Nigerian students in the United States. You've heard the joke that half the cab drivers in Washington were Nigerian students. The Nigerian students had a terrible reputation in American universities for not paying their tuition. This was most often a result of the failure of the various state scholarship boards to provide them with their scholarship money. So one of our major efforts was to try to reform the systems in the national and the state governments to get those scholarships paid. I spent a lot of my time on this.

We had a major conference in Lagos in which we brought over the leadership of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors and the head of the Institute for International Education. At the University of Lagos were convened the heads of the scholarship boards from all of the states, and other bureaucrats. The purpose of the conference was to try to convince them that they had to reform their system in order to keep their students in school in the United States. We're talking about millions of dollars, and a major component of our bilateral commercial relationships was the payment of those scholarships. It did not have a 100% effectiveness, but it, I think, went a long way toward improving it.

*Q: What was the problem?*

THOMSEN: The problem was bureaucratic. The state scholarship boards had bad records. They were not keeping track of when payments were made. They were making payments to the wrong students. Just everything that could possibly go wrong in a bureaucratic environment was going wrong. The intention was to get high level attention to the problem, and try to reform the systems in each of the states. The national government was not much better, but there was a substantial reform there. In any case, the focus was placed on that. The other side of the coin. I traveled to the United States to the national conference for the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors at Ames, Iowa, and made a presentation on the subject. I tried to encourage the Foreign Student Advisors to be a little more sympathetic to the problems of the Nigerian students, and sensitive to the importance of encouraging them. And I was very well received by those officials. And again, the intention was to smooth out that problem.

Another area, a fascinating effort, and one which the ambassador was very supportive of, was to bring over American specialists on the American government system. They went state to state and met with the newly elected state parliamentarians, and the newly appointed civilian leadership to talk about the American system of government because this new civilian government was going to have an American style constitution. That was paid for by the Nigerians. That was worth a couple million dollars. Then we began a program managed by the cultural affairs office, to send whole state parliaments in a body to the United States under a cultural exchange, paid for by the Nigerians. They would visit several state capitals, and then spend some time in Washington visiting with congress, and with the executive branch to talk about the American system of government. Again, from a funding point of view, a significant profit for us. But also very important in terms of establishing relationships with the new civilian leadership that was to come in Nigeria.

A third area, mid-level manpower training, was worth tens of millions of dollars and would have been an AID project if there had been an AID mission there, was managed by the cultural affairs office. The Nigerians were very, very interested in what was called mid-level manpower development. They wanted to send high school graduates mainly, to the United States for training in all of the various mid-level skills: computer programming, metallurgy, auto repair, electronics, just anything you can imagine. Although I was the nexus on the legal side, AID was responsible on the Washington side. The Nigerians paid the entire cost. In fact, they would take over small manual arts schools in the United States and 200 or 300 hundred Nigerians would be enrolled in a particular school.

*Q: Would they come back?*

THOMSEN: And they went back, yes. They were on limited visas, and they were education and training visas. AID developed a special office of manpower training which initially was paid for by the Nigerians to take on this project. And subsequently that office took on the same kind of training for a number of other countries. But the impetus and the initiative started with Nigeria. So, as well as having the largest Fulbright program, 13 American Fulbrighters, as well as having 50 international visitors, the kind of traditional USIA cultural program, we got into this incredible, massive exchange toward the United States, paid for by the Nigerians. It kept me busy, and it kept me in the middle of the embassy's policies, and the embassy's stated priorities.

*Q: This was sort of the golden period, wasn't it?*

THOMSEN: It really was. It was a period that ended not too long after. But it was a period of close relationships in what you might call a love-hate relationship because they really admired us, and they were patterning their civilian government on ours. But they also wanted to stand independent of us, and they were very, very jealous of not being considered part of an American circle. They wanted to be very strong in the non-alignment movement. But they were very practical about it. And again, they didn't hesitate to take advantage of what we had, and for the cultural affairs officer it was a very non-traditional role.

*Q: What was your impression of the Nigerian universities? The reason I asked, I know somebody, Henry Maddox, who went to Nigeria after retiring from the Foreign Service in the mid-'80s, and found it awful because they were shut down, they were usually on strike, or something like that, so you really didn't do anything. We're talking about the '76 to '79 period.*

THOMSEN: This was a period of incredible expansion on the part of the Nigerian universities. The traditional universities, were first of all the University of Ibadan, which was the first university and was mainly an English-style system and the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, which was an American-style university and was the second oldest. And then there were the universities in Kano, and Kaduna, and then they began springing up all over, and they were putting hundreds of millions of dollars into these campuses. These were beautiful campuses. We had 13 Fulbrighters spread around and I tried to visit each of them. It was a very mixed bag. Ibadan in its traditions and its discipline, almost a British institution in terms of staying in school, and having pretty good discipline for the students. The Ford Foundation, which had a presence in Ibadan associated with the university and put a lot of money in over the years. So there was an American influence. The University of Nigeria at Nsukka had a large foreign faculty, and again was pretty effective. But the new universities were just thrown together so quickly that they hadn't really gotten organized, and gotten an established discipline. I think probably those were some of the institutions that most likely began faltering by the '80s. They really hadn't ever gotten organized and were a mess. I understand that by today even the best of them are in dire straights. The money has not been there to keep them up physically. They haven't managed to keep their foreign faculties which enhanced their local faculties. But you're right, the late '70s was a kind of golden age and this was a time when they were really trying to fly, trying to soar, trying to stretch, and feeling that they could do it.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the role of corruption at that time? I mean a lot of money was coming in.*

THOMSEN: Corruption was always present. It was something that even the embassy had to deal with. This is not unique to Nigeria but we had our so-called expeditors at the airport. These were fairly good sized Nigerians who when you got to the airport to travel, whether it was in-country or internationally, you gave your ticket to the expeditor, and he would use his influence, and if necessary his brute strength, to get to the ticket counter to get your ticket validated. And then he would escort you to the plane. They had mad rushes to the plane, but these kinds of payoffs were going on everywhere and, of course, that's just a minuscule aspect of it. I wasn't involved in this side of things but it was recognized even then under the military, which was relatively clean I think, and not compared to the current regime which is even more notorious. But payoffs were just a part of life in Nigeria even in those days.

*Q: The Carter administration was going for most of this period. Did you feel there was any particular emphasis on Africa? Were people talking about the change from the previous Ford, Nixon administration?*

THOMSEN: First of all, Carter came to Nigeria in '78 for three days, in March and April. I guess a sidebar to this would be, I was the control officer for Mrs. Carter, and took her a number of places and found her a very energetic, and a very intellectually curious person who did very well. A sidebar to the sidebar is one of the little incidents with my older son, Sam, who was playing croquet with their daughter Amy. They were playing croquet, and Sammy hit her ball, and she flew into a total snit, and said, "Sammy, you get out of here. I'm not ever going to speak to you again," which is one of his strong memories of the Foreign Service. They had an effective visit, and as a result of the visit established a number of science and technology and educational relationships. They formed a Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation, and the ambassador, the economic counselor, the Ag attaché and I traveled to Washington with 20 Nigerians for a joint meeting of that commission, and some of what I've described to you came out of that commission meeting. As I would go on to become the officer in charge of Nigerian affairs in Washington some of these initiatives that were begun from the Carter visit played on substantially longer and helped strengthen those non-political, let's say, the technical, the economic, the educational relationships.

*Q: Did you do any training, or anything else get involved in what became sort of notorious around the world, and that was the harbor problems in Nigeria. You'd heard at that time they had a lot of money but ships were lined up and they couldn't get in, and they were...*

THOMSEN: I wasn't involved in it, but we certainly could see on the skyline in the bay dozens and dozens of ships were visible, and I think my recollection is that waiting periods were 30 to 60 days, and that the charges that were levied against the Nigerians by those ships in the harbor were hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

*Q: I think every day, if I recall, we're talking about \$10,000-\$5,000, something like that.*

THOMSEN: That's right, and then of course there were robberies and acts of piracy against some of the ships. But apparently the money was there enough to keep those ships coming. That's where a lot of the corruption was found in terms of getting those ships in faster, slipping a ship in ahead of its turn, and that sort of thing. A lot of corruption involved in that, yes.

*Q: Were there any other major things that happened during this period as far as you were concerned?*

THOMSEN: Well, actually just after I arrived, we arrived in September of '76. In early '77 it was called the Second Festival of Black African and Cultural (FESTAC). I was the coordinator of support for Americans. We expected over 600 Americans to be present for this and any number of VIPs and we wanted to put the best face on it. I had a motor pool, a radio net, security, consular officers were helping with protocol, political officers. I think it worked effectively. We got no negative reactions from the Americans. We entertained Andy Young, Stevie Wonder, and any number of VIPs.

*Q: These were almost all African-Americans.*

THOMSEN: And some of them were absolutely stunned at what they found. I went out myself to the FESTAC villages, as they were called, and the Nigerians had spent hundreds of millions of dollars in preparing for this event, to ensure that the American visitors who were going to be put up by the Nigerians would have adequate facilities. In some cases the Americans simply refused to accept them. I had no authority to make these demands. But we managed to get pretty good accommodations for them. And we put up a lot of them who were simply unable to take what was out in the village. And Don Easum himself put up a number of Americans who simply came in and said...

*Q: Why, was it too much sort of villages?*

THOMSEN: Or, no hot water, or the power would go off, or the food. There were large cafeterias and the food was pretty Nigerian, heavy on palm oil and yams. Some of them just had emotional problems.

*Q: Did you find...was there a sort of resident group of African-Americans who came back to find their roots who were there, or ones who maybe were expatriates from the United States who were looking for something else, and were anti-American.*

THOMSEN: There was no significant resident African-American population. We got a lot of African-Americans coming through for that purpose. But mainly they were spouses of Nigerians. And the Nigerians who they were married to were associated with the universities whom they had met while they were studying in the United States. Some of the Nigerian professors were absolutely superb, world class. I remember one whose wife was American, who spent half his time in Nigeria and half of his time going around the world because of his renown, and the respect for him in communications.

*Q: Was there a problem...I mean I've ran across this in other countries of American women particularly, who married Nigerian students or instructors in the United States, and then they come back, and they find they really can't take the society, and they've got children, and they want to leave, and the fathers won't let them, that type of thing. Was that a problem particularly there?*

THOMSEN: It was not a significant problem. There were cases of that. In most cases though the husband wouldn't prevent the wife from leaving. There wasn't the kind of issue that there was in Arab...

*Q: Yes, the Arab which I'm used to, that was a major issue.*

THOMSEN: There were cases of American...

*Q: But anyway, it wasn't...*

THOMSEN: We weren't required to provide succor or assistance for people trying to get out.

*Q: Do you have anything else from there?*

THOMSEN: I think I've pretty well covered it.

**ROBERT J. KOTT**  
**Nigeria Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1976-1979)**

*Mr. Kott was born and raised in New York City. He earned degrees from St. John's University in New York City and from the University of Oregon. After service with the Peace Corps in India, Mr. Kott joined the Foreign Service in 1971. An African specialist, Mr. Kott served in, Togo and Cameroon as Economic and Political Officer and in Malawi and Senegal as Deputy Chief of Mission. He also served in Indonesia and Canada. Mr. Kott was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

*Q: Where did you go from there in 1976?*

KOTT: In '76 I returned to Washington. They offered me a position on the Nigerian desk. I thought that was pretty good, I liked that. Sort of the old rule of thumb; two out - one back, and this would have been my first one back, and it was a necessary evil. Most, many Foreign Service officers don't want to come back to Washington, but certainly as a Junior Officer, untenured still, by the way, I knew I really had to, so I thought that was a pretty good job. Nigerian desk was, I believe, three officers, and I would have been the second of the three, specifically to handle the economic and commercial portfolio and other ancillary duty but that would sort of be my portfolio.



*Q: This was in the Office of West African Affairs?*

KOTT: Exactly. Headed at that time by Tom Smith, who subsequently became Ambassador to both Ghana and then ultimately to Nigeria and unfortunately died prematurely. A great officer, I learned a lot from Tom, probably one of the best mentors and bosses I've ever had in Foreign Service. Learning the hard way though. He was very rigorous, disciplined, but fair officer of the old school.

*Q: That job probably got you to Nigeria several times?*

KOTT: Not really. No. The Department told me to take my own orientation trip as I was leaving Togo on my way home. My wife flew home directly and I went to Nigeria for an orientation trip, which was good fun. But I never again got out to Nigeria. Didn't do that. I think the other two officers may have had their orientation trips from Washington out there, but I didn't.

But the job was very heady, because it was in the time of the heyday of the relationship between the Nigeria and the United States. Number one, Nigeria was more often than not in those days United States' largest supplier of imported crude oil. It was of course in the post OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) formation days, the early days of OPEC, prices were rising, our dependency on imported crude unfortunately was increasing, probably eventually got to about 50% of our total needs.

Jimmy Carter had just been elected president, Andy Young was up at the UN, Dick Moose became the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. Rather atypically, Africa gained an importance and ascendancy in the limelight if you will in the U.S. foreign policy. From a number of perspectives. Not only the economic perspective, of course, of oil production, but human rights policy was very much in the fore in those days. I know all papers that we ever produced virtually that had any assumptions or importance to them; certainly they were going to the seventh floor. Had to be cleared by two new offices. It was sort of unheard of before. One was the Human Rights Bureau, and the other was UNA, which stood for UN Andy. Andrew Young's office had to chop off on... those were the two mandatory clearances, no matter what the subject on virtually any paper that went to the seventh floor. But that's all I could live with that and learn to accommodate.

We were a very busy desk. Nigeria being for obvious reason a very important account, probably the most important account. The largest country in Africa, one which had just come out of its civil war, and was reconciling between old Biafra and federal Nigeria. The oil production, the American interest in Nigeria, its economy booming. A lot of American investment, a lot of American trade, a lot of American interest. All of this resulted in an invitation to the then head of state of Nigeria, and the now head of state of Nigeria once again, Olusegun Obasanjo, military ruler, to come and pay an official visit to the U.S. It was not often that we had an awful lot of Africa waking through the White House, but it was our turn and it was on my watch, and we wound up going of course to the President and the Secretary of State for that meeting, even all three of our desk officers were invited to the White House for the initial ceremony and the greeting of Obasanjo. President Carter then accepted Obasanjo's invitation to pay a return visit to

Nigeria and became as I recall the first American President to pay an official or state visit to any black African nation, Sub-Saharan African nation. I guess he did that in '77 and spent several days in Nigeria and the better part of the day in Liberia, to visit President William Tolbert, on his way back to the U.S.

Again, two state visits within a year, one in each direction, the level of interest, the level of political interest, the level of economic and commercial activity, the oil imports, all provided for a very busy account but a very manageable one. A great learning experience, a great way to learn the Department, kept us all busy. There was a high level of interest, certainly by the sixth floor, in terms of the Assistance Secretary, by the seventh floor, in certain quarters and indeed by the Secretary and by the President to a certain degree.

*Q: Why don't you talk a little but more about the economic/commercial dimension? Were you primarily dealing with American oil companies, or...?*

KOTT: Across the board. Banks, oil companies, manufacturers, not so big bona-fide American businessman who thought they could see a quick buck to be made. I'd get telephone calls at eight o'clock in the morning saying "How do I get in on some of this action out there?" They just wanted to rake the place, get their jellybeans. But seriously, there was a lot of serious interest.

And a lot of things happening that involved the American business community. For example, as I recall, the Nigerians put into effect some legislation for what we called "indigenization" of the economy. That involved personnel. That meant that management and other people had to be Nigerian to the extent possible. They also had laws that affected ownership. And I rather vividly remember that banks had to be majority Nigerian owned by a certain date. And certain American banks, City Bank in fact, had a rather hard-line policy and said, "Hell, no, we won't go. We refuse to become a majority foreign owned in any country. If we do it Nigeria, India will be next, then the Pandora's box is open and pretty soon we will lose majority stake-hold." So they decided to pull out instead. Big mistake, they subsequently rued that decision and went back into Nigeria number of years later. But we would deal with issues like that. The indigenization issue, the ownership issue.

In fact, I was tasked, as a result of the Obasanjo-Carter meeting at the White House, we formed a joint commission with the Nigeria. I don't remember the exact title of the commission, but in essence it was headed, at least in the first meeting, by the Vice-President and the Nigerian Foreign Minister or what have you. Sorry I'm a bit fuzzy on these details. But I was tasked to write up the economic paper – what are the issues, what is our side concerned with. I remember coming in on a Saturday, Tom said, "Bob, just write them up and here is the format, you know better than anybody else what the issues are." And I remember writing 17 papers on it on Saturday morning and afternoon, and Tom being rather critical of one's drafting, I was shocked to get it back with..., I could still read my own writing through the chicken scratch and the annotations and the amendments that Tom put on it. But anyway, he gave me a good pad on the back and said I did a good job, and anyway, they evolved into a major book, if you will, of issues that were of concern to the American community, especially the American business community. These were almost all economic and commercial issues that we were faced with. Just to give you a typical example, American businessman could not get a multiple entry visa. This was

ridiculous. They were coming in and going out of the country within a few weeks and then to be confronted by going over to the Nigerian Embassy with one-week delays on getting visas, My God, how can you do business like this? This is pre-internet days, remember. Issues like that. Trying to get the Nigerians to bow to our request to issue multiple entry visas.

*Q: Who was our Ambassador in Lagos at that time?*

KOTT: Don Easum. He had been previously Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, but for not very long period of time.

*Q: But certainly a very experienced African officer...?*

KOTT: Indeed. He'd been Ambassador to what was then Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso. Came back, Henry Kissinger brought him in as the Assistant Secretary I believe to replace David Newsom. He didn't last very long in that position as the Assistant Secretary, I think he ran afoul of Secretary Kissinger, certainly that was above my pay grade, I don't know what the issues were exactly, but then he was shipped out to Nigeria as Ambassador. He was very effective.

*Q: And he stayed there during the first years of the Carter administration?*

KOTT: Absolutely. Yes, and worked very closely with Andy Young who himself went out there and visited. Worked closely with Assistant Secretary Dick Moose, who was Don Easum's replacement as Assistant Secretary. Was very effective with the Nigerians. He was a good Ambassador. He believed in tennis diplomacy, great tennis player. In fact he tells the story of being run off the tennis courts one day with Andrew Young, at gun point, by the Nigerian military. I guess they were out there playing on Mother's Day or something that was viewed as being untoward and were alleged to being disrespectful even though they were playing on a private court at the American Chancery, American Embassy residence.

*Q: Why don't you talk a little bit more about the human rights element? You mentioned the need to get clearances from the new Bureau of Human Rights. This was at the time when the Human Rights Report was started on each country. Where you involved in drafting that for Nigeria? How difficult were human rights issues for desk officers like you in conducting relations with a country...*

KOTT: I can only speak in general ways. To be specific, I don't recall that I was deeply involved in the writing or editing of the human rights report from Nigeria because I think my boss, Pete Chaveas, or the third person on the desk, Seaford Patrick and Ellen Myland during my incumbency, were the human rights officers. As I said, I was doing more economic and commercial work. But clearly it impacted on our interests and our work. Both positively and negatively. I think there was an overall tendency by the Foreign Service bureaucracy to object to having to clear position papers or recommendations with the Human Rights Bureau. But, as Pat Derian and her crowd, as it became obvious that they were enjoying the support of the White House and others, I think there was a grudging acceptance, over time, of the reality that human rights was going to play an increasingly important part in our foreign policy. Especially in places like Africa.

*Q: Well, I suppose especially in places like Nigeria, where there was a military government in place, although perhaps enlightened one, with good leaders in an elected position.*

KOTT: Right. The fact that Obasanjo was a benevolent dictator, if you will, and that he had been accepted on the state visit to come to the White House and that the President returned the visit, made our work a little bit easier. Human rights were taken into account, but let's face it, one asks the question, "Would we have come to Kuwait's rescue had it not been for oil?" Similarly, how hard do you press on human rights in countries where you have significant interests? We were importing half of our oil from Nigeria in those days... well, that 's not true, we were importing the largest amount of oil that we imported from any one country from Nigeria in those days. It was clearly an important source of American energy needs. This was during the oil crises, when gasoline lines were long and inflation was high and Americans' patience was being tested. I doubt if American public would have cared much about the human rights in Nigeria perhaps as an everyday occurrence.

*Q: Why don't you say a few words about a general topic of corruption, inefficiency, fraud? Nigeria certainly had a large reputation in these areas later on, if not at the time when you were involved, I'm not sure.*

KOTT: Yes, absolutely. It was a way of life, a common occurrence. Of course I was not in the Embassy, I was back in Washington, so the recipient of the reports of the Embassy. But it pervaded the relationship, especially the economic and commercial relationship.

*Q: To some extent you were the person talking with the American companies who were either interested in getting started in Nigeria or who had run up against problems.*

KOTT: Absolutely. They knew we couldn't do much about it. We would make demarches where it was appropriate. It's not something that American diplomats are comfortable with and perhaps it's not even appropriate for them to confront, in terms of the classic meddling in the internal affairs kind of thing. Where it affects our interest, I suppose the Ambassador and others were able to raise the topic gingerly, but you cant go in and slam your fist on the table and say "Look, your Minister of Transportation is corrupt. Our American businessmen tell us that..." Well, they'll just turn that around pretty fast as you know and you'll walk away with your tail between your legs. But it was a deterrence to some companies I think, they just did not want to put up with that. The level of American investment in Nigeria and the level of American interest in Nigeria would have been much more significant probably had it not been for the pervasiveness of corruption and the difficulty of doing business in Nigeria. Because of both the legalities of the day, as well as the subterfuges, the corruption, the nepotism, all of these disincentives to doing business. The companies that could afford to hire the people, to wait out the game, companies with significant resources behind them, the big banks, the big insurance companies, the big oil companies; they could circumvent it, in one way or another. The smaller guy, the entrepreneur who saw an opportunity out in Nigeria and would like to avail himself of it, and could have perhaps benefited the Nigerian economy in the process because he would have had to take a partner for example, all American companies had to have a local partner by legislation, those are the people who would be dissuaded once they found out what the situation on the ground was.

That was pretty bad.

*Q: Because U.S. has legislation now in effect about corrupt practices and not giving bribes and so forth. I don't remember exactly when that was enacted.*

KOTT: I think that came in in the '70s, but I don't remember the year exactly, The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. And I would say, and I hope that I am not being naïve here, but I think that American companies overseas, while there may be exceptions and we all know of some of them, God knows they have been on the front pages of the newspapers over the years, by and large, American companies I think operated pretty much above board. The same can't be said of many of our allies in Europe who one would say perhaps are more realistic but were not constrained in those days at least, they are perhaps more constrained today by UN conventions and what have you, but were not constrained in those days by things such as the American Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. They went in and put the money on the table. I remember the economic officers in Indonesia, at the Embassy, telling me that the going price of getting a contract in Indonesia was 25%. Up-front, on the table, at the first meeting when you went in to see the Minister. Apocryphal as that might be, a billion dollar contract, that was 250 million dollars for the Minister and the people that he had to divide that amongst. Up-front, unabashed, no secrets. Obviously American companies couldn't get away with that so we had to have other arrows in our quiver.

*Q: Why don't you say just a word if you will about your relations as the Economic/Commercial Officer for Nigeria in the African Bureau with the Economic and Business Bureau (EB) and perhaps with other agencies. Did you spend a lot of your time in the interagency framework arena or...?*

KOTT: Yes, very much so. Especially with the new entity in AID, Nigeria being an OPEC country of a certain per capita gross national product level, was ineligible to receive direct USAID. However, someone came up with the bright idea of selling the American technology and expertise if you will through the mechanism of the USAID, and they called it the Trade and Development Program. Perhaps not the same Trade and Development Program in which ultimately it has evolved into, but in the early stages it was a very innovative and exciting program. And indeed, we had many successes with Nigerians. One in particular was a Nigerian decision to move their capital over a period of 10, 15 years from Lagos to a new city. A new Brasilia if you will, or new Canberra, called Abuja. This was, I am talking 25 years ago, this was well before any physical construction, this is when it was just a pipe dream. We brought out the U.S. Capitol Planning Commission. We had the Nigerians come and study under Jim Rouse who was the founder of Reston, Virginia and Columbia, Maryland, planned communities, how we went about doing planned communities. We had the Army Corps of Engineers go out there to look at the various aspects of water in the region that they were looking at to create this new city of Abuja, etc, etc. Nigerians paid for these services under the auspices of the Trade and Development Program. So what it did was it enabled us to provide, through an official channel, a level of technology, whether it came through the private sector or the U.S. Government as in the Corps of Engineers, but we were reimbursed for it and hence we could not turn down the Nigerians. It was a mechanism for allowing this transfer, and it was a wonderful brainstorm, I think, on someone's part. And I worked very closely with that office in AID, as the Economic

Officer on the desk. As far as the other interagency, yes, the usual sort of thing; the monetary affairs, trade, this that and the other thing. I am sorry my memory is fading a little bit, this is well over 20 years ago. But, the interagency process, meetings -- in State Department you are always going to meetings -- but the Trade and Development Program was the thing that stuck out most in my mind as being not only something that kept me very busy but certainly it was a success. It was a great vehicle.

*Q: How about the general subject of civil aviation? Was that an issue that you worked on much?*

KOTT: Not as much in those days at it has subsequently become for both security reasons as well as safety reasons.

*Q: There was an American carrier that went to Nigeria?*

KOTT: Yes, Pan American, the old Pan Am. I think people were more concerned about traffic in Lagos and getting to the airport then they were about once they got to the airport, about security. Nigeria was infamous for what they call the "go slows". Lagos became just a choked city, to the point where I guess they were one of the first cities that started the program of alternate day driving, where if your license plate ended with an even number or an odd number... Of course, Nigerian being the entrepreneurial folk that they are, they all decided to go out and buy an extra set of plates if not a second car so it made the situation worse as it ultimately resulted. But the airport which wasn't a terribly far distance by way of the crow from downtown Lagos, as I recall, sometimes took two and three and four hours. I know people that missed airplane flights when they left home four hours in advance because of the traffic. That was really the concern, I don't think it was the airport civil aviation. Although we all know it had subsequently become an issue.

*Q: Anything else we ought to cover to your assignment to Nigeria?*

KOTT: No. It was a great training for the first tour in Washington. I had great mentors there, great bosses. Super people to work with, the leadership was wonderful, the interest level was high on part of the Secretary, certainly the Andy Young's influence, Dick Moose, the Assistant Secretary, the deputies, Frank Wisner, Jim Bishop, people like that, all African hands, if you will, experienced. Things worked well. I think that the U.S. policy was well served, reasonably well formulated and accurate, as good as it ever got, so to speak, in my life time.

**PAUL GOOD**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1977-1979)**

*Paul Good was born in Kentucky in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree at Cascade College he received his master's degree from Ball State. His career in USIA included positions in Thailand, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Nigeria, Australia, Yugoslavia, South Africa, Morocco, and Senegal. Mr. Good*

*was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 2000.*

GOOD: It's always hard to get people to go to Lagos. They're desperate for people now. They'll take any volunteer for Lagos.

*Q: What's the problem?*

GOOD: It is a terribly difficult post. It is a post where living was tough. It was very expensive. A bowl of soup in a restaurant was seven dollars and fifty cents.

*Q: Yuck!*

GOOD: So you didn't go out. Your electricity was out regularly on a daily basis at least two, three hours, so we all had those old fashioned generators, not the nice ones they've got now, which were enough to give you a light bulb in the kitchen refrigerator and maybe a little extra, maybe a second one for your freezer. It certainly wasn't going to carry an air conditioner. It wasn't going to carry any more light. You had danger. There was a lot of petty theft. There was a lot of mugging. It was hot, it was humid, it was dirty, and there was a lot of disease. The military was in charge, but Obasanjo was working on maneuvering toward a civilian elected government, so they weren't interested in us either. I took it because of one thing. It was more money, 25 percent. Two, I didn't like being away from my wife 50 percent of the time.

*Q: Oh, yes!*

GOOD: So this was a chance to have a family life regularly. She, of course, didn't have children in Washington, so she was alone. She was, of course, fluent in English, but I'd dumped her into Washington without any network support, and I wasn't there, so I took it for that. I wanted to get out of Washington. I found that I really wasn't interested in the Washington kinds of jobs. In fact, I've never had in my whole career, never really had a line job until I got in the State in October last year when I moved into the IO. I took VOA jobs, negotiating job, which I'll talk about later, so I was happy to get overseas.

I had painted Nigeria so dismally that my wife was prepared for worse than it actually turned out to be. Esprit de corps is quite good in Lagos as is the norm, as you know, in hardship posts, because we're all together in this awful situation, and we're going to make it. There are exceptions; Khartoum was an exception on that. But mostly esprit de corps is measurable in a hardship post.

Nigeria is a magnificently interesting country! It's teeming with people, it's active, and it's noisy. There are a lot of physical confrontations going. Everyday something happens that you could never have imagined happening. I looked out my window one day. We were stuck in the back building from the old embassy, and through the courtyard from one open gate to the other went this swarm of people chasing this one guy, who was being accused of being a thief. I didn't go out to see what happened to him, but it wasn't unusual for them to beat him thieves to death. They didn't like thieves and pickpockets and they'd go chasing after them.

It was interesting in an international form; we had money, in the sense that there wasn't any place else to spend your naira. My wife got jobs teaching on the local economy, so we had naira, smelly, dirty, tattered naira, which was the local currency.

*Q: Naira is what?*

GOOD: It's the bill; it's their dollar if you will. At that time it was oh, something like two dollars to a naira, give or take some cents depending on the time. So although we weren't supposed to be trading it when we went outside, it was normal for us to do some exchanging when we left the country to drive over to Benin or to Togo or to Ghana, because it was just too expensive to trade officially in Lagos. Most of our food we brought in from outside because there wasn't a lot available there. But there was a large international community, businessmen involved with oil primarily, but also involved with construction, bringing in engineers and so forth for the building that was taking off with the oil money that had shown up. When I got there, there were something like 180 ships anchored in the bay, many of which never got unloaded because people took advantage of this opportunity to put real loser ships that shouldn't been out on the sea anymore, and loading them with something like cement, which would then get wet. They'd sit out there for months and months and ultimately sink. They had some pirates that would occasionally attack the ships and steal things. It was quite a wild time, but a very interesting time and a little bit of an adjustment for the first couple of months. That's normal for us, when we go to the overseas postings, we know the job we're going to get, we've done it before, we have a base to operate from, there's support structure. The unpaid spouse comes in and has to find her own way, every post a new thing, with the exception of those who do pick up a PIT (Part-time Intermittent Temporary) job in the embassy.

*Q: PIT being Part-Time Intern?*

GOOD: Part-time Intermittent Temporary, which now means full-time (laughing) since they changed the regulations. As soon as my wife found her feet, she liked it, too. We didn't have children. We wouldn't take children to Nigeria; it's just too dangerous. There was always at least one foreign child dying every Harmitan season. Harmitan being that season in which the winds from the north bring the sand to the south and bring viral diseases along. The kids are particularly susceptible. Some child in the foreign community is going to die.

We had four dead bodies wash up on our property. We were on a lagoon; it was connected to the river, which was connected to the bay. I never was there for them. I was either downtown, or I was up on a trip to one of the branches. When those came in, my wife had to deal with it. The most irritating one was when it came up headless. The medical school didn't want that cadaver, and the police didn't know what to do with it, so it took some push from the embassy to get them to take it away. Once I know, they got a pole and pushed the cadaver off to the next property so that (laughing) they didn't have to deal with it. (Laughing) It was quite a time, but it was interesting. The Nigerians, we still enjoy. Wherever we go, we enjoy them, because they are full of life. They may be the most corrupt element in the world today, perhaps not even second to the Russian mafia, but they're challenging.

*Q: I have a friend who's a banker in Baltimore, who said that, "Now if a Nigerian walks into*



*your bank, you lock all the doors.”*

GOOD: (laughing)

*Q: “Pull the tellers’ windows shut, and don’t deal with them because they are the greatest confidence people. They know every trick.”*

GOOD: Every trick, yes.

*Q: “To get money through fraudulent means.”*

GOOD: And their networking is incredible, absolutely incredible, and there are so many of them! They are really good.

*Q: You were doing what?*

GOOD: I was executive officer of the post. We had three branches up country. We had one in Ibadan, we had one in Kano, and we had one in Kaduna. The embassy had a consulate in Kaduna. When I first visited there still was a consulate in Ibadan. Yes, they did. One of the fellows there I had known when I was traveling Chad, the junior officer with State. He wasn’t so junior. He had his Ph.D. and had published a book. He was in the mid thirties. The only guy I ever met who took his R and R, and when he came back realized he didn’t really want to take a 24-month tour and paid back his R and R and left at the end of 18, which was an option in Chad. So I got to visit those posts. I was also responsible for Benin’s ADM work as well, just as an excuse to get me out of Nigeria.

*Q: In a society like that, you are sort of on the leading edge of trying to do business. I’m talking about leases.*

GOOD: Get things done.

*Q: Hiring, firing, supplies, that whole thing.*

GOOD: Yes.

*Q: It must have been almost impossible, wasn’t it?*

GOOD: It was challenging. Now we did have the regional ADM center, WAAC as they called it, located north of town. But while we could get supplies from there, we weren’t able to use all its facilities, as evidenced by the fact that we could not use their metal containers when we packed out. We had to use the wooden containers. When my wooden container arrived at my next post, it looked fine from the street side. But I got around to the other side and there was this huge patch. They had skimmed out everything that was worth anything in that shipment. It was all shaken down to, it had been full; it was shaken down thigh height.

*Q: It was half-full?*

GOOD: Not even half-full and without boxes, it was just piled in there. All my clothes were gone. Fortunately, I had brought some clothes in the States on home leave, but the port was an open sieve. When I arrived, some of my airfreight didn't make it. I put in my claim, and the company said, "Well, you need to go over to verify that it didn't come in." I told them, "Please, there's no sense in spending my day getting over there physically and getting back. There's nothing there; it's gone. This is Lagos, folks."

They bought that, finally. When I arrived, it took five hours to get in from the airport, 17 kilometers. 17 kilometers! We had to stop halfway along the way because of our air conditioning. They were using it, of course; traffic wasn't moving, and it overheated and had to let it cool down. That's changed; they've got more roads in now.

It was logistically difficult, it was physically difficult, and it was chaotic. There were policemen with their small whips. You'd see them beating up the drivers of cars all the time, not because anything significant had happened, but because they didn't like what they saw the guy do, or they didn't like his lip or whatever. The drivers weren't upset. They considered this a very normal piece of business in a day.

A very, very, tough people, but there was more violent death in my two years in Lagos that I personally knew about, our employees or family members, than I have seen anywhere else in my tours, probably in total. Quick death, people went into the hospital and picked up something new and died over a weekend, as was not infrequent. One of our friends was an Egyptian doctor, who had been there for a couple decades and really was a rice merchant by this point, export, import, but he did have some contact with foreigners. He said, "Whatever you do, don't go to a hospital!" That was our medical unit's advice, too. One of our oil guys over in Niger, area of the river district to the east, I think he had a hernia. He needed it operated. He didn't want to leave the area; he was tied into the work. So he said, "Oh, I'll do it over the weekend." So he went in and he died by Monday. We had a Seabee who died over the weekend in Lagos, same thing. It was dangerous. Don't have your babies born in Lagos, because the hospitals were short of supplies. The supplies they had were probably outdated. There was a lot there to get sick with, because hospitals were where the sickness focused.

Dead bodies on the streets were not unusual. I remember one announcement in the paper said, "Would anyone seeing a foreigner dead on the streets please notify the authorities." They didn't care about the Nigerians; they were just concerned about picking up the foreigners. One local doctor got so upset at one point when a body had been left for 30 days on the side of the road that he finally physically, I suppose in a truck, hauled it up to the city hall, and dumped it on the front steps as a protest.

One of our Washington staff personnel, who later came into the Foreign Service soon after her husband unfortunately had died at post. She had wanted for him to retire before going overseas because it was her first trip abroad. Now I don't know who did it to her, but she was on her way to India for TDY, and they routed her through Lagos to see what (laughing) it was like. I took her on my rounds that day. On one of the flyovers, as they call the overpasses there, I noticed a naked male body on the side of the road. My visitor didn't make any mention of it, but I saw she

noticed it, and she tensed up, and couldn't stop talking. Fine, I didn't say anything about it. In the evening I took her out to the club, which is one of the real benefits of Lagos, the Ikoyi Club. I'm a squash player, and they had great squash there. Not all the courts had great floors, some of them were concrete, but good players, and it was a perfect way to erase the stress that you had by four o'clock in any Lagos day. So I went over there, and my wife came with me that evening. I played, and they sat having a drink at the table out front, and I came back to the table, and I said, "What are you drinking?" And she said, "Gin, straight gin."

I said, "Why are your feet off the floor?" She was sitting there holding both feet off the floor. She said, "Look at those things running around." Well, they were lizards.

*Q: Gingkoes.*

GOOD: Gingkoes, geckos, whatever you want to call them.

*Q: Yes.*

GOOD: She hadn't ever seen them before, and she was petrified (laughing). She's a trooper, she learned how to cope, no problem for her, but that was a very, that was what Lagos was to someone coming in, a shocking experience!

*Q: In your job, did you deal with the government at all?*

GOOD: Not directly, got close to it in the branch posts, but the branch post officer would be the intermediary there. I wasn't doing reporting, occasionally get involved with leases, but again, that was more often with the owners of the property rather than someone in the government. The government would be setting these ridiculous demands, like you had to pay five years rent in advance. We got away without doing more than two. But at \$60,000 a year for a house, that got to be quite a bit of money. It was a very expensive post for our operation! What I found when I got there was that there had been no mandatory increase work done for some years, so they were well under funded in their budget. We had to work hard; Art Lewis was my PAO. With fortunately a very close cooperation of our budget officer in Washington, more than double of our budget my first year by capturing mandatory increases to the budget. If we hadn't had that influx of money, we'd have been in really very serious trouble.

*Q: What was your impression? I mean you've been around the block a number of times. Were we getting to the right people, and did it make any difference as far as you know, the USIA, the Americans' story?*

GOOD: Yes, in Nigeria, a very definite success story. They weren't interested in us particularly. In fact, they were probably less interested in the American embassy than any place I've been. They were so focused, those opinion makers in Lagos, were so focused on this conversion to nonmilitary government, that they were very interested in our assistance in learning how to have a constitutional government. They were interested in bringing in parts of our system, as opposed to bringing the British system in lock, stock, and barrel. We had many, many exchange visits, getting prospective legislators, constitution writers, and so forth to the States to observe and learn

how our system worked. So we had tremendous impact on the development of the civilian government.

But they were really focused on their affairs. If you invited someone to dinner, cocktail party, whatever, you didn't know who would come, and you didn't know when they'd come. You had to assume that some would come, and some would come very late. Some would bring a wife, some had to bring a second wife, some had to bring a mistress. It's a man's world there of course. You didn't have that much contact with women because the women were not the people that you were going to be dealing with anyway.

Yes, we had an excellent ambassador, Don Easum, who was a pro, and although he didn't appreciate my beating him at squash, he was okay.

*Q: (Laughing)*

GOOD: He came one night. I had just finished an hour of squash and was having a beer, and he dropped by at the club and said, "How about giving me some exercise?" He had been a good squash player, but of course, I had 10 years on him. So we rented a court, and we played, and I whipped him fairly easily even though I had just spent an hour on the court before. He never again asked to play. (Laughing)

But he was very good. He had his Ph.D.; he had a long experience in Africa. He had been an area director, a regional director at State. But he got into some trouble and didn't go on to another ambassadorship. His ADM officers didn't agree with what he wanted done in some cases. They thought that he was misusing government funds, not for personal perks, but for activities or enhancements that weren't legitimate. They were prepared to go to the Hill (Capitol Hill) should he come up for confirmation. So he opted out, which was a loss to the service, to take over the Afro-American operation in New York.

*Q: You left there when, in '77?*

GOOD: I left in June of '77. Making use of our excess naira, we bought round the world tickets, well tickets back to Washington and on to our next post out of the naira and then got reimbursed later. It turned out we got reimbursed about \$10,000 I think by the time we got to post. Now of course the next post had inexperienced ADM officers, junior officers without any supervision particularly. It took me a year to get my voucher processed.

*Q: Whoa!*

GOOD: It had to be done by the regional budget officer finally.

**KATHRYN CLARK-BOURNE**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Lagos (1977-1979)**

*Kathryn Clark-Bourne was born in 1924 in Colorado. She graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in journalism. Ms. Clark-Bourne became interested in international affairs after working in Japan with the Military Intelligence as a research analyst. Later, she went on to receive her master's degree in mass communications from the University of Minnesota. In addition to Nigeria, Ms. Clark-Bourne served in Iran, the Netherlands, India, and Cameroon. She was interviewed on August 2, 1995 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: And then where did you go?*

CLARK-BOURNE: In '77, I was assigned to Lagos, Nigeria as Political Counselor. That was a fantastic time to be in Nigeria.

*Q: You were in Lagos from when to when?*

CLARK-BOURNE: From '77 through '79 -- three years. At that time, General Obasanjo was head of state. It was a military government. He made the decision to step down and to set up an elected government. He sent representatives to a number of countries in the world to look into the types of government they had. They were mostly oil-producing countries because that was and is the greatest source of Nigerian income. They liked our form of government the best so he set up a committee to draft a constitution. They were meeting down the street from our Embassy. They came and used our library continuously and were always coming in and asking questions and asking for advice. I'll never forget one night. I was awakened at two in the morning at my home and one of the guys from the committee said, "Kay, we've got a real problem. You've got to help us." I said, "What's that?" They said, "What happens in the United States when the House of Representatives doesn't agree with the Senate?" So, I explained the joint committee system and after they left, it dawned on me that none of this is in our constitution. Our constitution's very general, but they had to have every single detail put into their constitution. They decided to have two legislative branches in each of their states -- they had at least 12 states at that time.

*Q: So they were going to have a Federal Republic as opposed to a unified...Of course, Nigeria is a vast country. Were they going to keep a federal system?*

CLARK-BOURNE: They asked me to bring in experts to go around the country and explain to the people in all the states how, in our country, the states related to the federal government. So, we did. We brought in professors and people like that.

When it came to forming parties and having elections, other problems arose. Large numbers of the population in Nigeria were illiterate. They ended up with five parties and decided to have symbols for each party. The voting mechanism was a problem. They did not have electricity in a large part of the country. So, we brought in a firm from Chicago to erect voting machines that were mechanical that could accommodate the party symbols. The elections went on fine. The elected government went into office. Obasanjo stepped down and retired to his farm. I left shortly thereafter the election. After I got back to the States, before going on to my next assignment, I went skiing in the Rockies. We stopped at a rest stop and I picked up a newspaper.

There it had the news on the front page that the Nigerian elected government had been overthrown by the military. There would be a military coup. All I could think of was, "What did we miss? What did we do wrong?" I came to the conclusion that we didn't stress that the chief of our military is a civilian -- the elected President. However, I don't think that would have made any difference. They've got the problem of too many ethnic groups.

*Q: I think this is one of the problems of the Americans. Here, Nigeria has a coup, and you as the American representative say, "What did we do wrong?" You can build these things, but it really took a couple centuries for our system to develop and it's still going through the process.*

*Could you talk a little about American representation there? Who was the Ambassador? Did we have any Consulates and any other programs going?*

CLARK-BOURNE: During the three years I was there, we had two ambassadors: Don Easum and Steve Low. One DCM was Parker Wyman. We had consulates in Ibadan, Kaduna, and one out in the East. One of the officers in the Political Section, not too long after I arrived, asked to be sent up to Ibadan as Consul. Of course, you know, now they've closed most of those and the capital has moved to Abuja. They were working on having the capital in Abuja when I was there, but years went by before it was actually moved up. But I believe our Embassy is still in Lagos.

*Q: When you got there, it was a military rule. Did you feel that the country was going to be able to move into a new mode, into a civilian role again? What was our way of looking at the situation in Nigeria, that the military seems to step in a lot?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Of course, when the Brits had moved out, they'd had civilian rule for a while before the Obasanjo government came in. We firmly believed they should try again. Nigeria, as you know, is the largest country in Africa. One out of every four Africans is a Nigerian. It has a number of universities, whereas many of the other states in Africa don't. So, although there were lots of uneducated people, there were lots of educated people too -- very knowledgeable. And the Nigerians, in general, reminded me of Americans. We used to say when I was there that, at any given time, 50 million people would be selling something to the other 50 million. They were all entrepreneurs. The feeling was that this was what the people wanted and this was why Obasanjo did it.

*Q: How did we view the ethnic divisions of Nigeria? Did we see this as something that could be, as a system, made to work? What were the prime causes of trouble over ethnic...?*

CLARK-BOURNE: The same as in all African countries. The same as in Yugoslavia. The same as in Ireland and England. These people each had their own customs and religions and felt that they should be the ones running the country, or at least their areas. It's a chronic problem. I think there were over 50 different ethnic groups. The three biggest ones were the Northern Muslims, the Yorubas in the west, and the Ibos in the east. Of course, you know about the war with the Ibos?

*Q: The Biafran War, yes. When you were there, had the Biafran problem been more or less resolved? Was it something that everybody remembered?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Of course everyone remembered it, but they were at peace. They allowed us to travel every place. There were no daily confrontations and everyone was going about their own business.

Dealing as a Political Officer with the Nigerians was very interesting for me. I had government quarters and I had a guest house, which most of the other government quarters did not have. So, when we had distinguished visitors, they usually stayed in my guest house. If I wanted to have a reception for them, a Nigerian would not accept an invitation just because I was a political officer, or First Secretary in the Embassy. They only accepted invitations from people they knew. So, I learned very soon that, when this would happen, to hand-carry my invitations to the invitees. Of course, at the beginning, I didn't know all the people that were on a list. But, in no time at all, I got to know them. Even then, I'd tell them to think about it and I'd come back to see what their answer was, so I could see them again. This way, I could assure attendance. But you could not assure attendance just by the person you asked. He might show up with five grandkids and two uncles. You never knew. I don't care what kind of a function it was. So, you had to learn to adjust for that. And we had lots of distinguished visitors when I was there. People such as Mohammed Ali stayed in my place.

*Q: The world champion boxer?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Yes. Vice President Mondale stayed in my place. Charlie Diggs. Remember Charlie Diggs?

*Q: Yes, he was a Congressmen from Chicago.*

CLARK-BOURNE: Yes. They were all interesting in their own way. The Nigerian ladies went mad over Mohammed Ali. Every time he'd step out of the compound or walk down the street, he'd be surrounded by women. It was interesting. Because of the Nigerian personality, I got to know an awful lot of people and they became very good friends of mine.

*Q: As a political officer -- you were mentioning that you had to sort of get to know people -- how did this...I'm interested in not just Nigeria, but how would a political officer, a Political Counselor, work in Nigeria?*

CLARK-BOURNE: The same as in any country. You get your directives from the Department: go in and tell them what our position is on such and such an issue in the United Nations; go in and tell them what we think about South Africa. Or we would get telegrams in, saying, "We need more information on some of these topics," so you'd go talk with people, chat with them, invite them over, go out to dinner, and try to get the information as easily as you could.

*Q: Did you find it a pretty open society?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Yes, very open. In Nigeria, like most African countries, women sort of run everything. They run the markets. You do see some men in the fields, but they were mostly women.

*Q: What about in the ministries, newspapers, universities? What was the role of women there?*

CLARK-BOURNE: I don't remember. I don't think there were very many in the newspapers or universities, although there were some university teachers and professors that I knew. I'm sure there were not as many as men. Still, the role in business is what sort of fascinated me as an American. At that time, women in the United States did not have that kind of a role. Of course, this was reinforced when I lived in other African countries after Nigeria.

*Q: What were American prime concerns during the time you were in Nigeria?*

CLARK-BOURNE: In the late '70s, I don't remember.

*Q: How was South Africa playing in those times?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Nigeria played, and does to this day, a major role in inter-African problems. When organizations or committees were established, Nigeria was always very prominent and took charge. That was another reason why I was spending so much time in the ministries, trying to get information on African subjects.

*Q: Did we have much contact within the Nigerian military?*

CLARK-BOURNE: I think we did. We had an Attaché. Of course, I had nothing to do with that at all.

*Q: I was wondering whether you would be in contact with the Attaché, since the military had a tendency to come in and out of running the government? From the political point of view, whatever we could get about the military should be shared, I would think.*

CLARK-BOURNE: I don't remember that as happening. As I say, I had not been there very long when they decided to have the civilian form of government, so we didn't pay any attention to the military. I met Obasanjo from time to time and he was very easy for us to deal with and to work with.

*Q: This was the Carter Administration most of the time you were there, wasn't it? Did human rights play any particular role at that time in Nigeria?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Not that I know of. As I say, women had fairly strong roles and I never found a Nigerian who was anti-white. However, we had, occasionally, Afro-Americans in the Foreign service or one of the government agencies, and some of them were prejudiced against the Africans. This was really eye-opening to me, to see this happening. In fact, one person had to be transferred due to that.

*Q: Was it easy to get into the Foreign Ministry?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Yes, I had no problems. I could walk in without an appointment. In no time



at all, I knew everybody. I could go wherever I wanted.

*Q: What about the UN vote? This always was a problem. Was Nigeria a problem as far as we were concerned?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Not generally, no. Of course, they usually voted with the African countries on a lot of the subjects. But they were always receptive if I had a position to give them. They would always say, "I'll take this up with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or I'll take this up with so and so."

*Q: How did Easum and Steve Low operate? How did you find working with them?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Both of them were just terrific. They were very cooperative and they gave me carte blanche to run the Political Section and to do the job that they wanted me to do. They both were liked by the Nigerians. They both entertained nicely. I remain very close friends with both of them. Don is up in New York now and Steve is here.

*Q: What was the impression of not only you but your officers in the Political Section about the viability as a democracy of Nigeria during this time, in the late '70s?*

CLARK-BOURNE: I think everybody felt that it was only a matter of time before it would fall, because of the ethnic groups. This was Africa. This was the history. It depended upon who managed to get voted in and what the supporting ethnic groups would think of that person.

*Q: Was there any concern about the survivability of Nigeria as a country?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Oh, no. As I say, the Nigerians are entrepreneurs. They're very strong people and they are in the majority in Africa. There is no doubt that Nigeria will survive.

*Q: You didn't see a splitting up of Nigeria?*

CLARK-BOURNE: No, not in any way, although we know that they tried to at one time, but that was gone. There have been problems recently, of course, among a smaller tribal group down in the Biafran area. They claim that Mobil oil is ruining their environment and damaging their sustenance down there. But these incidents are going to occur all the time.

*Q: Were the British playing much of a role?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Not at all. The Brits as colonists were great after they left. They pulled out completely. Only one Brit remained in the country. That was up in the North and he was a judge. He was just there for a couple of years and then he retired. They pulled out of all the jobs completely, whereas the French did not. They left thousands of Frenchmen in Côte d'Ivoire. They filled practically all of the ministry jobs -- the big government jobs. After they pulled out and Ivory Coast started educating its own people, the young college graduates couldn't get jobs in the government because they were all filled by Frenchmen. Finally, the Ivorians told the French they had to leave. Because these Frenchmen had lived all their lives there, they didn't

want to go back to France. They didn't know what to do with themselves. We had a large influx of them into Guinea when I was there and I know they went into some of the other surrounding countries. You didn't find that in any of the former British colonies. The Brits just left.

*Q: You left Nigeria when?*

CLARK-BOURNE: '79.

**WILLIAM C. HARROP**  
**Deputy Director, Bureau of African Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1977-1980)**

*Ambassador William C. Harrop was born in Maryland in 1929. He graduated with an A.B. in English literature from Harvard University. Prior to his entrance into the Foreign Service in 1954, he served in the U.S. Marine Corps and studied journalism for a year at graduate school at the University of Missouri. In addition to serving as ambassador to Guinea, Zaire, Kenya, and Israel, Ambassador Harrop held earlier positions in Italy and Brussels. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 24, 1993.*

*Q: Let's take a couple of these at a time. What about Biafra? This seemed to pit the State Department and its policy of opposing splitting Africa up into clans or tribes against the Jewish community, most of the Christian community, and other groups. All of the rock stars seemed to be on the side of Biafra. It was a difficult policy...*

HARROP: It was a very difficult policy and a very interesting problem. Careers were made and broken in the U.S. Government over that issue. There was a sense that, politically or in the national interest, we had to work with the central government [of Nigeria] in its efforts to contain an insurgency, or else all of Africa might fragment. The Biafrans were extremely competent in public relations. They were very skillful at portraying themselves as being ill-treated, as, in many respects, they were. One of the central government's tactical approaches was to choke off food and fuel supplies. There was starvation in Biafra. It was a tough, tough time. There was a lot of feeling and sentiment in Washington over it, with the academic community largely favoring the secession. We had great difficulties with the French, who kept slipping arms to Colonel Ojukwu...

*Q: What was in it for the French? How did they look at it?*

HARROP: The French, I think, have always tended to be contrary in Africa. They have tended to take a position counter to the United Kingdom and, later, the United States. Nigeria was the major former British colony in Africa. The British still had tremendous influence. I think it was a rather cynical opportunity for the French to increase their stature in Nigeria, and to put down the British.

*Q: Were there problems within INR and with the geographic desk on our Biafran policy? I'm thinking of today, where we're having so much trouble about [policy toward] the former Yugoslavia. We're having resignations and so forth. It seems to me that this would be somewhat the same situation.*

HARROP: There were a number of people who were concerned on humanitarian grounds. The pro-Biafran element in the United States was essentially a humanitarian element. One of the leading figures was the Dean, at the time, of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Jean Mayer. He happened to be a physician and nutritionist. That brought him strongly into the subject. He wrote a number of articles on the suffering of the people in Biafra.

In the State Department itself there was some division, but I would say there were no major differences. There was a division between the Department and the National Security Council, where there was a young Foreign Service Officer named Roger Morris who left the Foreign Service over this question. He was a junior officer on the National Security Council staff. He wrote a stream of strongly critical pieces in an endeavor to turn policy around, going over the issues repeatedly, dramatizing the suffering in Biafra, even though the administration really had limited sympathy with his view point.

*Q: How did you find Congress on this?*

HARROP: Very divided and very susceptible to influence from Colonel Ojukwu and the Eastern Nigerians. A number of members of Congress can always be approached successfully on human rights questions, and this happened on this occasion. Members often seem open to allegations of heartlessness on the part of the U.S. Government.

*Q: How did you find the reporting from Nigeria and the neighboring posts on this issue?*

HARROP: Well, it was quite mixed, as a matter of fact, because we had an ambassador there for a time, Bill Trueheart, who tended to have difficulty with our policy. It was a difficult problem for Assistant Secretary David Newsom, then in charge of the Bureau of African Affairs. There were more political, analytical, and emotional divisions among the staff in the Embassy in Lagos than in the State Department itself, it seemed to me. So we had of problems.

**S. DOUGLAS MARTIN**  
**Economic/Commercial Counselor**  
**Lagos (1978-1980)**

*S. Douglas Martin was born in New York in 1926. During 1945-1945 he served overseas in the US Army, upon returning he received his bachelor's from St John's University in 1949 and later received his law degree from Columbia University in 1952. His career included positions in Germany, Washington D. C., Yugoslavia, Poland, Laos, Austria, Turkey, Nigeria, and Cameroon. Mr. Martin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in January 1999.*

*Q: You left there in '78. Where did you go?*

MARTIN: In '78 I went to Lagos, Nigeria.

*Q: And you were there from when to when?*

MARTIN: '78 to '80. I was the counselor for economic affairs, commercial counselor, and AID affairs officer. Nigeria had a reputation, fostered somewhat by my predecessor, of being one of the worst posts in the world, heavily populated. It's the first place I had been assigned where my wife said she was scared. She was scared not because anybody was threatening her so much; just the density of the population, the mass of the people in Lagos was something unbelievable, and it really led to some misperceptions. We used to say there were 100 million people in Nigeria, that every fourth or fifth African was a Nigerian, and that they had 256 tribes, 250 languages, but in fact there were three major groups. The people in the north, the Hausas, who spoke the Hausa languages and who were Muslims, and the Hausa Fulani were the ruling group. In the south, where we were, were the Yorubas. They were Christian and Muslim. In the east were the Ibos who were Christians, mainly Catholic, as a matter of fact.

During the civil war it was the Ibo that had rebelled, and that was where the oil was, in the east. Lagos, Nigeria, was very important at that time because it was the second largest source of oil for the United States after, I think, Venezuela. The 100 million number resulted if you added up what every tribe said it had. They had never had a census. They didn't really know how many people they had. Yet when you drove out of Lagos and went around the country, you had a feeling there were vast empty areas as well. There were these densely populated areas down in the south, and there was a historic reason for that, the people in the north were slave dealers, and they used to go on raids to the south, capture slaves, bring them all the way across Africa and sell them in the Near East. To get away from them the people had moved more and more to the south. Bob Frazier, who was killed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, was a junior officer there. He was the one that told me this. Those areas that seemed to be empty, he said were empty because they were "slaved out," and there was some Muslim later who said, "When I die, I'll die with a slave in my hands."

*Q: I want to move to this period of '78-80. How did we view the economics? Was this the time of port problems and corruption? Could you talk about our view?*

MARTIN: The unbelievable port problem was over. That was a major scandal that had taken place, and I had come across it while I was in Vienna. Somebody came into my office with an unbelievably large order for Americans stuff, to be sent to Lagos by ship. I heard that it took four of five months. Every Greek ship in the world seemed to head toward Lagos Harbor and stand out in the harbor waiting to get permission to come in and unload. The crew would fly back to Greece and come back with another ship. They would leave three or four people on board just to keep the ship Greek and waiting, and make money because of these port charges. When I got there, oil was mostly American production by Gulf and Mobil, but there was also some British companies and some smaller oil companies. That was why it was important to us, oil.

*Q: How did you find it for getting statistics, for negotiating with the Nigerian Government?*

MARTIN: Well, probably our most important report was the monthly oil production statistics, and they were very good about giving us that. We had no trouble. You could go into their oil ministry, and they would give you their figures for the month and tell you something about it. Where you couldn't get reliable statistics was the foreign exchange. They had a fixed exchange rate, and they controlled the foreign exchange. If you were a Nigerian, you could get a permit to buy foreign exchange. You would pay a certain amount of naira, the Nigerian unit of currency, and basically you would be paying like 70, and you would get a dollar, and for the dollar you could get 100 naira cash back on the street. If you could go in a circle long enough, you could become wealthy.

The main thing I wanted to mention is corruption. The country is unbelievably corrupt. It was corrupt at every level, and yet politically we were very happy there because General Obasanjo, who had just become the head of Government there again, was in charge. He had promised to turn the government over to civilian rule. The corruption was very bad to the point where I remember once I was traveling in the country, and the driver wanted to stop to buy some onions in a place fairly far out from Lagos. On the way back to town, he wanted to do some shopping. So we stopped. As soon as we stopped, over came a girl about 12 years old carrying a baby. I reached out to touch the baby on the head, as anybody would do, she pulled the baby away and said, "Dash me," *dash* being the term for 'bribe.' If you brought a letter to a ministry to get it delivered to a minister, people said you had to pay the secretary or she would not deliver the letter to her own boss. A priest friend who ran a school there told me he came across a kid who didn't do his homework. And he said, "Why didn't you do your homework?" And the kid said, "Father, one of the older boys tapped my notebook." So he said, "I hope when you get to be an older boy, you won't tap the younger boys books." He said, "Father, I'm going to tap all I can."

This culture of corruption was so strong there that I heard about it on the plane coming in. I was talking to an Indian businessman. The Indians were fairly strong there. He said, "You know, it's not whether you pay," because I had said, you know, we don't pay bribes to people. He said, "You know, in Lagos, it's not whether you pay or not - you must pay. It's so corrupt you must pay or you can't get anything done, but the trick is to know how little you can pay to still get it done."

*Q: Were we reporting this corruption as being absolutely corrosive? Was the money going into the pockets of the ruling class, or was it getting out to the people?*

MARTIN: It wasn't getting out to the little people, no, but it was getting into projects. Certain projects were being done. There were projects, for example, there were roads all over the place. They had roads right through Lagos, although the traffic in Lagos was unbelievably bad. There was a story of somebody who left the embassy to go on a plane leaving the post. He left at noontime to catch a six o'clock flight, and he missed it. If there were no traffic, you could get out to the airport in about an hour. It was pretty far. But on the way, the tie-ups would be unbelievable. Their skill with the language is marvelous. They use words like "a go-slow": "I'm caught in a go-slow." We had electricity going off all the time. There were water shortages. The telephone never worked.

On the other hand, there was a feeling that they could make it work if they wanted to. I'll give you an example. My mother died while I was there. Every once in a while the phone would ring, I'd pick it up, and there'd be nothing. One day the phone rang, and I picked it up and it was my son calling me from the United States to tell me that my mother had died. Now all during the time I was there, people said, "You'd better pay your phone bill." I kept paying my phone bill even though the phone wasn't working, which seemed kind of stupid, but I think the ambassador didn't want people coming and saying so-and-so hasn't paid his phone bill, even though the phone just about never worked. If you wanted to make an international call, you could go down to the main post office kind of building, and then you could make a call to the States, but otherwise the telephone just didn't work.

We had radio communication. We'd call in for radio check all the time, and so we overcame it. For electricity, I had my own generator. I had a beautiful house. It was built during the British colonial days. It was on stilts, so it had a breeze, and large rooms and all that, although it was air conditioned. Robbery was very bad there. It was dangerous. They had the death penalty. They would have public executions regularly, and they were big for reporting in the newspaper the person's last words. That was one of the big things, which we have in our tradition too. When we execute somebody, they always have a little thing in the paper, "Last words." It's part of our Judeo-Christian tradition that a person that's dying can make a statement. They used to bring them down to the beach and shoot them. Huge crowds would show up on a Saturday when they were going to have an execution. The executions were ordered by a military tribunal, for armed robbery. An armed robbery could be with any kind of weapon, even with a stick. But if the person were armed and got caught robbing, he would normally get the death sentence, and they carried it out.

*Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?*

MARTIN: Don Easum. He was very happy that he had contributed to some extent to the promise of General Obasanjo to transition into a civilian régime. Politically we were on a high point. A year before I came there had been a Presidential visit, which I'm sure that Easum considered the apex of his time there. A visit by President Carter was considered a great success. Following that, we agreed we would have economic talks, and it fell to me to do them with the Nigerians. We had certain issues. For example, Pan American Airways used to have a flight that went down the coast of West Africa. They had two flights a week. They wanted to increase it to four, but the Nigerians wouldn't let them, because they were planning to have their own airline, Nigerian Airways, which would go to the United States. They wanted at the very least to share passengers. Most people would rather go on Pan Am than on Nigerian Airways, and so they would not allow an increase in Pan Am. We kept asking them, and they kept saying no.

Because the government had so much foreign exchange, our aid program was running out. I was the aid affairs officer. We'd just had a program where we were funding a couple of teachers around the country in different places and that money was running out. I did have some residual funds that were left over from projects where they hadn't used up all the money, and eventually I cleaned that up. We made a donation to a library and got rid of the program because it was running out anyway.

Because it had so much foreign exchange, there was an organization established, I think with Saudi Arabia and Nigeria. It was reimbursable foreign aid, where we would offer to come in with our aid resources, do some project, and they would pay for it. I had a man working for me who was responsible for that, and he was really a very capable guy with many years in AID. He would write up a project proposal and present it to them, but they really didn't want to pay for foreign aid, so they would just stall on it. We never got one through.

They did mention AID once in a while. Even though they had this huge foreign exchange, they still were hoping we would give them aid, because after all, we're the United States, and they're Nigeria. Their people are poor. Why not? Finally, AID, which is a bureaucratic institution and wanted to have its own mission there, proposed that we give \$10 million, even though Nigeria had so much money. Easum disappointed me on this. He was very smart, and he knew what he was doing. He said, "Let them fight that out in Washington." I thought we should have gone in and said, this is ridiculous. When Ambassador Stephen Low succeeded Easum, he went around for his briefing and talked to the man in charge of the institution in Washington and said, "There's this proposal for \$10 million for aid to Nigeria. This is ridiculous." But AID wanted it. They sent a guy out, and he was very upset with me that I wasn't giving him full support. I just said, "Well, the embassy can't, but, good luck to you." That's all we said, and he was upset with that.

When I got there, there was a Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army Engineer Corps, who had experience on the Mississippi River. We had a proposal to redo the Niger- Benue River, and it would have cost a huge amount of money, but it would have been of huge benefit to the country. He had talks with them about it, but in the end they weren't going to pay anything for any American aid. We also had a proposal for ID cards, because they had a problem with a lot of people walking around from other African countries who were undocumented. It would have given them the chance to control the population a little better, or know who was what and where. It could have been used as a kind of census. That didn't happen either. There were about six important projects. There had been some major commercial deals by my predecessor there. For example, there was the largest combat boot sale to any institution other than the United States army, because their local combat boots were poor. Combat boots have to have good leather, and the American leather is thicker than the European leather, and so our American combat boots were suitable, and they ordered I don't know how many million. Their army was a very good army, professionally trained, mainly by the British. They still had some British officers up in the north for training the Nigerian army, and it was the only institution that you might call a national institution. It somehow was trying to integrate the different tribal groups.

We had the largest single commercial or trade opportunity I ever dealt with, and it was successful. When I was first there, the Nigerian Government became interested in having a fertilizer plant using the petrochemical resources of the country. Poland Kellogg (now under a different name) was the company that was the leader in petrochemical fertilizer plants and had almost a monopoly. These are very expensive. They came in and made a proposal to build one for \$600 million, which was really very high. The Nigerians told us they wanted it. I told the Poland Kellogg people, who are pretty shrewd negotiators, that they wanted it. They guy said, "Well, if they want it, they're going to have to pay for it."

The Nigerians hired an Irishman who was an expert in this type of fertilizer plant, and then they started negotiating. It took them 18 months, but before I left, they signed an agreement for \$500 million. The Nigerians did feel that this company was trying to take advantage of them, and that they had to watch them very closely, getting them down from the \$600 million down to \$500 million. By the time the \$500 million fertilizer plant was about to be agreed - everything was agreed more or less, a trade mission came over headed by Andrew Young. During that trade mission, and in the presence of General Obasanjo, they agreed to the \$500 million contract, and Andy Young got the credit - it was in Newsweek, and Time. This was very good politically. Andrew Young was our ambassador to the UN. He got fired while he was there, but he helped Easum get to be the head of the African Affairs Institute, which is what he did for about five years after he retired.

Easum loved tennis. As part of the tennis circuit, there was a tournament in Lagos. I think the tennis players considered it to be just at the bottom of the pile, but it did get them points for their ranking. An Austrian came down, named Feigl, and also a guy stayed with me who has since become more or less famous if you follow tennis, Larry Stefanki. Easum encouraged us and I liked that idea, too, of having these tennis players stay with us while they were there. Larry Stefanki later became John McEnroe's trainer and was just in the papers within the past six months or so. He trained this guy who came up and almost became number one, a guy from Chile named Rios, I think. But anyway, Stefanki is a figure now in American tennis. I see his name every once in a while, and during the US Open he's one of the broadcasters, and he's close to John McEnroe.

The transition to civilian rule took place while I was there. Civilian rule was more corrupt, by a lot, than the military rule. It was a shame, because the country could have done something with the oil. Overall, I would say that Nigeria was worse off for having discovered oil, even though it brought them a huge amount of money. It brought the kind of thing where their recent dictator, General Abacha was killed; they brought in three prostitutes and a supply of Viagra, gave it to him, he had a heart attack and died. They think there was something else in the pill - it wasn't just the Viagra that killed him. It was some kind of poison. They assassinated him.

It was kind of a dangerous place and very difficult to deal with servants. This was my introduction to Africa, and I've often thought, if I had it to do over again, I might have liked to be an African specialist because I love Africa.

**PETER DAVID EICHER**  
**Political Officer**  
**Lagos (1978-1980)**

*Mr. Eicher, son of an American oil geologist, was born in Saudi Arabia and raised in the US and abroad. He was educated at McGill University, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of California, Los Angeles. Entering the Foreign Service in 1973, Mr. Eicher became an Africa and Human*



*Rights specialist, serving at posts in Fiji, South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Switzerland as well as in Washington and at the United Nations in New York. Mr. Eicher was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.*

*Q: So you were in Nigeria from when to when?*

EICHER: From the middle of 1978 to the middle of 1980.

*Q: How did you feel about going to Nigeria at the time?*

EICHER: I felt alright about it at the time. I had been interested in African affairs. That's what took me to South Africa and I was looking for another African assignment. I can't remember exactly what our first choice was but Nigeria was not one of the countries on our list. We wanted to go to Kenya or to Ghana – Accra might have been our first choice – and when those didn't work we finally got word that we were going to Nigeria, which, little did we know, was not quite the same thing. We thought that West Africa was West Africa, but Nigeria turned out to be – from a living point of view – quite an unpleasant place to be.

*Q: Did you at the time feel that you were, did you feel like an Africanist?*

EICHER: Well, kind of, I mean, to the extent you can be an Africanist after one tour. But out of my two tours in the Foreign Service, one was in Africa. I had also done a lot of work on Africa at university, since I was interested in it. I was looking forward to another African tour and I guess I was slowly becoming an Africanist and would go on to a couple of African tours after that as well. So Africa did interest me. I was still in the mode of wanting to go to unusual places that I hadn't been to before and the politics of Africa were certainly very interesting. It struck me that Africa was kind of a neglected element of U.S. foreign policy, so it was something that as a junior officer you could get your teeth into, and do more interesting things and go more interesting places than you might if you were assigned to one of the big European embassies.

*Q: In 1978 what was the situation in Nigeria?*

EICHER: It turned out to be an interesting two years politically. I was assigned as a political officer again, which, you'll recall was my "cone." In Nigeria at the time was there was a military government led by General Obasanjo. Interestingly, that's the same Obasanjo who was president of Nigeria again until a couple of weeks ago. [General Olusegun Obasanjo was head of Nigeria's military government in the 1970s, then was out of power for many years before serving as a democratically elected president for several years ending in 2007.] When I was in Nigeria, Obasanjo had launched a process to take Nigeria back to civilian rule after many years of military government. This was kind of revolutionary in Africa at the time; military governments just didn't hand power back to civilians. So Obasanjo was an unusual leader in that regards and was doing something very good in terms of moving toward a new constitution and elections. The new constitution was based on the American model. He divided the country into 19 states and set up a constitution which was similar to ours. About halfway through my tour in Nigeria they had the elections and successfully returned to civilian rule. Shehu Shagari was elected president of Nigeria and Obasanjo, to his credit, went back to the barracks. This was a big event. There have

been a lot of coups in Africa and a lot of post-colonial undemocratic regimes. But what you had in Nigeria at the time was the biggest, most important country in black Africa going back to civilian rule, and on the American model, to boot. So it made a very interesting time to be a young political officer in Nigeria.

*Q: Let's talk about the embassy, the ambassador, the DCM.*

EICHER: The ambassador when I got there for the first year was Don Easum. He was replaced later on by Steve Low. The DCM was Parker somebody, I can't remember his last name. Katherine Clark-Bourne was political counselor. There were about four or five of us in the political section. It was a good-sized political section, bigger than our political section in South Africa. When I got there, we were in the old embassy, in downtown Lagos in an old building. It was not very pleasant accommodations but there was a new embassy being built. Everybody was looking forward to moving to the new building. We were so cramped that I had to share an office with the other junior political officer, Bob Frasure, who later went on to die in tragic circumstances in Bosnia during the war there. After a few months, we moved to the new embassy building out on Victoria Island just off the coast, which was much newer, nicer digs.

Nigeria was a very tough place to operate. We didn't have working telephones anywhere in Lagos, including in the Embassy. We didn't even have a telephone instrument in our home. Even where there were telephones, you could virtually never get a call through. Traffic was absolutely horrendous and moved at a crawl. So it became very difficult to get around and do your job as a political officer, especially in comparison to my previous post in South Africa. If you wanted to meet with anybody or even talk with someone, you had to get in an embassy car and laboriously make your way to their office, maybe an hour to get downtown, or twice that long to get to the university, and hope they were there when you arrived and hope they had time to see you. Then, you would crawl back to the embassy in traffic afterwards. So it was very difficult and often frustrating. You wasted an awful lot of time. Often you got somewhere and the person or people you wanted to see were not there; "he's not on seat," they would say; we got to hate that expression. When the ambassador wanted an appointment with someone, he couldn't telephone, so he would send one of us down in person to arrange the appointment for him. You couldn't even get a phone call through to the Foreign Ministry. Going there and returning might be a whole morning's work, just making one appointment for the ambassador. And I had to go down to the Foreign Ministry a lot. I remember it was in a high-rise building downtown and the elevator never worked. The ministry itself was on the sixth, seventh and eighth floors so we would always be walking up that many floors to get to the Ministry. Those of us who went to the ministry used to joke that there should be a reciprocity agreement – that Nigerian diplomats in Washington should be required to climb eight flights of stairs for their appointments at the State Department.

*Q: I would think this was sort of an "amateur hour." You know, the damn place doesn't work and the people, the Nigerians... Oh, it's just not working. I mean, it's not working how Americans like things to work.*

EICHER: I have to admit there was a lot of that feeling around, both from the expatriate community generally and from the people at the embassy. It did give you kind of a negative view

of the country because it was so difficult to do anything. It was such a hard place to live. Nothing seemed to work, nothing was available in the stores, there were terrible health problems, it was dirty and run-down, and the population in the Lagos area tended to be extremely arrogant and unfriendly and hard to deal with, as well. So there was kind of a mixed feeling. On the one hand, it was an unpleasant place to be, but on the other, you knew you were in Africa's most important country, with the biggest population, biggest economy, most military power, and all that; all in all a very vibrant society. You know, it was, in its way, very exciting. It always seemed like there were things going on politically. They were moving toward general elections and every day there were new political parties being formed and speeches and rallies and one thing and another, so professionally, being able to follow all this and to have so much going on seemed very interesting. But physically, it was extremely difficult. Crime was also very bad. Each of the embassy residences had its own guards. Housing was very bad. The power went off all the time. The weather was hot and sticky. It was just a very unpleasant place to be.

*Q: To what did you ascribe, you and you colleagues ascribe the fact that things didn't work?*

EICHER: I'm not sure that we thought very much why things were not working. To me it was my first experience in West Africa. It seemed that this must just be the way that it is. You know, partly the colonial powers left it a wreck, partly there was internal corruption which was making it a wreck, partly they just didn't have the skills and education that they needed; partly they weren't managing it as well as they could. I don't know. There was an expression "wa-wa," "West Africa wins again." Every time something went wrong you just sort of took it in stride. You'd roll your eyes knowingly and come to expect that, of course, if something can go wrong, it's going to go wrong.

*Q: By this time you had three children.*

EICHER: Yes.

*Q: As always, the impact if it's a lousy place to live, it's the wife who has to put things together.*

EICHER: That is true, indeed. She certainly was not very happy living in Nigeria. On the one hand, because it was such a tough place and because the embassy people all lived more or less in the same general neighborhood of town, we made a lot of quite good friends and there was a lot of esprit de corps. There were a lot of young families, a lot of kids the same age as ours, a quite reasonable American school, with a lot of young teachers who we got to be friends with. The ambassador opened the residence grounds with its swimming pool to the embassy community almost all the time on a permanent basis. There was a commissary where you could get things, fortunately, because very little was available on the local market. There were food orders. You'd have to order frozen food every three months and they gave you two extra freezers to keep it in. Since power went out all the time, your many-months supply of food was always in danger of thawing out and spoiling. When we first got there, there were no generators at the houses, you just lived with the power outages. Eventually, they installed generators that you could run for a few hours at a time when the power went out. The generators made so much noise, however, that the neighbors were always complaining.

So, my wife, to get back to your question, really didn't like it at all. The kids tended to be sick fairly often – not to mention her and me, as well – from one thing or another, you know, eating this or getting that infected, or whatever it might be. We were able to have household help as we had in South Africa, so we had somebody to look after the kids when she wasn't there. It gave her some freedom and she did work part-time at the embassy on and off, for the Foreign Building Office, which was building the new embassy and for the regional security officer, among others. So, she got by.

But, life was generally not pleasant. Housing was sub-standard in comparison to embassy housing elsewhere. The place we were in had rats running in the yard when we first got there, before we had it cleaned up. The roof was in such bad shape that twice we had upstairs rooms flooded after heavy rains. We had an electrical fire because the wiring was bad. Crime was very bad, so much so that at night we were supposed to lock ourselves into the upstairs of our house, which was all barred off at the top of the stairs like a jail. We had guards at the house, two young, unarmed Nigerians, one was the day guard and one the night guard. On a trip back to the States, we bought them each a pair of blue jeans, which became one of their prized possessions. One night, the night guard had his stolen. We asked how it happened and he explained that he took them off and hung them on the line before he lay down to go to sleep and they were gone when he woke up. This was the guy who was supposed to be up guarding us at night! When we got to Nigeria, there were still public executions of criminals; the Nigerians would execute prisoners by tying them to a pole on the public beach and shooting them. Some of the Embassy Marines would go down to watch. The practice was ended before we left.

Lagos did have pretty beaches, but we seldom went. The currents were so dangerous along the West African coast that you weren't supposed to swim; many people used to drown. In fact, once we were at the beach and there was a dead body washed up. All the kids wanted to go down and look at it and we had to restrain them. And, you would be constantly hassled at the beach, both by vendors trying to sell handicrafts and things, and just by onlookers, some of whom, shall I say, weren't polite. To get away to the beach, we would occasionally drive to Lome, in Togo, two countries away but only a four hour drive; we'd convoy with a couple other embassy families. Lome had a very nice resort hotels, and good French food, and was just a pleasant place to get away from Lagos.

We also had another moving disaster going to Nigeria: our shipment of household effects was stolen off the docks and never reached us. What a disaster that was! There we were with three little kids in a country where you couldn't get anything, with our household effects lost. There certainly was no thought in any of our minds that we were going to extend in Nigeria after two years.

*Q: Let's talk about your work. You were there during the elections?*

EICHER: Yes. The elections took place about halfway through the time I was there.

*Q: That was fun?*

EICHER: It was good fun. We did try to get out, we tried to meet politicians, and we tried to get

around the country. In fact, there was an effort, to the credit of the embassy management, to try to get us out quite a bit to travel in Nigeria, which was quite difficult and took a lot of planning. We'd have to get a big embassy vehicle, usually one of these giant "carry-alls," as they used to call SUVs; they weren't called SUVs yet at that time. You'd have to load up the vehicle with C-rations because you couldn't be certain food would be available anywhere you went. The hotel accommodations, if they existed, could be unbelievably bad.

I ended up taking a few of these different excursions, which were extremely interesting and really did get you out into what I considered to be the wilds of Africa. I remember my first one, which was very soon after getting to Nigeria, which was a trip up to the north. I went up and joined the consul general in Kaduna, it was Joe Lake at the time, and had quite a trip out to eastern Nigeria, to Maiduguri, to meet some politicians and check out the situation there. That was very interesting. We decided we would drive up to see Lake Chad because this sounded to both of us like a very interesting thing to do. We ended up driving on some endless, very bad dirt roads through very wild country, just driving and driving and driving. It seemed to never end. We sort of compared ourselves mentally to Livingston trekking endlessly through the wilds of Africa. No matter how far we went – hours – we couldn't find the lake; again, it was like Livingston not being able to find the source of the Nile. We were asking people and they were saying "well, it's right here," sort of like, "open your eyes, stupid" but we couldn't see any water. We never actually saw a lake. Apparently, at that season the lake dried up in the area we were in. You could see all around you sort of a flat plain full of reeds that you wouldn't know was a lake unless somebody told you it was. So, in a sense, we were in the lake, in the lake bed, at least. We finally decided, we told each other, we could honestly say we had been "to the shores of Lake Chad," even if we couldn't say we had seen Lake Chad.

While I was away on that trip – which, as I said, was very soon after arriving in Lagos – the upstairs of our house flooded during a storm. The roof was bad; that was the first of several floods we had. It was late at night and my wife was home alone with the kids; we had no telephone; and we barely knew anyone yet. She had to run down the street to a neighbor's in the middle of the night and ask them to radio the GSO (the general services office) to come help bail her out, literally. She still hasn't forgiven me for that one.

Another trip I took with a couple of people through the eastern delta region of Nigeria, which was very interesting – Port Harcourt and Calabar and the whole southeast area of Nigeria, the area that had once seceded from Nigeria as Biafra. In addition to meeting with politicians and other local leaders, I remember going to meetings at the University of Calabar and then proudly buying a University of Calabar T-shirt in their bookstore, which I thought was fun to wear around because it was so exotic. We also visited the oil companies who were out there and I remember being helicoptered out to one of their oil platforms off the coast to get a look at that. It wasn't really part of my portfolio, but one of the guys I was traveling with was an economic officer so we did both political and economic meetings, since we were traveling together. That was my first ever helicopter ride, as well as my first time on an oil platform, so that was interesting.

*Q: Was there any residue of the Biafran War when you were there?*

EICHER: Not a lot. I mean, people talked about it still, of course, and everybody had been through it so it was very much part of recent history. Our housekeeper was an Ibo who had lost her husband and children and home during the war. I guess it had been less than ten years since the war took place, so it was still very much part of the background people were living with. On this trip to the east that I'm talking about, we drove through much of what used to be Biafra, but you really couldn't see real devastation there and didn't get the feeling that there had recently been a war there. There were maybe just a few ruined buildings or wrecks that were left over from the war. The Ibos – who had been the secessionists – were still quite a force in Nigerian politics, which generally tended to break down along ethnic lines. There were a lot of different divisions in the country, the largest one being the North-South division, to some extent this mirrored a Muslim-Christian division, although that's a simplification and is not entirely accurate. And, in the southern Nigeria, you also had an east-west division between the Yorubas and the Ibos, who were the two largest groups, but there were lots and lots of other ethnic groups scattered around there as well. So it would be very simplistic to try to divide it into three – Yoruba, Ibo and northern Hausa-Fulani – although that was the sort of the standard way people would describe the country's ethnic divisions in their briefings to visitors.

*Q: Did you see the military having a hand in the elections as far as favorites or support or what have you?*

EICHER: We didn't really. It seemed at the time to be a quite reasonably run contest. The military, after all, was anxious to return to civilian rule and didn't want trouble. Obasanjo was trying to get rid of power, not hold on to it. But, this is a very interesting question to me now because I have spent much of the last 10 years heading election observation missions. I try to think back sometimes about what I really knew about elections at that point in my life, and whether when I and others at the embassy who were following the elections we were looking for the right things. I'm not sure anymore that we were. I don't doubt that there must have been a lot of manipulations that went along with the elections. But that was not the impression we had at the time and it was certainly a lively campaign, and there didn't seem to be any serious restrictions on freedom of speech or freedom of assembly.

There were lots of candidates. There was even one rather amusing candidate, Nigeria's biggest pop star, a fellow named Fela, who had been involved in protest movements in the past. He decided he wanted to run for president. One of the requirements of running for president was that a candidate had to have a campaign establishment in all 19 of Nigeria's states. This was a rule because they wanted to avoid the kind of regional politics that had led to the Biafra war, so every party was required to be a nation-wide party; there could be no regional parties. So Fela's solution to this was to have a big ceremony and marry 19 wives in one day, one from each of the 19 states! Through their family connections, presto, he had a campaign establishment in each one of the 19 states. So that was kind of fun.

*Q: How did he do?*

EICHER: Not very well, as I recall. He was never really considered a serious contender, although he got a lot of publicity. He had his 19 wives support him, I guess, and maybe a bunch of fans. There was no limit on the number of wives a man could have in Nigeria, if he could

support them. In fact, men weren't even necessarily expected to support all of their wives; it was not uncommon for each wife to be expected to support herself and her children.

But the real presidential contest, if I recall correctly, was between Shagari, who was the main northern candidate and had a young Ibo for his vice presidential running mate, Alex Ekwueme, against an old-time politician named Awolowo. Awolowo was a Yoruba and drew most of his support from the Yoruba areas of southwest Nigeria. He was well known as one of the leaders of Nigeria's independence era. As I recall, Shagari pretty much trounced him. They were the only two candidates who really figured in the contest. There were also lots of state races and Senate races and other election contests going on at the same time that I don't remember much about. But I do remember there was a lot going on that we continually had to follow and that we did a lot of reporting. In addition to election reporting, there was a lot of biographical reporting to do, since a whole new set of leaders was emerging in Nigeria. I remember that the Department even sent out an extra officer for several months, maybe even a year, just to do biographical reporting.

*Q: Were we concerned about the Islamic influence in the north? Did we see in this a certain amount of, you might say, intolerance that might affect Nigeria?*

EICHER: It wasn't really seen as an issue at the time at all. I don't recall it in any of our reporting or any reporting from the consulate in Kaduna. Certainly Islam was part of the political background to the country and we recognized that there was an Islamic north and a more or less Christian south, which affected people's political attitudes. But, Islamic radicalism was not something that had emerged at all as an issue.

There was a civil war going on in Chad at the time, which was a neighboring country, and I know Nigeria got involved regularly in the efforts to find a solution in Chad. They had a big conference in Lagos and, I remember the political counselor asked a couple of us to go down and find out what was happening at the Chad conference. There were no telephones, of course. We couldn't call or make an appointment with anyone. So, we went down to the hotel where they were holding the conference on Chad and started chatting up some delegates in the lobby to see if we could find out what was going on. Pretty soon a couple of security officers approached us and asked us what we were doing and whether we had credentials and of course, we didn't, and so we were evicted from the Chad conference.

*Q: Did we feel the hand of Qadhafi messing around in Nigeria at all?*

EICHER: Not that I can recall, although he was very active in the Chad conflict. You know, Libyan activity in Nigeria would've been something that we probably would have been concerned about at the time if it were happening, but I don't remember that being a problem. Nigeria was an OPEC country, I believe. There was certainly some oil politics in the bigger sense but that was not in my portfolio so it was not something that I followed or recall particularly.

*Q: By the time you left how did you find it? Was there a pretty good political structure or not?*

EICHER: It seemed to be a pretty good structure. As I said, it was modeled after ours and so it

had to be close to perfect. (Chuckle.) You know, it looked like they might actually make a go of it, which would have been wonderful – Africa's largest country moving successfully to democracy. As it happened, it didn't last very long. But, it was still a functioning civilian democracy and something we could be quite hopeful about at the time I left.

I remember that soon after the new government took over, the civilian government, we had a visit by a big congressional delegation, led by Jim Wright, the Speaker of the House, and somehow I ended up as his control officer and it actually went quite well. The new congressmen and senators in Nigeria were really pleased to meet some of their American counterparts. The Americans actually visited the newly-built Senate Hall and the House of Representatives or whatever they called it in Nigeria, and they were all talking to each other about how you vote and what buttons you press to vote electronically in each chamber. So, that was actually a very happy CODEL (congressional delegation) and I remember being very impressed with Jim Wright, as well.

We had a lot of other visitors I should mention, as well. It seemed at times as if the whole American black establishment felt like they needed to visit Nigeria. I can't remember all of them. I don't remember if Jesse Jackson came out or not; I think he may have. We had Tom Bradley from Los Angeles and Andy Young and many others. My wife was asked to take care of Andy Young's son, who was about the same age as our oldest son; I can't remember exactly how she got stuck with that. The same day that he was coming over, we had one of those typical Nigerian mess-ups where the sewer lines backed up into our kitchen and we had a kitchen flooded with sewage to contend with. So she had a stressful time of it, but it went well and everyone was grateful to her.

One particular visit which I ended up as control officer on, which was my all-time greatest control officership, was Muhammad Ali. He came to Lagos as an official U.S. envoy to try to persuade African countries not to participate in the Moscow Olympics. The U.S. was boycotting the Olympics because Russians had invaded Afghanistan. Ali, being a good Muslim, was against the Russian invasion of a Muslim country and someone had convinced him to sign on to this idea of being an American envoy to the African states to get them to join the boycott. Nigeria was one of four countries he was visiting. From a personal perspective, I found this to be just a wonderful little visit, a great experience. Muhammad Ali was one of the best-known Americans in the world, probably the best known American. He played it up wonderfully. We had a bus, a small minibus, which we took him and the delegation around in. He did a lot of his famous clowning. He would hang out of the open door of the little bus as we went along – generally slowly through Lagos traffic – and shake his fist at people on the street and absolutely everybody knew him instantly on sight and regarded him as a hero. Everywhere we went we would have women and children running after the bus waving and shouting “Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Ali!”

Interestingly though, in private he was very calm, very subdued, even meek. This was so different from his public persona that it came as quite a shock. He would carefully listen to the instructions that were given to him by Lannon Walker, a deputy assistant secretary of state who had come out with him on the delegation and would do as he was told carefully and very meekly. But, as soon as he got out into a crowd, he was clowning and sparring with everybody making a good impression in line with his image as “the greatest.” And, he hit on all the women, what a



womanizer! When there was a little gap in his schedule I asked if he would go greet the kids at the American school and he agreed. I think that was my wife's idea. Anyway, we got it organized. The school let all the kids out of class and everybody crowded around him and got to see Muhammad Ali and shake his hand. It was a great visit.

*Q: Was Nigeria in the Olympics?*

EICHER: Yes. From a substantive point of view, the visit was a flop, which was fairly predictable. Nigeria attended the Moscow Olympics. They loved Muhammad Ali but they didn't buy his message.

*Q: Did you feel the hand of either the black caucus or political correctness or something? I mean, obviously, Nigeria was a black African country and a lot of things weren't going very well.*

EICHER: In the end, being in Nigeria really made clear the extent to which Africa was a side issue of U.S. foreign policy. I mean, it's not as if we ever imagined that Africa was at the center of things, but here we were in the most important, largest, wealthiest, most powerful African country and I don't remember having a feeling that Washington considered it to be important in the grand scheme of things. In South Africa, I felt much more like we were in the center of issues that people cared about.

*Q: You left there in 1978?*

EICHER: 1980.

**HELEN WEINLAND**  
**Nigeria Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1978)**

**Political Officer**  
**Lagos (1979-1981)**

*Ms. Weinland was born and raised in New York and educated at Mount Holyoke College and Ohio State University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1974, she served in Zurich, Berlin and Prague and at a number of African posts, including Lagos, Nigeria; Kigali, Rwanda as Deputy Chief of Mission and Kaduna, Nigeria, where she served as Consul General. She also served in Washington as Desk Officer for the Philippines, Nigeria and Zimbabwe as well as Officer for United Nations Affairs. Ms. Weinland was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*

WEINLAND: By that point I had decided I did not want to stay in the consular cone, which I still was in. I asked my CDO to find me a political job and so she looked around and said there

was a political job open on the Nigeria desk. I said that would be fine. I moved downstairs to AF (Bureau of African Affairs).

There were three officers at that time handling Nigeria because it was a very big and important country for U.S. interests, and so there was a senior officer and two of us more junior. I handled the political and consular issues and the other one handled the economic and commercial stuff. The director of AF/W was a man named Tom Smith, who subsequently was an ambassador to Nigeria and then died tragically early from cancer. He was an aloof man, a Boston Brahmin type, but very balanced and fair and didn't get excited and was not a screamer.

My immediate boss, the top of the three, was a man named Peter Chaveas, who has just retired, who had already been in Nigeria, had served a tour at the consulate in Kaduna, and had also been in the Peace Corps and had had a posting in Sierra Leone so he was very knowledgeable about West Africa. Subsequently, he served twice as ambassador, in Malawi and then Sierra Leone. My sideways colleague was a man named Robert Kott and I don't know what happened with him.

*Q: You were there, what would it have been, '77 to '79?*

WEINLAND: I started in January of '78 and it should have been a two-year tour but what happened was that I went out to Nigeria on my familiarization tour and I absolutely fell in love with the place, which I had not expected to do. I came back and said there was going to be a political job opening up in the summer of '79 that I would like to be allowed to curtail and bid on. Tom Smith gave me a little grief on that because he was then going to have to find another desk officer sooner than he thought. I was eventually allowed to do that.

*Q: During the time, this would be?*

WEINLAND: '78 to mid '79

*Q: What was the situation in Nigeria?*

WEINLAND: They had a military government under the leadership of General Olusegun Obasanjo. He had announced at the time he took over that he would turn over the government to a civilian government. I was on the desk during a very intense period of preparation for the shift to civilian rule that was due to happen in August of 1979. The Nigerians, of course, had to allow political activity to begin: parties to form, allowing more freedom of the press.

We were also intensely involved in discussions with the Nigerians about economic issues. They had become one of our more important suppliers of petroleum, and they were sitting pretty. At that time amazingly, there were something like 20,000 Nigerians in the United States studying, who were, most of them, on some kind of government scholarship. One of my jobs was to be sure that the Nigerian government was coughing up the necessary funds to keep them enrolled in all these universities all around the country. That was sometimes a delicate job.

There was a great deal of interest in Nigeria from the American business community because, of

course, they saw that there was an opportunity to invest there and, many thought, make a killing. We had a great deal of back and forth activity on that score.

We did not have a USAID (United States Agency for International Development) program at the time because there was a prohibition on USAID being involved in a petroleum exporting country. We had a sort of quasi-USAID operation that got started, which essentially was helping the Nigerians themselves invest some of their money, somehow.

*Q: Given Nigerian proclivity for getting involved in various schemes that are not necessarily honest, with 20,000 students in the country, they must have caused problems, didn't they?*

WEINLAND: Not really. I think that reputation is from a somewhat later period. There was a lot of money in Nigeria; certainly Nigeria did not have an honest government. I don't know that they ever have since the time the military assassinated the first prime minister, but by and large, it was nothing like what it became later. Certainly we didn't have all the scams and drug crimes that became so prolific in the 80s and 90s.

*Q: You say you went to Nigeria on a sort of familiarization tour. What hit you about Nigeria?*

WEINLAND: It was in those days and I think still is a country of immense energy. The people there are wonderfully outgoing, creative, intelligent. I mean, I just loved the sense of energy and purpose and hard work. It just struck me. I had never been to Africa before. I was really lucky; the trip must have been two or three weeks and I went all over the place. I went to the east. I went with the petroleum officer to the east and we visited some of the offshore platforms and stuff like that. I had never been on an oil platform before.

The petroleum officer was sort of a madman. He was always interested in all the culture, so we'd be driving along, and he'd all of a sudden say, "Oh, there's this wonderful weaving something or other here. Oh, this is a town that's very famous for pottery." We were always stopping and going in. He knew chief so-and-so who had come into the embassy one day and whom he had gotten to know, so let's go see him. So we went in and had kola nut with Chief Mbah. We went to Enugu, then the capital of the eastern region, and we stopped in Bendel, and then we went to Ibadan, which was the site of the oldest university in and one of the leading universities in Nigeria.

Then I went up north and traveled with the Consul General in Kaduna all the way out to Sokoto, where the Sultan of Sokoto, the nominal chief of all the Muslims in Nigeria, has his palace, and then on up to Kano, a premier commercial center in the north. So I really saw a very large amount of the country, which is large and quite varied in people, landscape, and economic life. There was something about it that just appealed to me.

*Q: Were the issues of the Biafran War pretty well submerged by the time you got there?*

WEINLAND: Officially, but even today they are not submerged in the memory of the Ibo. Has our Civil War been put to rest yet? And ours was a hundred years before the Nigerians'. Civil war is a terrible thing.

One of the things I found interesting was that in the east, the central Ibo land in particular is in a belt of very dense forest. It's very heavily populated but you really wouldn't know that, just driving down the road. But you look down side tracks and side roads, and all of a sudden you see that there is some settlement back there. If you go back in there, you will find there are 10,000 people living there. In almost every one of those places I would suspect, even in those days before all the wealth had really been built up, there would be what they call a "story house." You know, most people would be living in fairly simple one-story cement buildings, but then somebody who was making his money in Lagos would put his real investment into a very nice, fancy house in one of these off the road villages.

My feeling was that they were all trying to ensure that they had a bolt hole, if they needed one. I think that is still true today -- they make their money in Lagos, but build their permanent homes in the villages. The villages are very important anyway to a Nigerian. That is where he is from and that's where his parents and grandparents are buried, that's where he wants to be buried, that's where the ancestral spirits live. That's a very significant tie, and they were putting their money in those places as well.

*Q: At the time you were on the desk, was there the concern that at one time the oil money was being squandered? I recall there were huge delays at the port. You had ships lined up bringing cement and other materials, just sitting there. Was this a problem?*

WEINLAND: Yes. The port wasn't too big and by the time I arrived out there for my two-year tour, it had even gotten more severe. There were occasions when pirates would board the ships waiting in the outer harbor or out in the bay and take over the ship. I remember one case of a Dutch ship that was taken over by pirates and the captain was radioing from his quarters and they couldn't figure out quite what to do. Somehow the situation was resolved, but it was not unlike what is going on off the coast of Somalia today.

*Q: When you got there, who was the ambassador?*

WEINLAND: It had just changed. Don Easum had just left and Steve Low was coming in. Easum may have been there for another couple of weeks after I got there. I would have arrived in late July or early August and then Low would have arrived a few weeks after that.

*Q: And the DCM?*

WEINLAND: The DCM when I first got there was Parker Wyman. He was there for a year and was replaced by Wes Kriebel. Low was there for the whole time I was there.

*Q: You were part of the political section?*

WEINLAND: Yes.

*Q: What piece of the action did you have?*

WEINLAND: The civilian government had just been elected and seated, perhaps a week before I arrived, so my beat was the legislature, and regionally, the east. Those were the two big things on my plate.

It was a very interesting time to be there because their prior civilian government had been modeled on the British system, so the seating in the parliament was two opposing benches across from each other. And there was all this sort of parliamentary procedure. But the new constitution they had written, they had done a lot of consulting with us on how this, that, and the other worked, and it was based pretty much on the American system.

They had five political parties at that time, two of which were pretty big while the other three were more regional in their support. So the legislators were just beginning to get to Lagos to take up their jobs. One of the things I had to learn, when you live in a place like Nigeria, is that nothing works: the phones don't work, the traffic and roads are a mess. Nowadays, everybody has cell phones, but in those days there were only land lines and they did not work. Usually when a political officer changes over, you leave a list of your primary contacts and so on, but of course nobody had any primary contacts with these people, by and large. I mean, people in the embassy knew some of the big muckety-mucks, but not the ordinary heads of party caucuses and other key figures. They had been given living quarters (in Nigeria whenever you work for the government, you are given housing), that were a long way out of town. So I would drive out there in an official car with a driver and bump my way through all these traffic jams and over these rutted roads and everything. Then I would just walk up and down corridors of the apartment complex -- I mean, there was no list of where any of these people lived. You would just knock on the door. "Hi, I am from the American Embassy," you know, and "who are you and do you know where I can find Mr. So and So? Mrs. So and So told me this" and blah, blah, blah. without any of the technology that I had grown up with.

It was an extraordinary introduction to how to do seat of the pants political work.

But then the legislators themselves began to get somewhat irritated by the fact that they were half an hour or more away from the legislative building. The apartments were so small they couldn't even have their wives, let alone their families plus servants, come and live with them. So they started scouting around and they found a wonderful, new apartment complex right down the road from where the embassy was on Victoria Island, the newest area of Lagos that was growing up. So they said, "Well, we'll take those." And the civil service said, "No, those were built for mid-level civil service" and the legislators said, "Well, the civil service can go find other housing but we like these. They are big enough for us and we like them and that's for us."

So they moved in there. I had formed a nice relationship with the man who was the clerk of the National Assembly, the top civil servant at the National Assembly, and among other things he gave me permission to pick up the record of the legislative debates within a day or two so I didn't have to wait for them, possibly, to be delivered in the mail. I had my own little pigeon hole over there. He also gave me a list of what apartments all these people were in. I was able more easily to go over to the apartment complex, usually in the evening, and I would go and look for the heads of committees or caucuses to get to know people.

It was really fun, because many of the legislators didn't know how it was supposed to work, and generally I did. One of the things they all wanted to do was to travel to the United States and speak to counterparts in our both state and national legislatures about how you run a committee, how a committee reports out to the full house, how the protocol works and so on. We in the political section were working very closely with the people at USIS (United States Information Service), putting together traveling groups to go to the States. I don't know how many of these trips we organized. It really was a lot of fun because you could sort of say, "Well, you're going to meet with the chairman of the agriculture committee" or something like that. The entire transition to the civilian government was taking place before our eyes.

Then there were CODELS (congressional delegations) coming in our direction from the U.S. Congress as well. So they were all very anxious to meet with them.

I really felt I probably knew better how their government should work than they did, although I never said that. I knew a few people over at the British High Commission, and one of them was talking with me one day, and he said, "Well, if this particular issue breaks this way and so on, maybe the government will fall." I said, "You don't understand. Under the American system, the government does not fall." That was news to him.

*Q: Did you find the people were coming back with pretty good ideas on how to run things? Did you see a sort of a gelling of the system?*

WEINLAND: Yes, I think so. I mean, some of them were more interested in going shopping and their perks when they were in the United States and that wasn't always successful. Like our system, the committee assignments had been made on the basis of regional and party balance and so on, so there were some duds and some really sharp, bright people.

I became a good friend of the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and also some of the other senators. Of course, I was doing the regular representation thing of dinner parties and all that too.

*Q: How did you find the dinner party work in this atmosphere?*

WEINLAND: Giving a dinner party in Nigeria is a real challenge; even Mrs. Low found it so. In my head I would make up a list of people that I thought, well, it would be interesting to bring these people together; both Americans and other diplomats and Nigerian legislators. I would send out cards and then run into them down at the legislature and say, "I hope you are going to come to dinner next Tuesday." The usual reply was, "Oh, if I can, I will, if I can. *Inshallah* (God willing)." So the day would come, and I would have no idea who was going to be at my dinner party, so I would cook, or rather the cook did. I would have planned to have 12 people, so I would cook ample food for 12 people and in one case, nobody turned up, except the couple from USIS whom I had invited. In another case, I opened the door and a guest standing there said, "This is my cousin from my village." There is somebody there I had never met before in my life, or there might even be two or three people in that category so I would quickly reset the table, put in another leaf, whatever. It's a very interesting challenge.

I was saying to somebody just the other day, I will forgive things for my Nigerian friends that I would never, ever forgive for American friends. I just learned that if I was going to get worried about stuff like that, I was not going to be very happy there.

*Q: Were there any issues, were we more interested in seeing the development of a political system than issues, would you say?*

WEINLAND: Certainly one of the things at the top of the list was to encourage and help guide the democratization of the country. Petroleum was always a huge issue in our relations. There were various American investment issues there that sometimes would heat up. There was a plan to build a big, new fertilizer plant and we wanted a piece of the action, of course. We were up against some intense French competition. I don't know if you have ever served in Africa but the French don't play very clean in Africa, so that got a little heated.

I am trying to think what other issues there were in those days. The West African countries had a regional organization that has become fairly significant, called ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). That was just beginning to get up off the ground and they were having summits and so on and so forth. In the long run we were quite interested in how that would develop. There was some effort to give some support to that.

The major international issue for the Nigerians at that time was to bring about an end to apartheid in South Africa. Our bilateral relations were always conducted within the overshadowing of that issue. The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and the appointment of Chester Crocker as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs the following year, increased the anxiety of the Nigerians over this issue, as they viewed Crocker as too sympathetic to the white South African government.

The political counselor, the DCM, or the ambassador were the ones who would go over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on U.N. issues and other multilateral or bilateral issues on which we were interested in getting Nigerian support. I concentrated mostly on reporting on Nigerian domestic developments.

South Africa was, as I have said, a huge issue.

*Q: How was that playing in Nigeria? South Africa is pretty far away from there.*

WEINLAND: Oh, it was very important to them, very important. They, of course, were pushing very strongly for economic boycott and during the time I was in Nigeria, the U.S. position opposed economic sanctions. The Nigerians were upset with the U.S. not being stronger against the apartheid regime. It was a very large issue in all of our conversations that involved international kinds of issues.

Interestingly, we had a good head of the FAS (Foreign Agriculture Service) office in Lagos. One day I was down at the legislature. Whenever I was at the legislature, I was not only getting all the information about party relationships and bills in process and so on, but I was also receiving constant personal requests such as visas for relatives, information about political processes in the

U.S. and so on. One day a senator approached me and said, "I am starting a chicken business and I need to get feed grain" and I said, "Oh, well, I'll put you in touch with the foreign agriculture attaché," so I went back to the embassy and said, "This important senator from the north wants to start a chicken business and he wants to talk to you about importing grain." So I think they had a meeting.

A few weeks later I ran into the senator, and I said, "How did your conversations with the attaché go?" and "Were you able to find a source of corn in the States?" He said, "Oh, I found it much cheaper in Mozambique." So I went back to the agriculture attaché and said, "It seems the senator is going to import his corn from Mozambique" and he said, "Ha, ha, ha. That's South African corn. Mozambicans don't grow any corn for export."

So the next time I saw the senator, I said, "I understand this corn you are importing comes from South Africa." "Oh, yeah," a mere technicality.

*Q: Were you keeping an eye on the Nigerian military?*

WEINLAND: Oh, yes. We had a big defense attaché office there. I mean, I am just trying to think if I knew anybody very important in the military. The military, the previous military government had all pretty much retired from the military so they were all going into business and using the millions they had salted away to establish themselves as big men around town. I think there was always the worry that there would be a military coup but I don't think it was so much the political section, *per se*, that was tasked with keeping an eye on that.

*Q: What about the element within the legislature, the political process of corruption? How, were you reporting on this or seeing this?*

WEINLAND: Oh, yes, we saw it. It's always hard to know how to handle that when it's pervasive but not, I would judge at that point, seriously getting in the way of general democratic processes as I think it did later. There was a huge amount of wasteful spending. The legislators were all concerned about their perks, a stipend for this and a stipend for that, and travel -- they all wanted to travel all the time. There were people in the legislature who had come in from business. The president of the Senate was Joe Wayas. He came from the eastern part of the country and had his fingers in every pie. He was something of a lightweight, except for the fact that he had this position, due entirely to the geographical and political party distribution of legislative titles, but he was entirely concerned with securing his future.

Then there was another man I saw fairly frequently who came from one of the middle belt states Kwara. He was a doctor by training, but had been in a lot of business. I think he was very much involved in the effort to put telephones throughout the country, one of the many efforts to establish a functioning telephone system in Nigeria, and I think he was getting some rake-off from that. So yes, a lot of them were doing business on the side. I don't think there was any serious ethics legislation such as we keep attempting to put in place in our country but they managed. I think that we were aware of it but I don't think we felt it was an impediment to the interests that we were pursuing.



*Q: How pervasive was the tribal set up within the country?*

WEINLAND: That's always a difficult question to answer. For some people it is the factor that explains everything, but I have never believed this. I think also people from the outside who don't know a great deal about Nigeria don't always understand that, although there are three large tribes, Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa, that there are many, many smaller ones, still with millions of members.

I can remember sitting at a dinner once next to a gentleman and he was speaking with someone across the table. They were dressed as northerners so I assumed they were speaking Hausa. I said to him something like, "Well, maybe one day I will learn Hausa and be able to speak Hausa with you." He said, "We are not speaking Hausa, we're speaking Kanuri." You make these generalizations but just because someone is from the east doesn't mean he is Ibo, he could be Ijaw or he could be Ibibio. He could be a number of things.

There was a certain tribal chauvinism. One of the things that happened at the time of the transition to the civilian government, prior to the elections, the military government had decided they would break up the four regions of the country and create I think 19 or 21 states. This would then allow some of the smaller but still fairly large tribal groups to have "their own state."

What I observed as an outsider was there is no end to that. I have seen this also in Czechoslovakia. There is no end to it because you take the eastern region and you split off two Ibo dominated states and the Rivers State, which was dominated by Ijaw and the Cross River State which is dominated by Efik and so on. But then you still have smaller minorities in those states that feel that they are being gyped out of all the development money. It became very important during the time I was in Nigeria, because all these new states had been created, and they needed state assemblies, therefore state assembly buildings. They needed a governor's mansion, they needed a university, they needed all this infrastructure that they felt every state should have equally with every other state. So you take a state like Oyo where Ibadan is located and they already had Ibadan and they already had the university there, they already had the old regional assembly building, and all the existing infrastructure.

In the new states there were contracts up the kazoo to come in and build these things; the cement importing, the rebar, and everybody had his fingers in those pies. I mean even if he was in the national legislature, he was concerned about what was going on in his home state and was very concerned to know what construction company was importing what cement so that he could get a piece of that action.

The tribal thing was important in the sense that "we need our own," not just because we are being trod upon by the other guy, but because also if we get our own state -- and they continued to sub-divide them -- if we get our own state, we will then have our own little piece of the oil money. All the money was coming from the distribution of the petroleum proceeds. So our way to get our hands on that petroleum money is to create our own state and then have to construct the infrastructure that went with it.

I would say to friends, "This is a very expensive process and it is wasteful" and they'd say, "Oh,

you just don't understand. We need to have this. You have 50 states." I said, "Yes, but we got those by taking over everybody else's land, not by subdividing what we already had."

*Q: Was there a feeling at that time that the oil money was getting distributed fairly well?*

WEINLAND: I don't know how to answer that question. A huge amount of it, from the point of view of an American observing it, was going for very wasteful projects that were never going to go anywhere. There continues to this day to be argument about the distribution of the oil money. I don't know that any group or business was ever totally satisfied with the way it was being distributed and what formulae there were. There is a federal body tasked with working out the distribution formula, which changes every time new states are created, but there is always controversy about the formulae it comes up with.

The effort to diversify and create other sources of income from industries around the country was a very halting and slow process.

*Q: From our perspective, how did we view Soviet influence in the area?*

WEINLAND: We were worried about it. There was one huge project that the Soviets were financing, a steel complex in a town called Ajaokuta, and there were a lot of Soviets brought in to work on it. The Soviets were putting money into it but they were also using Nigerian money. It had been supposedly a big gift from the Soviet Union, but you have to build roads to the place and other infrastructure, and the project was never completed. It just went on and on and on. But it gave the Soviets a reason to be there and every time you would say, "Well, the U.S. is doing X and Y for you" but "The Soviets are building us this steel plant and we have to have a steel plant". It was always something we kind of kept an eye on.

*Q: Were the French of influence?*

WEINLAND: Not as much as they are in Francophone Africa, by any means, but they wanted an in. Of course, the British were the colonial power, so they sort of assumed that they had some rights to be there.

*Q: You were doing this until '79?*

WEINLAND: No, I arrived in '79 so I left in '81, halfway through the first term of the civilian government.

*Q: When you left did you feel it was taking hold?*

WEINLAND: I did, rather foolishly, but I did. I left behind some good friends that I thought were going to help build the country. However, as the next presidential election approached, scheduled for 1983, there began to be conflict between the Hausa and Yoruba members of the governing party over who the nominee would be, and shortly after the election, the military stepped in and took over.

**PARKER W. BORG**  
**Country Director, West African Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1979-1981)**

*Ambassador Borg was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Cornell University. In 1965, after a tour with the Peace Corps in the Philippines, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his career he served in Vietnam and Zaire, and in the State Department in senior positions concerning Vietnam, West Africa and Counter Terrorism. He served as US Ambassador to Mali (1981-1984) and to Iceland from 1993 to 1996. Ambassador Borg was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

*Q: Today is the 23rd of September 2002. Parker, in 1979 you were going to take a trip, and I understand we're going to get some notes from that trip.*

BORG: I traveled from mid-May until almost the middle part of July spending a couple of days in each one of the countries in west Africa.

*Q: How many were there?*

BORG: There were 18 in the office at the time. I had no experience in any of these countries and knew little about any of them, and so while I traveled I took incredibly detailed notes of what was happening politically and economically in each one of the countries and what the state of our American presence was, what were the problems that we faced and the problems that the country faced. The purpose of the notes was so that I was going to be able to distinguish one of these countries from the next once I got back to Washington and began working on the different problems.

*Q: You are going then to type these up and these will be inserted into our narrative. When you came back from there, overall how did you see the growing trouble spots, what the US interests were, and how were things going?*

BORG: I came back with the knowledge of how different each one of these countries was from its neighbor despite the fact that they had overlapping ethnic groups and sometimes similar colonial experiences, that in the 15 to 20 years of independence they had each evolved in a different way, and what was happening in the different countries politically was a changing of the guard. The old revolutionaries who had made the fight for independence were moving on. The population was more willing to express themselves in a way that they hadn't been in the past. There were a growing number of riots and protests over food prices and other things that had not occurred to the same extent in the past. Economically Nigeria with its oil had lots of money. It was apparent that those countries which had inherited a lot of resources from the colonial period had for the most part squandered them, and those countries that had no resources

and had to get by with what they had were doing much better economically. It was the time of the Sahelian drought, and one of the prime interests of the United States was providing food into the drought-stricken regions of the countries of West Africa at the time. I was overwhelmed on the assistance front by two things: first, how little we had to show for the number of years we had been providing aid into these countries, how much it had sort of gone for studies that paid Americans to look at things and had never been translated to concrete projects. I made a point in each one of the countries as I visited of asking the AID mission director to assume that I was a Congressman that was visiting and to tell me what were the projects that had been completed in each country so that I could go back to Washington and defend the AID program, and I was stunned at how few projects there were on the ground. We had spent millions of dollars and there was almost nothing to show for it. We were in the era when we were no longer looking at infrastructure projects but were looking at basic human needs, and this often translated into things that we didn't really know what to do with and money going for helping people do things better, but after the project ended there was little you could see as a result. The second thing that I noticed was that, since the collapse of Vietnam seemed to coincide with the emergence of our interest in Africa, a lot of the AID people whom I had known in Vietnam had suddenly surfaced and were now doing Sahelian drought, and many of these people shouldn't have stayed on as long as they had in Vietnam, had become quite irrelevant to what was happening there, and now they were the ones that were in charge of a lot of the drought work in Africa.

*Q: As you look at it at this time, was there something endemic to our AID system that meant that we ended up with an awful lot of subsidies of American graduate students doing surveys and all?*

BORG: Absolutely. The problems of American assistance were, I would argue, almost exclusively American problems. That is to say that Washington would establish priorities and these priorities would change from one administration to the next. The priorities would be sent out to the mission. The missions were supposed to act as independently as possible from the embassies, because the AID missions were doing what was good for the country and were not involved in the politics, were not trying to do things to support our political mission. So the AID mission director would have his priorities, and he would then begin the study process of what are the appropriate projects to build given these priorities. The studies would go to American companies and universities. They would spend a couple of years designing an appropriate project, which would then go through the approval process, and by the time they were ready to start launching the projects, there would be a change of administration, a change in the AID mission director, a change in somebody's internal priority, and the things that we had been working for the first couple of years would no longer be the priority, and rather than continue and implement things that were not in vogue, we would switch to new projects. So we were in kind of continuously revolving door where the projects were coming in and they were being tossed out before any of them were implemented.

*Q: Talking to the AID directors on this mission that you did, did they seem to understand the process? Were they frustrated and trying to do something about it?*

BORG: Some of them were very able and very dedicated, and they were concerned with making their mark while they were there, of establishing whatever it was that they felt could be achieved in the time frame that they were going to be there. The problem was that five years was a very

long time for an AID mission director to be in place and they wanted the projects to be the ones that they had something to do with starting it, so the focus was on their projects and not the last mission director's projects. So even though it may have survived the political process, it no longer had the emphasis because they want the stars, they want the priorities.

*Q: Did you find that AID on the American side was overstaffed? One of the things that bothers me is we say we've given so many million dollars to such and such a country but when you add it up a very significant portion of that is paid to American salaries and American housing and...*

BORG: There's no question that that is a serious part of the problem. I remember, when I first worked with AID people in other countries, the AID officers were actually involved in projects and were doing things on the ground in the field. By the time I got into West Africa, the AID project officers were all contracting specialists who were supposed to be experts in agriculture or community development or health or whatever it was, but they had another tier of project managers who were contract people. If there was a program of \$20,000,000 in a country, there could be an AID mission of 10 or 15 people and contractors almost equal in that number whose salaries and maintenance costs took up a very heavy portion of the assistance program. I believe members of the AID senior staff even argued with Congress at times that, "You may think that assistance goes to foreign countries, but let us show you how much of it comes back to support American institutions," and this was a selling point that kept our assistance programs alive.

*Q: Did you see any areas on the political side where, one, we had real interest and, two, that there were problems?*

BORG: At the time I was working in Africa, we had real interests in only one country, and that was Nigeria because of the oil that Nigeria produced and the amount of Nigerian oil that we imported. We had a very difficult trade balance relationship with Nigeria, and one of our priorities was to try and correct that balance so that we were able to sell more things to Nigeria, but they really weren't much of a market. Nigeria at that time was in the process of making a transition from a military government to a civilian government, and so we were watching that very closely. This was one of many periods in Nigerian history when they were moving between civilians and the military, and a lot of the players would keep popping up over and over again. In other places our interests were secondary. Some were more important than others. In Niger for its uranium, we were concerned about where that uranium might be going and would there be adequate controls for it. We were concerned about what the Libyans might be doing throughout the region in fomenting Islamic fundamentalism or the green-book approach to revolution. We had a special relationship with Liberia which had gone back many years. We were concerned about the Russians and the growing Russian interest in that part of Africa and how that might play into our own interests. But, no, we did not have great interests. There were, however, continuous rumblings in each one of these countries of a desire on the part of the local population for a change in government. There was a civil war or a coup going on in at least two countries almost continuously the whole time that I was working these issues, and we were constantly sort of putting out fires and trying to think of what do we do to keep this one under control. One could start in the west with Chad. There was a civil war that had been going on in Chad that began in about March of 1979. In Ghana the military had moved against the civilian government and executed the chief of state in '79. In Liberia Sammy Doe and his group came

into power and overthrew the...

*Q: Was that while you were on...?*

BORG: This was on our watch in 1980, I believe. There had been a change in governments in Upper Volta. There was a war going on in the western Sahara where the Moroccans had claimed this piece of land that had previously been Spanish territory, and the western Sahara was part of our domain although Morocco was not, so we were responsible for following the war in western Sahara but it wasn't primary. Morocco was not one of our countries. So there was always something going on somewhere.

*Q: Before we move to some of the individual places, was West Africa on the greater African scheme of things within the Bureau? Did you have the feeling that your people were rambunctious and all that, that "You're in charge and you take care of them," and there wasn't much that got kicked up?*

BORG: Within the bureaucracy in AF at the time, Dick Moose was the Assistant Secretary and his focus was almost exclusively on what was going on in southern Africa and trying to bring about a change to a nonwhite-dominated government in Rhodesia. The second interest for the front office was probably what was happening in the Horn of Africa. After Sammy Doe took over in Liberia, there was more interest in our region. Otherwise, the only real interest was what was happening in Nigeria. The Deputy Assistant Secretary with whom I worked most closely was Bill Harrop. He was always very helpful, but he had other things that he was working on most of the time, and so we were pretty much left to our own devices in the west African region.

*Q: First, let's do this Polisario problem. I almost have the feeling that here we had American ambassadors who tended to become almost clients of King Hassan in Morocco and took a very pro-Moroccan point of view. Here you are dealing with it sort of from the other side. Did you find yourself, to use a diplomatic term, in a pissing contest with the people dealing with Moroccan interests in the State Department?*

BORG: Morocco is not the only case of a country where our ambassadors take very strong protective measure on behalf of the nation. Saudi Arabia comes to mind as another good example of a country like that. India and Pakistan are also places where our ambassadors often take the local side in a conflict. Morocco was special in that we have gone out of our way to see that we only have political appointees there and people who are going to recognize the importance of getting along with the royal family so that the ambassador takes usually a very strong position in favor of what the Moroccans would prefer. This is translated into what the Middle Eastern Bureau often pushes as the policy. We were somewhat in the middle, not completely, but the conflict is usually looked at as a completely Algerian-Moroccan conflict, but there was an overlapping conflict with Mauritania. The Mauritaniens were initially sympathetic to the Moroccans, and the rulers who ran Mauritania looked upon themselves as part of the greater world of Morocco. There were some incidents that occurred that changed their perspective to make them a little more wary of Moroccan interests. But it was more a question of was Mauritania going to survive or was Mauritania likely to collapse also because of what was going on in the western Sahara. I was in continuous disputes with Carleton Coon, who was the country

director for northwest Africa. We had endless arguments about this issue. If I remember correctly, our office was first sympathetic to the Moroccans and then we were much less sympathetic towards what the Moroccans were doing. But when the Reagan Administration came in, we were told to switch back and be sympathetic to Morocco, that we were not paying any attention to the Algerian point of view. There were lots of arguments and I can't remember what they were all about.

*Q: Let's go to Liberia. How did this thing burst upon you? Was this sort of something that had been looming?*

BORG: Liberia and Sierra Leone had a history that was different from the other countries in Africa. Both of these nations had been settled not by foreign colonialists but by freed slaves who had come back from the United States in the case of Liberia and some of the English colonies in the Caribbean in the case of Sierra Leone, and these people established governments in these respective little pieces of geography where the freed slaves were the masters and the native populations were clearly second-class citizens. So you had a similar colonial situation in each one of these countries that existed in other places in Africa except that the elites were black and not white. Sierra Leone has erupted on the scene in more recent years, but the Liberian problems began in 1979/1980. President Tolbert, who was the last president in the line of what were called the America-Liberians, came to the United States, met with Jimmy Carter, talked about assistance programs and so forth, and things seemed to be moving as well as they might be expected to in this country where there was a great divergence between the elite who ran the country and the people out in the villages. We had offered military assistance training among other things and we trained various units in how to work together more effectively in close combat, and one of these groups decided that they didn't like the government and so they used the military training which we had provided to overthrow the Tolbert government. They took all of the cabinet ministers that they could round up. I think they issued a call for people to turn themselves in, and eventually after much anguish various ones did. The one who is best known, about whom more history has been recorded, is Cecil Bennett, the foreign minister, a very elegant, decent man. I think he spent some time at the ambassador's residence anguishing over what he might do before he turned himself in. He turned himself in, and the Liberians decided that the only reasonable way to bring this thing to an end was to kill everybody, and so they brought them down to a beach, tied them to a post, invited Life magazine to take pictures, and killed them all on the beach outside of Monrovia. We then had to deal with a group of the platoon level at the beginning, maybe 15 or so illiterate soldiers, who were suddenly in charge of this country where the United States had no critical interest but we did have important interests. There was the VOA (Voice of America) relay station for Africa located there. The Coast Guard maintained a LORAN (Long Range Navigation) facility for navigational purposes there. We had an agreement with the Liberian government that, if we ever needed to use the airport in Monrovia for military purposes, it was always available to us. There were all of these things that suddenly made us pay attention to Liberia in a way that we hadn't in the past. It was interesting to reflect on our relationship with Liberia in that most Americans don't really think at all about Liberia - it's just another country in Africa - but the Liberians look to the United States as their mother country in the sense that the Senegalese or the Ivorians might look to France, and many, many Liberians had family in the United States, many had dual residency in the United States, dual citizenship, and could not understand why the United States didn't pay more attention to

Liberia and its problems. I remember one conversation with a young man, an official but I can't remember in what capacity, when he said, "Look at Abidjan, look at Senegal, look at Dakar. Look what the French have created in these places, and look at Monrovia. Monrovia's a dump, and it's your fault. Why haven't you built the buildings to make Monrovia a nice place like the French have done in Dakar and Abidjan," to which I responded, "You've been an independent country now for over 100 years. You've got to take responsibility for your own destiny. The fact that you don't have nice buildings in Monrovia is a reflection on the state of your management of the economy and the fact that you've never made foreign companies feel particularly welcome to come there and to invest. You don't have any indigenous reasons. There's nothing going on for the place." Anyway, they lined everybody up and they shot them on the beach, and we then had to try and put together a package of assistance which was going to help these relatively illiterate people to come to grips with the fact that they were now in charge of the country. Our desired strategy was to try to convince the leaders of this group...

*Q: At this point it wasn't clear who was leading?*

BORG: Yes, there was one person by the name of Sammy Doe who was the clear leader, and there were two or three others who were more prominent. Our interest was to try and convince him that he could be the great savior, the great hero, of Liberia, having thrown out the colonialists and established a new sort of government. What he needed to do was to set up institutions for democracy, for a fairer government, a government that provided for the people in the rural areas, and that they had to overlook and forget about retribution for the past but to focus on the future. That did not work at all. They were not in a position to think about these things. These were our sorts of thoughts. Their interests were in trying to preserve their own power to the extent that they could. There were internal squabbles among the sergeants that erupted, and they eliminated each other one by one so that pretty soon it was down to only a few, and then there were some outsiders who came in and pushed them out. We told Sammy Doe that he had to recognize that, since he had thrown people out through a coup, he was likely to be thrown out by a similar coup unless he could make himself the hero of the country. In the end result, our policy was much more providing dribs and dabs of assistance to sort of buy them off and keep them friendly.

*Q: Did we send out a mission there or anything like that?*

BORG: Dick Moose had several interesting sessions. We brought the Liberian leadership back here to the United States, and we had meetings with them and sent them over to the Pentagon. It was quite a scene, these people who were barely literate trying to discuss things in this country. We were trying to impress them with our interest and the importance of trying to work out a settlement to these problems. Dick Moose became involved. He met with the generals, the leaders, on several occasions. I remember we found a Peace Corps volunteer that had worked in the same village where Sammy Doe came from, and we organized a meeting one evening where Dick Moose could sit with this guy and learn about the people in the villages of Liberia, where were they coming from, what were some of the myths of their village, so that we could try to reason with these people in a way that we had not succeeded in doing in the past. Dick was very intrigued with this. He liked this sort of activity. He did go out and talk with Sammy Doe using the analogies about "You've got a hole in the pocket and that's where the money goes" and some



other humorous stories like this, but it was all to little effect.

*Q: Were we concerned about getting our people out? We must have had quite a few people there, didn't we?*

BORG: We had quite a few people. The threat at this time was not to the Americans as much as it was to the Americo-Liberians. There was fighting up in some of the rural areas where people were in danger, but we continued to maintain our various facilities for the most part despite the problems.

*Q: Did we have any special program to help the Americo-Liberians get out, visas, refugee-type things?*

BORG: We had very little, but we didn't need very much because most of them seemed to travel quite easily back and forth to the United States. We met on more than one occasion with Americo communities. I think there was a heavy group of them in New Jersey. Those that could, fled; those that couldn't, didn't have the ties with the United States, generally weren't so prominent that they were threatened. But there was a big exodus, as there are in many countries when such things occur.

*Q: What about up in Chad? While you were there, were the Libyans messing around?*

BORG: No, when I was there, the Libyans were in the background, but a civil war had broken out in Chad early in 1979. The original problem had been between the southern Christian animus factions and the northern Arab Muslim groups. There's a dividing line across the Sahel between the Arab Muslim in the north and the Christian Black in the south, most pronounced in Mauritania and Chad, but it goes down into Nigeria and hits the Ivory Coast. In '79 the Christians had withdrawn from N'Djamena and pulled down to the southern part of the country, which left two, then three, then more factions in control of N'Djamena. There was a continuous series of struggles between the different leaders, the different groups, some having more Libyan influence than others. In fact, when I made my trip there in June, I arrived right in the middle of the fighting and there was a battle that took place each night that I was there, in which the different factions were trying to eliminate each other, but they were all Muslim factions at this time. They had pretty much destroyed the city of N'Djamena. There were two main players, a man by the name of Goukouni, who was considered closer to the Libyans, and a man by the name of Habré, who was closer to the French, among the Muslim factions. They took turns being in the preeminent position. We watched the situation and tried to keep track of who was doing what, but we had no interests in Chad which would warrant the introduction of any resources at this time.

*Q: Did the French have the equivalent of what we had in Paris? We had an African watcher in Paris, I think. Did the French have an African watcher in Washington? Did you have any contact with French embassy officials?*

BORG: I'm sure I did, but they didn't maintain the same level of portfolio or interest as we did at the embassies in Paris and London. What was more significant was that the French had an office

in Paris, which was not part of the Foreign Ministry, which was closer to the President's office, and there was a figure, often a dark figure, who went around solving problems, organizing French interventions in the former Francophone Africa. Again, it was fascinating to see the different roles that the French and the English had taken in their former colonies in the post-independence period. The English felt they had left their British values and just wiped their hands and walked away, and the French seemed far more intent on maintaining a cultural presence, a linguistic presence and, in those cases where they could, an economic presence. So the French remain very strong in a place like the Ivory Coast or Senegal, which had moderate governments that were prepared to work with the French, but even in a place like Chad the French felt that they had a responsibility.

*Q: While you were there, did we have any feeling the French had gone too far or should go farther or do anything, or were we just carrying a watching brief?*

BORG: I don't think we had a clear vision of that. We on occasions worked with the French; on occasions we didn't work with the French. The French showed great interest in Nigeria because of its oil and they looked to be expanding their interests in Nigeria, but for most of the Francophone countries we didn't particularly have any great interest and so we were not too upset that the French did maintain economic interests and provide stability in these countries. Also, anyplace where the French were located, life was generally much easier for the people in our embassies than it was in places where the French had not been present, because there was a tradition of bakeries and imported wines and things that were generally available, and the French subsidized the economies in these places, as contrasted with the places where the English had been where, once the English were gone, the markets subsisted on local produce.

*Q: You were there during the Carter period. Obviously one of the hallmarks of the Carter Administration was human rights. Did you have any problems?*

BORG: Well, there were many hallmarks of the Carter Administration: I think human rights and representative government on the political side, and on the economic side basic human needs and trying to promote development from the bottom up. On the human rights front, there were no pronounced problems like ones found in Iran or other places where there were large numbers of dissidents that were held in prison and their rights were being deprived, so human rights was not the issue in West Africa that it might have been in other states. There were no strong police states at that time that were repressing their populations. There were police states, but some of them were more benevolent, some of them were struggling, but none of them had been sort of established themselves.

*Q: I don't know if he'd passed from the scene by this time, but in Senegal, Guinea or one of the places along the western, Francophone, there was one quite brutal, well known father-of-his-country figure.*

BORG: Sekou Toure?

*Q: Sekou Toure.*

BORG: In Guinea, yes, he was still on the scene, but he had mellowed. Sekou Toure was the first of the Francophones to throw out the French. They became independent in 1957, and the rest of the countries didn't become independent until 1960, I believe. The French had responded to Sekou Toure's declaration of independence by ripping out the phone jacks and pulling out the lights and making sure that nothing worked. Sekou Toure responded by pursuing a radical socialist approach, but by 1979 this had mellowed and they were beginning to invite back French businessmen, they were trying to build up Conakry and make it into a decent city again. This was not the Sekou Toure of the past. There probably still were some people in prison, but this was not the evil person...

*Q: You weren't having to fight Patt Derian in the Human Rights Bureau?*

BORG: No, she had many more significant human rights issues to deal with in other places.

*Q: Then let's turn to Nigeria.*

BORG: Let me go on with the point, human rights. On the assistance side we had to look at basic human needs, and I felt that we poured more money down rat holes in which we were trying to improve health care or education. It wasn't just that we were pouring money down the rat holes; it's that there were so many basic human needs that we were trying to help all at the same time that we spread our money very, very thinly and did almost nothing that made a difference in any of these countries. There were too many different programs, too diverse, and the whole idea that countries were suddenly going to become prosperous because maybe we could change life in a couple villages just didn't work. A third point: Jimmy Carter was known to have tremendous sympathy for Africa.

Andrew Young was making all sorts of headway with Africans at the United Nations, but we found that the Carter White House was very, very difficult to deal with when it came to receiving African visitors. The problems seemed not to be with Carter himself but with the people who surrounded him. Jimmy Carter, being an engineer by training, had an intense interest in the details of everything that was going on, and so anytime he became involved in an issue he became very intensely involved and needed to know an awful lot about what was happening. As a result, his staff, to preserve his time, discouraged him from becoming involved in issues that were not of great importance. I remember particularly two meetings at the White House while I was the country director: one, when the president of Sierra Leone came to the United States and, two, when President Tolbert came. Tolbert may have been the first one. We sent over the briefing books, and I remember seeing President Carter sitting over in a corner outside pouring over the briefing book just before the meeting began, and I was thinking, you know, the President really doesn't have to master the details of these things. All these people want is just a picture taken with the President. But there he was, and he was able to discuss the issues, whatever they might have been, in a very intelligent, concerned, forthright manner. When it came to, I think, Siaka Stevens, the person running Sierra Leone at the time, the White House said no, that the President couldn't see him. Our argument for why the President should see him was that Siaka Stevens was the current head of the Organization of African States and that, since the organization had been founded, every single head of the organization, when they came to the United States, had had a courtesy call with the President and that this would be considered a

slight. We were working through Dick Moose and the Bureau, but we just could not get Siaka Stevens an appointment. We had to do something, so we called Jackie Kennedy Onassis' boyfriend in New York, Templeton.

*Q: He was in diamonds.*

BORG: He was in diamonds and Sierra Leone had diamonds, and so we explained to Templeton's office that we were having problems with the White House, that they knew, of course, that Siaka Stevens was coming and he was expecting to see the President, and we needed some help at getting an appointment. 24 hours later the appointment was on.

*Q: That's high diplomacy, to go after the former President's wife's boyfriend.*

BORG: It wasn't that; it was the diamond connection. Now, by contrast, I worked these issues for several months when Ronald Reagan was President, and Ronald Reagan never showed the slightest interest in this part of the world, but, boy, when these people came to town, he saw every one of them, he was charming, he'd talk about old movies when they were delighted. It was really interesting to see from our perspective that here is a President that really cares about Africa but doesn't have the time to ever talk to anybody as contrasted with an administration that supposedly has other issues but the President recognizes the importance of his ceremonial role and performs it well.

*Q: With Nigeria, because this was the one place you say that had... What was the situation in Nigeria when you arrived? What were we doing?*

BORG: Nigeria was at that point one of the largest oil producers in the world, where the United States purchased a large amount of oil. Nigeria had been a military government for a number of years and was making a transition to being a civilian government, and elections were on the horizon. Various political parties were competing with each other as to which party was going to control the country. The politics in Nigeria repeats itself over and over again. You've got the Yoruba people living around Lagos with their candidate, and you've got a couple of candidates from the north, from the Muslim north...

*Q: Hausa.*

BORG: ...the Hausa commune area, and then there's usually a candidate from the Ebo tribe. So there are usually three or four major groups, but the Christian groups don't cooperate with each other and the Muslim groups don't necessarily cooperate with each other, but the Muslims seem to feel that they have to have the presidency, so if they're not running things, things become unstable. So we were in the process of watching the electoral process, trying to work with the government. I think Steve Lowe was our ambassador. Have you talked with him?

*Q: Yes.*

BORG: We had a bilateral commission with the Nigerians which met periodically and tried to sort out problems and find projects that we could work on together. Lagos was certainly one of

the most awful cities that I ever visited. The embassy usually had terrible morale problems because there was nothing to do in the country other than go to work. The Nigerians were very, very difficult people at that time.

*Q: Speaking of which, did you get at all involved in the personnel process of getting people, staffing your embassies?*

BORG: The first priority for staffing was taking care of the people at the embassies, but we did what we could to try and figure out which embassies were going to be short on specific kinds of people. It was very, very difficult at this time to find people who wanted to go and work in West Africa. The places weren't particularly pleasant. Those people who liked working in Africa usually didn't want to work their entire careers going from one difficult place to another. There were some very able, dedicated people, but there was trouble finding good people. In a way, we could be more successful with a more senior officer than someone who was younger in this position.

*Q: Did you get involved in the process of getting people who had a couple of lousy posts in Africa up into Europe or someplace?*

BORG: Not as much as we could have, partly because people didn't bring to our attention the fact that they were unhappy in working in Africa and wanted to go somewhere else. People on the desks were not the ones that they wanted to talk to. They would go and talk with their friends that were working in Europe. Whether we could have made a difference or not, I don't know, but I don't recall anybody ever bringing to my attention that "Look, so-and-so has been here for a long time and deserves to go somewhere else." I worked on this issue more in Personnel than I did in Africa.

**THEODORE A. BOYD**  
**Branch Public Officer, USIS**  
**Kano (1979-1981)**

*Theodore A. Boyd was born on October 9, 1941 in Terre Haute, Indiana. He served in the U.S. Army from 1959 to 1964. Throughout his career he has held positions in countries including the Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Iran, Nigeria, Ecuador, Togo, and Cameroon. Mr. Boyd was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on November 29, 2005.*

BOYD: We are talking about '79. In '79 we came back here. I went to the Office of African Affairs in USIA for a while until I got an assignment as Branch Public Affairs Officer in Kano, Nigeria, which was then the country's second largest city. I was the director of the American Cultural Center and the official American presence in northern Nigeria.

*Q: I was going to say Kano sort of sits up there in Muslim country. It is quite different from...*

BOYD: This was during the period when they were trying for an executive president and a representative government with a unicameral legislature.

*Q: How long were you in Kano?*

BOYD: Two years, '79-'81.

*Q: Two years. What was living like there?*

BOYD: Living was pretty good and since I was the official American presence I was recruited for the Rotary Club. We did have a major dust up there with Muslim fundamentalists killing a lot of people. The consulate was in Kaduna, which was about a couple hours drive away. I did lots of reporting during that period but we didn't have any communication there so I had to type up my stuff and put it in a pouch and the newspaper delivery truck would take it to Kaduna and deliver it to the Consulate General.'

*Q: What was sort of the political situation there in the area?*

BOYD: In and around Kano there were several political parties. The leader of the dominant party in northern Nigeria was Aminu Kano and he was not of the same party as the President Shehu Shagari. This was again all the old politicians who had been around since independence and they were still vying for the presidency. There was a lot of political infighting, everybody trying to get their piece of the pie. But they were still trying for a democracy because they had just come off of several coups. They were between coups at the time.

*Q: Was there a feeling, I mean you were some distance away from the oil producing fields but was the feeling up in your area that the people in the capital were sort of stealing the oil wells and all that?*

BOYD: No that would have been the people in the east, in Biafra, where the oil fields were. The people in the north didn't have that feeling because the northerners were the ones who were ripping off the southerners. The three major groups were: the Ibo's, Hausa and the Yoruba. So the Hausa's and the Ibo's were the ones who were at odds and the Yoruba's were standing back watching. That's an over simplification but not that much of an over simplification.

*Q: You were up in Hausa country?*

BOYD: Yes.

*Q: What sort of work were you doing?*

BOYD: Again pushing information, doing English teaching, programs, providing guidance for those who wanted to study in the U.S., coordinating with Fulbright professors. Mostly educational and cultural exchange work, with a little bit of information thrown in — providing articles and features from the Wireless File that I was talking about before to locally published newspapers and magazines.

*Q: Were you running across in that area or was that located some place else? The Nigerians in the United States are renowned for their scams of...*

BOYD: There were not that many scams being run in Nigeria then, but they were well on the way to retiring the title of "Most Corrupt Nation."

*Q: During this time what were...you were up in...*

BOYD: In Kano. At that time the Naira (Nigerian currency) was quite strong because of petrol dollars. As a matter of fact it took more than two dollars to equal one Naira.

*Q: Did you run across the growing influence of fundamentalism of Mullahs?*

BOYD: Yes that is what I was referring to previously when I mentioned that thousands of people were killed. It was estimated that then thousand were killed during the religious rioting before the Muslim cleric who was responsible for the uproar was killed by security forces.

*Q: When I think of Kano and seen pictures and all I think of these mission tribal chiefs in very colorful costumes...*

BOYD: The Emirs. Yes, they had ceremonies and exhibitions of horsemanship. all that.

*Q: Did you get invited?*

BOYD: Yes, we got invited since I was the official U.S. diplomatic presence. When U.S. dignitaries came through, they usually put on quite a show. Ambassador Andrew Young visited northern Nigeria when he was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Vice President Walter Mondale made a one-day stop in Kano in the summer of 1980.

*Q: How did that visit work out?*

BOYD: They fixed up the local market a little bit because the visit took place during the rainy season and the market was a virtual mud pit. They fixed it up so the visitors could shop and get artifacts. It was also during Ramadan and the U.S. party wanted to have lunch with the Kano state governor and other high-level officials. The problem with that was that nearly all the people they wanted to meet were Muslim. They were fasting during the day and didn't eat lunch.

*Q: Yeah.*

BOYD: So that was a bad, bad move but this was Vice President Mondale and a large delegation from the Black National Caucus. It was all part of a unity type thing, I guess, because Nigeria was at that point trying for democracy but Nigeria also has some very good crude oil of its own. So it was a combination thing.

*Q: What was the embassy asking of you?*

BOYD: Very little. I was virtually on my own. I had to go to Lagos for \quarterly branch PAO conferences. There were branch posts in Kaduna, Kano, and Ibadan, and the Country Post in Lagos. So we would come down for meetings to discuss what USIS programming we were going to do.

*Q: Did events in Tehran, the seizing of our embassy and all that long hostage business, was there much interest in that, where you were?*

BOYD: Not really, no, not much interest. We were interested; we being my wife and I because we were in Tehran and there but for our evacuation from post, it could have been me. Other than that, no. Nigeria had other concerns at the time. If there was any comment at all, it was along the lines of “It sure was a shame what’s happening over there. How about what’s going on here?”

*Q: Were you concerned being in a fundamentalist Islamic area that you might...?*

BOYD: No it was fundamentalist but ecumenical. Now that sounds contradictory, but Muslims and Christians frequented the Kano Club. There wasn’t an emphasis on religion, as far as I could tell. The Muslims we associated with were more secular than fundamentalist.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the Nigerian educational system as it was up in your area?*

BOYD: Yeah because we had two universities in the area.

*Q: I’ve talked to people who have been there on a Fulbright at different times not necessarily there more than the others but they said that one of the problems was the universities had been neglected, I mean this may be a different period when the students were out on strike period?*

BOYD: That’s correct. When the students were upset because they weren’t getting their stipends they went on strike. The school system wasn’t all that; it probably still isn’t. That’s why you have more people coming to study in the U.S. During that time the Iranians comprised the largest foreign student population in the U.S. and Nigerians were second.

*Q: Were you involved in the Fulbright program?*

BOYD: Slightly. There were a couple of Fulbright professors at the university in Kano and we provided them logistic and facilitative assistance..

**STEPHEN LOW**  
**Ambassador**  
**Nigeria (1979-1981)**

*Ambassador Stephen Low was born in Ohio in 1927. He received his bachelor’s degree from Yale, and his master’s and doctorate from the Fletcher School of*



*Law and Diplomacy. In addition to Nigeria, Ambassador Low served in Uganda, Senegal, and Zambia. He was interviewed by Professor I.W. Zartman in 1988.*

LOW: Well, if Zambia was international political mediation, Nigeria was bilateral economic cooperation. It couldn't have been more different in that sense. I went there when Nigeria was the U.S. second most important supplier of petroleum, just barely after the Saudis. At the time of the oil shocks the Nigerians were our second largest supplier of oil. We had at that point a nine billion dollar deficit, which today is nothing, but in those days was just barely behind our deficit with Japan, which was about twelve or fifteen billion dollars. It was a major problem, and I can remember the Vice-President at a reception at the White House saying to me, "Young man you are going to have to do something about the price of oil." I didn't join up for that purpose, but I did go there with the feeling that we had very little leverage - we had very little purchase. To us the relationship with Nigeria was very important, but to the Nigerians the relationship with the United States was not very important. I felt uncomfortable as an Ambassador in that very unbalanced kind of a situation and so my focus was to look around and see how we could make our relationship more important to the Nigerians. In the first few months I realized the importance they put on agricultural development and the admiration with which they looked at America and its productivity in agriculture. I made a speech in the Northern part of the country once and they said, "What are you going to do for us in agriculture?" I answered, "We're not going to do anything for you. You decide what you need to do and we will see if we can't cooperate." I thought that was a nifty answer and I went home and I thought that's just not the answer, that isn't going to get us anywhere. If we continue on that basis we are never going to succeed. So instead I went back to them and said "Let's get together and establish some kind of an institution within which we can cooperate." We can't cooperate in a concessional assistance program because, even though it was not a wealthy country, it was not a poor country. It was relatively less poor than others in the world and with that kind of a U.S. deficit, the Congress would never sit still for a significant concessional assistance program. It just didn't seem to me that was the way to go; although there was a lot of pressure within the government for us to start up an aid program again which I resisted very strongly. We did then work it out. I say "we" which is a bit of a euphemism. I worked it out together with some people in Washington. The Nigerians didn't have much to do with it. When they saw what we had in mind they became more and more interested and we worked out an arrangement which involved a tri-lateral group including non-profit organizations (foundations), the government, and private industry on both sides. It was an institution which the Nigerians wanted to name. We said that if they wanted to put a name to it that was fine. They called it the Joint Agricultural Consultative Commission. The JACC. When Vice-President Mondale visited Nigeria we unveiled the project with Nigerian cooperation and the former Secretary of Agriculture, whose name escapes me at the moment (Orville Freeman), agreed to be Director of the American side. The American JACC group was in Lagos the week before I left there. President Shagari met with the group for about an hour and a half and he said, "Really I should be over with the Council of State today, it meets twice a year for one day." This was the highest consultive body in the country, it was made up of the traditional Chiefs and the members of Congress, the governors, and so forth. It was the leadership of Nigeria. He took an hour and a half out of that day to visit with the JACC and he said, "I'm here because to me this is the most important thing that is happening in Nigeria today." Well I felt that something had changed, that there was something in the relationship with the United States that the Nigerians felt was important. We were able to touch a felt need on their

part and to create an institution which in a non-aid sense could help, support, encourage, facilitate what they needed. This was a private technical assistance program, rather than taking over and clearing large acres of land for American farmers, it was a body that could help private Americans help Nigerians raise the seed they need and to provide the inputs for Nigerians. This made sense and they I think responded to it. When I left the U.S. was in the process of setting up four JACCs in four other countries of the world. It has since been privatized and the JACC as far as I know is still in existence. I think it is important to figure out ways of institutionalizing help for private cooperation. In the developing world it's very hard for Americans in private life to compete with the Japanese and the Koreans and the Europeans without some kind of an institutional framework that can nurture, support, encourage and facilitate these kinds of things. The relationship between these countries and the U.S. shouldn't have to operate in an entirely concessional assistance framework. There may be other ways of doing it but I think we were moving in the right direction. I was interested that shortly after I left Nigeria, Assistant Secretary Crocker in a speech in New York to the Council on Foreign Relations said that our relations with Nigeria was a model of the kind of relations that we wanted with other countries in Africa.

*Q: Nigeria was the centerpiece of our African policy at that time if I remember correctly? Is there a difference in operating in a country of that kind than in a Zambia the mediation aspect aside?*

LOW: Well you know I'm not sure that's the way I would describe our African policy. I think that we put great importance on our relations with Nigeria, and they were important out of all proportion to anything else in pure self-interest terms. Nigeria was a significant trading partner and it represented nearly a quarter of the population of black Africa. In that sense it was important and I think we were willing to make the efforts to pay attention to it. However, the stage was still set in Southern Africa. That was where the dynamic of our African position was acted out. I think that as far as I was concerned personally the Zambian experience was exciting because it involved the President and the Secretary of State and U.S. interests more than Nigeria did. We listened to Nigeria in a sense but I don't think that the Nigerian views had a major impact on American views as I think some in the Senate believed they had. It is different and in this sense it is much like Brazil. A friend of mine, Mike Samuels, had mentioned to me that the relationship between Brazil and the United States in South America is not different from the United States and Nigeria in Africa. They are both very important to us but still the political dynamic was being acted out elsewhere -- in Central American or South Africa.

*Q: It's been, people have often observed that Africa is the least important continent in our relationships and yet you served a lot and worked a lot in Africa. Is there, do you want to comment on that situation? Should we be paying more attention to Africa? Is there a certain way of operating in the field within the continent that is objectively least important? Are things different there than in the means of operation? Is there something to correct?*

LOW: I think we've got it about right. It's a little bit like when you go to a new post and you have to call on all your diplomatic colleagues. Obviously your important contacts are with our close allies and our major competitors. Without any doubt it is the Soviet Ambassador, the Chinese, British, the French, and the Japanese - these are the most important. However, you ignore or down play others at your peril. If you don't go out of your way and spend a disproportionate

amount of your time in calling on every single one of your colleagues your position in the Diplomatic Corps is affected. If you do what you need to do, with the whole world, then you are stronger everywhere. There is something involved with this in our relationships with the third world. Clearly the amount of effort and attention that we give is disproportionate to the gross national product, to the amount of international trade, to the impact. If you want to balance it on the basis of those quantitative factors you are going to be in trouble.

We all know that the Fire Department's budget in Westchester County is greater than that of many of the independent countries of Africa, but that isn't an indication of the effort and attention that you have to spend with them. Without any doubt your ability to handle those relationships smoothly and maturely and effectively contributes a great deal to your relations with the Soviet Union, and China, and our allies. We have to pay more attention than our quantitative interests might indicate.

**CARL C. CUNDIFF**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Lagos (1980-1983)**

*Carl Cundiff was educated at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and Tufts. He entered the Foreign Service in 1966. His career included posts in Singapore, Saigon, Paris, Lagos and Abidjan and he was named ambassador to Niger in 1988. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1996.*

*Q: So, you finished this assignment as you say, it was a three year assignment, in 1980. Then you went abroad again, I think. What was your next assignment?*

CUNDIFF: I went to Lagos, Nigeria, as Economic Counselor.

*Q: And when you got there, Nigeria was still a functioning democracy?*

CUNDIFF: It was a functioning democracy. In fact the day I arrived, Vice President Mondale as I recall was visiting Nigeria. And the first week on the job was taken up to help support a very large U.S. delegation that was accompanying the Vice President for an official visit to Nigeria.

*Q: That I am sure was very demanding, on the other hand it probably gave you entree and opportunity to do things and meet people it might have taken a year to do.*

CUNDIFF: That is correct. It was an intensive, rapid orientation and it did give me an opportunity to become involved with the issues and essentially a good deal of my assignment in Nigeria was taken with follow-up to that visit. Because later there was a follow-up visit by the Vice President of Nigeria to Washington as well. And we had to monitor, if you will, the progress of engagements that had been taken on both sides to have closer economic cooperation.

*Q: This was a period in Nigeria, not too long after OPEC and the oil price increases, when the*

*oil sector was booming and flourishing?*

CUNDIFF: When I was in Nigeria initially, oil prices were high and Nigeria was earning substantial amounts of foreign exchange. I forget the exact figures but I think they were earning something on the order of \$2 billion dollars a month in foreign exchange earnings from petroleum. But after I had been there, I think it was about a year, the bottom fell out of the petroleum market and prices went down very rapidly and quite substantially and eventually to the point where I think Nigeria was earning perhaps something close to 600-700 million dollars in foreign exchange per month. So there was an incredibly rapid decline in foreign exchange earnings that had a major impact on Nigeria.

*Q: Because they had made commitments and undertaken investments anticipating continuing that high rate of foreign exchange?*

CUNDIFF: Yes. They had undertaken very large development projects, particularly in the agricultural area. But also elsewhere in the economy there were a lot of construction projects going forward. There were a lot of road projects, the building of public buildings, bridges, large river valley development projects and in general just the very expansive economy which was abruptly affected by a substantial change in the financial outlook.

*Q: I have always been struck by the preponderance of Nigeria in U.S. trade with Africa, largely in the petroleum sector. To what extent were you, as economic counselor, involved with American companies? Were they undertaking a lot of the investment-involved with these projects that you mentioned? Or was it primarily European involvement?*

CUNDIFF: I would say that the U.S. oil companies had a very substantial role in the Nigeria petroleum sector. But, Shell Oil Company was there and as I recall was perhaps the largest of the large in terms of its petroleum operations, having been there before independence. Shell was the largest company. But we had a couple of American companies with very substantial operations including Texaco and Mobil Oil but also others.

*Q: And you said, in part as a result of the Vice President's visit, we were involved in a number of joint projects or programs working together in that period. So there really was a very strong and close interchange between Nigeria and the United States on the economic side.*

CUNDIFF: There was an effort, I think, on both sides to expand the economic relationship beyond petroleum. There was an effort to encourage investments in other areas and a general desire to expand opportunities. I think American companies in particular were anxious, if you will, to have more business with Nigeria. Nigeria was a prosperous, developing country with great potential because of its oil earnings. And I think the feeling was that we ought to be expanding our relationship beyond just petroleum into other parts of the business relationship.

*Q: Was that resisted either by Nigerians or British or other Western Europeans who perhaps had been there ahead of us...or ahead of our companies?*

CUNDIFF: I think that there was a friendly rivalry going on, as there always is in the business

world between companies competing for contracts. A lot of the business in Nigeria then, and probably still, takes the form of contracts with the government.

*Q: I see here that you monitored a major fertilizer project supported by the U.S. Export- Import Bank. That was sort of an example of trying to get beyond the petroleum sector. What sort of project was that?*

CUNDIFF: I can't remember all the details of that. But I think it wasn't totally outside of petroleum. It was a project using petroleum to create fertilizers. And at this point I can't remember the details of that project but at that time it kept me fairly busy trying to take care of the interest of the U.S. Export-Import bank in working on the project, because it was a financial engagement by the Export-Import Bank.

I was also involved with trying to take care of the interest of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation-OPIC. And there we were dealing with a case of a project which had run into difficulty and where there were financial claims involved and we were trying to reach a satisfactory settlement of that issue. Again, it took quite a bit of time and effort to work with the Nigerian authorities on that project.

*Q: Was there a commercial attaché of the Foreign Commercial Service in the embassy in Lagos in that period?*

CUNDIFF: Yes, there was. And in fact the commercial side of the embassy's operation expanded while I was there. And we increased the rank of the commercial representative. He became a commercial counselor. The person happened to be a Foreign Service officer but there was a major effort to expand the commercial section, if you will, of the embassy. That was a period when you may recall we separated out the commercial function from the Foreign Service at the State Department and established the Foreign Commercial Service at the Department of Commerce. That took place on my watch in Lagos.

*Q: And that was a separate section from the Economic Section that you headed up?*

CUNDIFF: Yes. And when I arrived in Lagos, those functions as I recall, were initially or had been together in the same office. But when I arrived we were in the process of separating out the two functions.

*Q: Who was the ambassador in Lagos when you were there?*

CUNDIFF: My first year, the ambassador was Steve Low. The next year, the ambassador was Tom Pickering.

*Q: Two great figures of the modern Foreign Service.*

CUNDIFF: Yes. And I worked quite closely with both of them during that period. The economic side of the relationship with Nigeria was, I think it is fair to say, very important.

*Q: You were there when the election of 1980 took place in the United States. On the economic side did that make much impact when Ronald Reagan succeeded Jimmy Carter?*

CUNDIFF: No.

*Q: It certainly had no particular effect on the work you did.*

CUNDIFF: Not particularly. I don't recall any particular effect at that time.

*Q: I've never served in Nigeria but I've always had the sense that, from visits and from what I've heard, of sharp cleavages, if you will, between different parts of this very large nation and over ethnic differences, religious differences. And this is more I suppose on the political side but is that something that you ran into on the economic side as well that you were aware of?*

CUNDIFF: I'm not sure I understand your question.

*Q: The differences between the North, the East, the West...were they competing for the projects, for investment by U.S. firms?*

CUNDIFF: I don't think that economically there was a major relationship between business activities and internal regional and ethnic differences within Nigeria. The fact is that the very large bulk of U.S. investment was in petroleum and that investment is in the southern part of the country either along the coast or offshore. A good deal of it is in the eastern sector of Nigeria but I can't really say that there was a big interrelationship there between ethnic rivalry, if you will, and business operations.

*Q: At that time we had a consulate, I suppose, in the North in Kano or Kaduna. Was there any other consulate in the south central part of Nigeria?*

CUNDIFF: At that time we had a small USIA operation still functioning in Kano. I think it was a USIA library and cultural center in Kano. In Kaduna we had also a cultural center as I recall but we had the consulate general in Kaduna. We had no other operations outside Lagos other than that. At that time Abuja was being or had been declared "the new national capital of Nigeria," and we were beginning to talk about how we would establish an embassy in Abuja at some point.

*Q: But at that time, there was no great pressure for the embassy to establish a presence in Abuja?*

CUNDIFF: There may have been some initial pressure but I don't recall myself that it was something that we envisaged having to do instantly.

*Q: The economic ministries and the Central Bank were all in Lagos still?*

CUNDIFF: Yes. And I think it was envisaged that the economic and commercial institutions would probably continue to be based in Lagos despite the establishment of the official capital in Abuja. Possibly, the Ministry of Finance might have to be in Abuja at some point. Other

Ministries would have to have their headquarters in Abuja but I'm not so sure that the Central Bank, for example, was going to have to move to Abuja.

*Q: Is there anything else that we should cover in your two years in Nigeria?*

CUNDIFF: I don't think so.

**GEORGE G. B. GRIFFIN**  
**Commercial Counselor**  
**Lagos (1981-1984)**

*George G.B. Griffin was born in Turkey in 1934. He graduated with a BA from the University of South Carolina in 1957, and served in the U.S. Navy as a lieutenant overseas from 1957 to 1959. After entering the Foreign Service in 1959, his postings abroad have included Naples, Colombo, Calcutta, Islamabad, Lahore, Kathmandu, Kabul, Lagos, Seoul, Nairobi and Milan. Mr. Griffin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

GRIFFIN: This was shortly after the creation of the Foreign Commercial Service, and Commerce didn't want to hear much from State. They already had Erland Higginbotham, a State officer, as the first FCS Director General. It was probably important for Commerce, or at least the Assistant and Under Secretaries in ITA who supervised FCS, to have a USDOC officer in their top position in Lagos. Nigeria at that time was the source of our largest trade deficit, because of our oil imports. They may have seen it as State trying to recapture the commercial function (which it should do). The pain was especially acute in Lagos, where Pickering said he would make me Counselor, supervising the Commercial Attaché and other Commerce officers already there. They were really bent out of shape, putting it mildly. It took some major arm twisting, but in the end, Commerce agreed, and I went to Lagos as Commercial Counselor.

*Q: This was when?*

GRIFFIN: November 1981. By the way, this afternoon I'm going to the funeral of Rick McIlhenny, who died two days ago. He took over from Higginbotham as Director General of the Foreign Commercial Service. He came to see me in 1981 in Lagos on his first trip abroad as Director General.

*Q: Did you get any kind of a briefing or read your way into the post before you went there?*

GRIFFIN: Yes, a bit. There was a long time between leaving Kabul and going to Nigeria. Most of that time was spent trying to find a job. Once I was picked by Tom Pickering, it took some bureaucratic tussling to get the Commerce Department to agree. I spent much of that time boning up on the Nigerian market, and talking to people in Commerce and State.

*Q: It's interesting to get some of one's preconceptions and all. Before you went out, what were*

*you getting? Nigeria was sort of a mess, wasn't it, actually at the time?*

GRIFFIN: Actually it was in its best shape for some time, and even since. General Olusegun Obasanjo, who had staged a coup in 1976, organized elections in 1979 in which he did not run, and then stepped down. He's now President again – elected this time. Thanks to Tom Pickering and Political Counselor Walter Clarke, I got to know him when I was there. So there was a democratic government, which Washington liked. A huge cement scandal had been cleaned up. (At one time there were 200 ships full of cement sitting in Lagos harbor. The stuff was ordered by people who expected kickbacks, but most of it had not been paid for. Many of them eventually sank.) The U.S. is Nigeria's largest export market, but for the U.K. We take some 40 percent of their oil. At the time, that made Nigeria the source of our largest trade deficit. Quite a challenge for me!

Being picked by Tom Pickering was flattering, so I thought I could make it work. But there were immediate housekeeping problems. There was no counselor's house because the position was new, created for me. The Commercial Attaché, Ed Rojas, was to stay in his residence. I was to be his boss and Minister Counselor. I liked that, because at the time I was a mere FSO-1, so the title gave me a standing which I wouldn't have had otherwise. But finding a house turned out to be a serious problem. The Commerce Department wouldn't pay for it, so State finally blinked and paid. We first moved into the former residence of the Political Counselor, which was about to be demolished and replaced by several townhouses. We stayed there for the better part of a year, longer than we anticipated, because of a dramatic and scary event. On what was supposed to be our last night in the house, we had a party. The house was to be torn down the next day, so we invited friends to scrawl on the walls, knock holes in it, and do anything else they wanted, to start the destruction process. But that night the Embassy almost burnt to the ground. The next day it was decided, since my office was destroyed, that the FCS front office would be in my house. So we stayed there, holes in the wall and all. It was quite a sight.

To answer your question, I was fully briefed at the Commerce Department and at State. While I was seconded to Commerce, I was not rated by Commerce. I was rated by the DCM, with the Ambassador as the reviewing officer, all in the State system.

*Q: What was Commerce telling you, and you were picking up elsewhere, about how things stood commercial-wise?*

GRIFFIN: Well, for once Nigeria had a lot of money. Oil money was pouring in, and they wanted to spend it. Pickering wanted a more senior officer as commercial minister counselor because he foresaw lots of sales possibilities and wanted some oomph behind FCS Lagos. He convinced Commerce about that, and agreed to add another FCS position at that level. Of course, Commerce wanted one of its own in that slot and was not very happy with his choice of me. They had a candidate for the slot, who applied before my name arose. He eventually came to Lagos, by the way, as economic counselor. Tom Pickering didn't want him, and he is a very persuasive, forceful gentleman, who got me there. He introduced me to several American business leaders who were familiar with Nigeria, and I went with him to New York for a full BCIU briefing.



*Q: BCIU?*

GRIFFIN: The Business Council for International Understanding. It gives briefings to ambassadors, DCMs, and commercial officers, and sets up meetings with American companies doing business in their host country. We went to New York for a couple days and had some excellent briefings. That furthered my education on Nigeria immensely. Pickering looked at the commercial function as one of the more important aspects of his job. He really was the senior commercial officer there, and told everybody so. He liked what I had to say in my first interview with him, especially what I had done in Pakistan years before. Because as Deputy Principal Officer in Lahore, I facilitated deals worth over \$3 billion for American business. He said that was the kind of officer he wanted.

*Q: To put this in context - please correct me if I'm wrong - we were going through a time when oil was king, wasn't it?*

GRIFFIN: Well, prices had shot up in the 1970s, thanks to OPEC. It was important to keep the oil flowing to our industries through that crisis. A lot of Nigerian oil goes to Europe, so it doesn't buy much from Venezuela, which is where we buy a lot of ours.

*Q: But also in that context the whole idea was that the United States, as other states, wanted to absorb as much of the money that was being generated by this, getting it back to the United States.*

GRIFFIN: Yes, that was the idea. Our trade deficit was enormous, so my job was to convince the Nigerians, since we were buying a lot of their oil, that they needed to reciprocate by buying American goods. Competition was pretty fierce.

But before getting further into that, I'd like to talk about the reasons for my getting bounced out of India. It all hounded me in Nigeria as well, so I want to get it on the record. It probably all started when I tried to help what I thought was a Soviet defector in Colombo in 1963 or '64. That set the Soviets off on an effort to get me. They tried to get me to defect too, as I mentioned. But of course I refused, which seemed to have angered them. They kept after me for decades. It was a constant drumbeat in my life. It heated up drastically in Calcutta when I was talking to the Bangladesh government in exile, before it became the government. Things got hotter when I went to Pakistan, which neither India nor the Soviets consider a friendly country. It really boiled over when I was in Kabul and, during visits to my family in New Delhi, briefed American journalists, who could not get into Afghanistan. The climax was when the Indians declared me *persona non grata*. They were clearly influenced by or pressured by the Soviets, although the Indian Government at every level, all the way to Mrs. Gandhi, denied it.

The Indians and the Soviets soon learned where I was headed, despite our efforts to keep it quiet. When my orders to Lagos were issued, Tom Pickering sent a classified telegram to Chargé Wes Kriebel, instructing him to brief the staff about my background. He said it was extremely sensitive, so they should not talk about it, lest it interfere with my role in Lagos. I was to do my job, and do it quietly. But that didn't last very long. Shortly after I arrived, a leftish Nigerian newspaper – they have lots of tabloids there, as in India or the U.S. for that matter – printed a

phony memo, ostensibly from a USIS FSN, a woman. It was to the Ambassador, supposedly signed by me, arguing that two very powerful chiefs, Chief Awolowo and Chief Abiola, needed to be killed, and that the Shehu Shagari government must be brought down. Chief Abiola was the head of his tribe and owned a big newspaper empire. When this was plastered all over the front page of one of his newspapers, it created quite a stir.

*Q: You were already in...?*

GRIFFIN: Yes, I was in Lagos. The Shagari government launched a frantic investigation, and Parliament had a committee look into it. It got to be front page news. But soon the government declared it was phony, saying it sounded foolish, with atrocious English which certainly wasn't written by an American. We again found a Soviet hand in it – trying to make life miserable for me. Shortly thereafter, there was an attempt on Mrs. Gandhi's life – which I mentioned earlier – in which strut wires in her official airplane were found sawed half through just as she was about to take a trip to Switzerland, the UAE and Kuwait. I got blamed for that. Moscow made a huge to-do out of it. The Indians arrested some Air India mechanics and threw them in jail. They claimed that I had sneaked into Bombay in the dead of night and organized the whole thing. Of course, was in Nigeria all that time. Not too long after that, Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated. Then the Soviets really went to town, saying I was behind it as a promoter of Free Kalistan, a militant Sikh movement. (Remember, she was killed by her Sikh bodyguards.) *Pravda* was first to print that story. Then the Indian press picked it up and repeated it along with my picture – the whole shebang. At about that time, Secretary Schultz met with the Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, a gentleman named Tikanov. He told Schultz that the *Pravda* story was nonsense, and that everyone in the Soviet Government knew it. I'm told the Secretary asked him to knock it off, and it quieted down after awhile.

*Q: This is something I've never heard before, of the intelligence apparatus going after somebody who's not part of it. You can raise hell, but what started the thinking behind this?*

GRIFFIN: None of us knows. When we finally got at the East German intelligence service files and could request our own files through the Freedom of Information Act, I started after mine. But the officer in Berlin who was supposed to help me never got them. I haven't asked Moscow for theirs, but I might. Everybody who followed Soviet disinformation activity (it's a Russian word) said my case was unprecedented. They had never seen anything else like it. If you go on the Internet, you will find all the books in which I'm called a killer CIA spy.

*Q: You're showing me a...*

GRIFFIN: It is a diagram of a sinister network. As you see, it connects me with all manner of evil people, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski. It's supposed to look like a spider web.

*Q: I'm surprised in a way. Two can play the same game. The CIA and the KGB don't assassinate each other, because they say, "If you do our guys, we'll do your guys." Was it the fact that you weren't CIA? I would have thought this is a thing we'd tell our CIA people: "You go talk to your counterparts," because they do talk to their counterparts, "and tell them to cut out the crap, or we'll pick on some of your..."*

GRIFFIN: I'm sure they did, without telling me that they were doing it. Some of my CIA friends, and I know a lot of them, would make a joke of it, saying, "Here comes one of The Company's boys." They thought this was funny because I was taking heat off of them. I asked Milt Beardon, who was Station Chief in Lagos, to help me on that score. I showed him my file, which seemed to astonish him. But we used to see each other socially, so some probably thought we were in the same organization. Then, when he found he was headed for Pakistan to play games in Afghanistan, my experience became even more interesting to him, so we did a lot of talking. He didn't actually tell me he was going; he just went. Now he's on talk shows as an expert.

*Q: It really sounds like you stepped on somebody's toes. It sounds like in our government as if a staffer in the Senate, of Jesse Helms or something, was out to get you.*

GRIFFIN: Maybe. All I can do is to go back to the events in the early '60s in Colombo. The attempts to achieve defections in both directions, and what the newspaper editor told me about his clandestine Soviet support, which I immediately reported to Washington. I don't know, but they certainly kept after me. It didn't stop until the Soviet Union collapsed.

*Q: What was the reaction in Nigeria about this?*

GRIFFIN: As I said, they first established a parliamentary commission to investigate. The subject was eventually dropped, but I suspect that a lot of Nigerians thought I was a spook of some sort. Many of them knew I had been a political officer, which in the British Commonwealth system is quite a different creature than in the U.S. Foreign Service. They may have thought I was some sort of *eminence grise*. It's hard to convince others of something that isn't.

In any case, in Lagos I tried to stay out of politics which, of course, was not entirely possible. I worked very hard at my trade job. Since I was relatively new at it, I had to rely on my staff, especially the Commercial Attaché, Ed Rojas. At first he was quite resentful of me, but we became friends. He's a very nice guy. After about a year, he was transferred away. I saw him again when we worked together on a small project years later.

The Commercial Section's workload was huge. We worked closely with Ambassador Pickering, and traveled all over the country. In the course of my tour, I calculated that we facilitated \$20 billion worth of business. Our trade deficit with Nigeria dropped by \$2 billion in that time, so I think we had a positive effect. That was, of course, the purpose of my being there. At the time it was our fourth largest trade deficit in the world, which is why Pickering got authority to beef up the commercial section and focus on commerce. Tom liked the idea of having a political officer in my position because he said you can't dissociate the two; the same with economics and politics. So I worked closely with the political and economic sections because most business is run by people who are well connected politically. They make a difference in any country.

Gene Mihaly, whom Pickering had known in Tanzania when Mihaly was a Peace Corps administrator there, was a businessman in California. We worked together to form what was then considered novel – a bilateral business council, made up of business leaders from both countries

who agreed to try to influence their own government to facilitate bilateral business. That meant politics. Mihaly became the sparkplug, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce assigned Millard Arnold as secretary. He had been a political-appointee DAS in the Department, and then was head of African affairs at the Chamber. (In the Clinton Administration, he became Commercial Counselor in South Africa.) We canvassed the American business community in Nigeria for serious interest and recommendations for membership on both sides. Secretary Schultz and Commerce Secretary “Mac” Baldrige got involved. The most important members of the American business community in Nigeria were the oil people, so we worked with them through our Petroleum Attaché. The idea was soon accepted by business and government leaders in both countries, and we went to work on substance. A year after it was formed, Vice President George Bush came to Lagos to bless it. He made a speech, which I wrote. Shortly after the speech, he departed precipitously to attend Brezhnev’s funeral as the U.S. representative.

I think Bush was rather embarrassed when he arrived, because when he landed he was told he would be helicoptered into town. I don’t know if you’ve ever been to Lagos, but the road to the airport is where the country’s most splendid “go-slows” take place. “Go-slows” – you’ve seen them on our Beltway – go for miles, and you just sit there. No one wanted to subject the Vice President to that. But he said, no, he wanted to see some of the countryside and the people. It’s a 30-mile trip, or so. It usually took two hours. This time, the Nigerians stopped all other traffic. They blocked every road into the main road, halted traffic behind them, and assumed that traffic in front would get out of the way. The police are quite used to this. They drive Harley-Davidsons in a flying V formation escort and push everybody out of the way. About halfway into town, there was a jam on top of a bridge that they couldn’t break. The police carry bicycle chains with them and, if you don’t get out of their way fast enough, they smash your windshield. Most people know the drill and get out of the way. This time a woman was stuck. Her car stalled and she couldn’t start it. She blocked the whole road by trying to get to the side, and nothing could move. The police walked in and beat on her car, but it didn’t do any good. Finally they were so frantic that a dozen cops picked up her car and threw it over the railing of the bridge to the road below. She was still in it. That cleared the road, and off they went. The Vice President said he didn’t want to see anything like that ever again and hoped the story wouldn’t get in the press. So he didn’t want to go back that way, and took a helicopter back to the airport.

During that visit, Lionel Ulmer, the Under Secretary for ITA, the foreign affairs branch of the Commerce Department, told me that his primary reason for being there was to take a look at me and my work. He said FCS was considering offering me another job if my performance was as good as the stories they had heard. He stayed in town for another couple of days, checking into our shop. Apparently he liked what he saw, since they did offer me the job and asked me if I would join FCS. In the end I took the job and went to Seoul, but we’ll come to that later.

*Q: Let’s talk about the business community, sort of the milieu in which you were going to be working. Was this different than anywhere else?*

GRIFFIN: The American presence was large and growing. The important American business men were the oil company executives. But the “oilie” at the top of the heap was Shell, which was not American. The chairman was an Englishman.

*Q: British/Dutch.*

GRIFFIN: Yes. His deputy was Dutch, who eventually became Chairman of Shell; a very nice guy. The next most important man in that field was the Mobil Oil representative, who was quite something himself. Mobil had two arms – prospecting and production, of which he was chairman, and marketing. They had retail stations all over the country, and the head of that arm became a friend. I kept pretty close to the oil company representatives, and then other types of people started coming. The word was out that Nigeria was the place to make good money. It was flowing. People came from all over the U.S., especially African-American business men and women who saw a golden opportunity. Many of them were bled dry by shady Nigerians. They learned their lesson the hard way.

The early 1980s was an especially tough time in Texas. The oil economy had gone bust, and the overall state economy was in the doldrums. Jay Anderson, President of Prairie Farms in East Texas, farmed rice. He was one of the biggest rice producers in America, until they had a drought and he was going belly up. He heard that Nigerians are big rice eaters, and that money was flowing there, so he came to try to emulate his success in Texas. He never succeeded. The politics overwhelmed him. There were many American construction companies in Nigeria, building highways, dams, and airports – almost anything you can think of. The money kept flowing, so all the big firms, from Brown & Root, to Bechtel, to almost every company you've heard of, came in. We recruited some of their CEOs to the board of the Business Council, after convincing them it was in their own self interest to do so. If I'm not mistaken, Secretary Schultz went on the board when he went to Bechtel after he left State.

But I thought the Chairman of a company in Birmingham, Alabama, was going to give us serious problems. His President had been to Nigeria several times, and was about to sign a contract, but the Chairman would not agree until he was convinced that everything was okay. So he came to see for himself. As they arrived at the Embassy, the President excused himself to go to the washroom, leaving me standing in the lobby with the Chairman. He looked around and in a very loud, very thick, Southern accent, said, "Sure are a lot of niggers in this place." I tried to sink into the floor. Several people stopped and stared at him. When the President reappeared, I whispered to him what his boss had said. He said that was normal for the man, but agreed, "Let's get him out of here fast." On the other side of the coin, we saw some of the slickest charlatans I've ever encountered from the African American community. They seemed to think it was easy to swindle their Nigerian "brothers."

*Q: From what I've heard, Nigerian crooks are world class. They're the Olympic champions of charlatans.*

GRIFFIN: They are indeed, and they don't stop. After a worldwide campaign by the Secret Service, they still send out letters saying, "You have been chosen, Mr. Kennedy. If you'll just sign here and tell me your bank account and credit card numbers, I'll send you \$20 million. We will fix you right up."

*Q: I keep getting e-mails from Nigeria. I talked to a friend of mine who's a banker in Baltimore, and he said, "If a couple people who looked like Nigerians walked into the bank, the windows*

*would come down, because they could pick out schemes faster than the bankers could figure out how to combat it.”*

GRIFFIN: They're very good at it. They got in league with Koreans to whom we sold some very fine printing equipment. They could produce excellent counterfeit \$20 bills, phony identity documents – anything you can think of. So we had to be extremely careful, and tried to pick only the most trustworthy Nigerian businessmen. There is an easy dozen of them who are world-class, straight, upright business people, so we tried to stick with them. For example, Chief Earnest Shonekan, the Chairman of UAC, the biggest corporation in Africa, is highly respected. He became President of Nigeria briefly years later, but was too honest for both the military and the politicians in the country, and didn't last. Caterpillar and several other American companies were in the UAC conglomerate, so I had a business entree to him.

The U.S. had stiff competition in Nigeria, and not just from the British. We worked to disprove the notion that Nigeria and the rest of the Commonwealth was a British lock-up. We preached that other nations had the right to equal access, but it was not easy. We were taught some lessons, but so were the Brits – from the French, who were incredibly strong. I got to know the young Nigeria Chairman of a very large French company. His English was so good that his jokes in American slang with almost no accent were better than any of the Americans in Nigeria. (He could put on a Maurice Chevalier-type French accent when he wanted to.) I told some American businessmen that they better watch out; this fellow was going to give them a run for their money. He did.

*Q: This was also the time when Africa was sort of a fiefdom of Mitterrand, Socialist President, and there were all sorts of deals going on in Africa which the Socialist Party benefitted from.*

GRIFFIN: It was, but don't forget: the colonial powers divided up Africa. Mitterrand took care of Francophone Africa, but couldn't get the time of day in the Anglophone or Lusophone countries. The Nigerians received regular visits from the legendary British business figure, “Tiny” Rowland. So did Kenya, which I'll come to when we talk about that. He was born in India of German parents, so whether he was a real Englishman was debatable, but that's beside the point. Prime Minister Ted Heath once called him “the unacceptable face of capitalism.” He pushed the British Government to keep a lock on as much business as they possibly could. Yes, the fights were incredible. The Japanese were also trying to horn in, using every tactic imaginable. It seemed that every country was trying, which made our job all the more difficult.

Q: Okay, you've got the situation there. How did you operate? At that time we had more constraints, we speaking as Americans.

GRIFFIN: It was about that time that the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act came out. It became my job to try to convince the American business community that it was not a fatal blow. Their immediate reaction was, “We can't do business in this country like that. It's impossible, so we may as well pack up our bags and go home.” I managed to make the case and convince some of them, but certainly not all. We made it very clear what would happen to them if they got caught. A few small fry did get caught. The big firms didn't – at least as far I can recall. I used the Ambassador, visiting firemen from official Washington, and other tactics to influence them. One

of my first visitors was Rick McIlhenny, the new Director General of FCS. It was his first trip abroad in that capacity, and he particularly wanted to check on the State Department fellow in Lagos. I had not met him before.

We got a frantic call from his secretary while he was still in the air, to say that he had forgotten his yellow inoculation card. That was something we stressed in our welcome telegrams, because Nigerian health officials were running a scam at the airport. They loved to catch people without cards, or with improper or expired inoculations. They would put them through hell, keeping them at the airport for days in quarantine, unless they paid a bribe. Of course, McIlhenny arrived without it. I went to the airport early and talked to several officials, and explained that he was a big deal. I waved a telegram from Washington with all the data that was on his card, and asked them to give him a break. My lone female FSN was with me. She was tougher than any of the health officials, and read the riot act to them. They were convinced, so I suggested that we play a little joke on the DG, making a big fuss, and telling him he was going to have to stay in quarantine. They thought the idea was hysterically funny, and did it. Rick was not amused. They took him into a small room and locked him in. He started yelling for me to get him out. I did, trying to look like the only guy who could save him.

McIlhenny spent the next few days at our house, going through my files, and talking to the staff. In the end, he seems to have decided that we were doing as well as could be expected. He did say something about teaching me how to do commercial work, but nothing much came of it. He had never done that sort of work himself. He had been a farm implement salesman after college. In the long run, we became friends, and I went to his funeral the other day.

Rick was very quick, but sometimes a rough sort of gentleman. He had an all-Africa/Middle East commercial counselors' conference in Nairobi in my second year. I went to it. He almost brought the session to a halt by insisting that we do a lot of reporting – something FCS officers were not used to. Maybe he brought it up because I did a lot of reporting. I thought it was absolutely necessary. The others objected in one voice, and said they wouldn't do it. Rick blew his stack and shouted at them, "I just told you what you're going to do! This is the way you're going to do it! If you don't like it, you can walk out of here, and you won't have a job tomorrow morning, because I'll see to it that you're all sacked." It was the wrong approach. Jim Moorhouse, who was McIlhenny's chief civil service aide, managed to calm him down and make him backtrack a bit. The others finally agreed to do the reports, but it took an all-night session to convince them. It was quite something. Moorhouse, by the way, later succeeded me in Nigeria as Commercial Counselor.

*Q: Let's talk about the foreign commercial practices there. You're not supposed to give bribes. Other companies are doing this, other countries are doing this. Particularly when you're talking about people dealing with government officials are involved, they don't give too much of a damn about the quality, they like the money.*

GRIFFIN: It was a tough sell, but we made headway. We argued that the firms should calculate what they otherwise would spend on bribes and call it an immediate profit, as they didn't have to spend that money. We pointed out that in some cases there were stories of huge sums of money. We said that the best approach to that was to shine a spotlight on it. If we heard that the Japanese

gave a local government official a bribe, we would publicize it in a way that was not traceable to our source. We told American businesses that we would collaborate with them to expose corruption by their competitors. We suggested many ways to go about it, but stressed that, in the long run, they would save money and build a reputation as clean. Their clients should be willing to give them contracts because it would cost them less. Of course, there would still be individuals who wanted their pockets lined. That would be the hard part, but we would go all out to embarrass them by shining a spotlight. It began to work. The oil companies in particular were grateful, because they were subjected to daily approaches for large sums of money. Over the years, I think doing business abroad has become easier for Americans because they don't often get asked for bribes any more. They seem to be telling people who come after them, "We don't talk about that. It's not part of the package. Don't bother to ask." Their foreign competitors still play the game, but Americans don't get asked so much.

In the early days we got plenty of arguments. Businessmen would ask, "What do I do at the airport if the guy's got me over a barrel? All he wants is 100 naira, which is chicken feed. Why can't I give him that?" I stressed that the law was intended to address major corruption. But added that whatever they did would be on their conscience. If they got caught, it was their necks. I also argued that, if they used their heads, there were ways to influence customers short of bribery. Today, the lawyers say that some of my ideas were not acceptable. For example, I would say that they couldn't give a client money. But if they happened to know the president of the university where a client wanted to send his kid to school, they might send a letter praising the kid, to which the president might listen. No money would change hands, and the client would have to pay full fare for the kid. I was suggesting that they be a little creative by being nice to the client. In Korea I learned some hard lessons about that approach, which I will get to when we talk about that. As in Nigeria, to do business, you had to get to know people, but it was different, as they had a particular way of doing it.

Nigerians are not catalog buyers. They're not Internet buyers. They must touch, feel, drive, or play with whatever is being sold. Otherwise, they won't buy. So we had trade shows, big ones. John Vlavianos in the Commerce Department helped us buy a large geodesic dome, which we used as an exhibit hall. Most Nigerian exhibit halls were not big enough for some of our equipment, such as cranes and cherry pickers. Our dome could be air conditioned, which was important in that very hot country, especially in the north at the edge of the Sahara. We shared the cost with several other posts in Africa, so it was moved around quite a bit. Our trade shows were mounted by visiting professionals from the Commerce Department, who taught us a lot about the right and wrong way to do things.

Our primary focus was to help small American businesses who otherwise couldn't afford to market abroad. In my view, the smart people come to the government for its virtually free assistance, because we do a lot for them. The big firms usually take care of themselves, but when they get in trouble overseas, they always run to Uncle Sam, crying "Help!" It was for that reason that we put the business council together – to aim for political influence at high levels. That effort paid off in other ways. On New Year's Eve 1983, there was a coup d'état. President Shagari was in such bad odor as his government became more and more visibly corrupt, that the generals decided once again that it was time for them to take over. The announcement came from Sani Abacha, who eventually became the ruler himself. (Not that time; there were several other



coups in between.) My wife and I were at the Economic Counselor's house for dinner, when suddenly we heard martial music coming from speakers all around the neighborhood. We turned on the radio and television to find nothing but music and a picture of the national seal. Once in a while somebody would say something like "stand by." All the telephones were dead, but the Embassy radio net was functioning. We managed to get home at dawn, finding that our diplomatic tags were still honored by troops at roadblocks.

That morning, the Ambassador instructed all agency and section chiefs to help get word to the American community. I recalled from trips to the oil patch that the oil companies had their own communication system. They had been in Nigeria a long time, and had a good idea of what to expect. I drove to the home of head man of one of the oil companies and asked him to help me get out the word. I told him he had just become a warden in the Embassy emergency system. He understood and helped a lot. His staff and I quickly learned the status of most Americans in the country, and there were thousands. At a Country Team meeting later, DCM Don Gelber thanked me profusely, noting that none of the security officers, consular officers, wardens, or the oil attaché had remembered about the oil industry communications system.

I had just won the James Clement Dunn Award for my performance in Afghanistan and INR. Word came after Tom Pickering left for El Salvador so Gelber had a big party for me, and invited some of the biggest names in the Nigerian and American business communities, Embassy staffers, and personal friends. It was very nice of him. He made me sound like some sort of god, which helped my relations with my contacts and others at the post. Then the Commerce Department decided to piggyback, and gave me a couple of other awards, with cash bonuses. I think it was the first time the Dunn Award had been awarded with money. It was \$5,000, which was a lot of money to me at that time.

*Q: Did you have any Americans arrested on commercial things that you got involved with?*

GRIFFIN: Unfortunately, we had several bad guys who ended up in jail. There were also a few people arrested on trumped-up charges. I don't think we managed to spring any of them. We did insist on (and got) consular access, so consular officers saw them. We got innocent people out of trouble several times. Just as in this past week, villagers in Ogun Province, down in the oil patch, took over oil company facilities and held workers hostage. That's in the southeast corner of the country, on the border with Cameroon. Most of Mobil's operations were offshore, and its workers rarely went ashore in Ogun. But there have been several of what amounted to pirate attacks on their rigs, with people held hostage for some time. We usually managed to work a solution with local tribal elders and the central government.

Pickering is an intrepid traveler – maybe one of the most widely traveled people on Earth. He loves to drive himself to the places he wants to visit, though his visits are carefully organized. In Nigeria, he sent out advance teams, and arrived himself with a very large entourage – almost a royal procession. Follow-up was done by a clean-up crew which came later to make sure the i's were dotted, the t's crossed, promises kept, and to pass out a few more gifts. In each area, he called on the tribal chief. In the oil patch, all that paid off when he talked a chief into using his influence to get the demonstrators to back off. Sometimes the hostages were held at onshore installations, as happened this week with all the women. Most of the tribes in the oil patch assert

that it's really their oil, and it is being ripped off by the central government, which doesn't give them any of the profits. That's partly true, but government leaders point out that the oil income benefits all Nigerians. Of course, some are benefitted more than others. The 1967-1970 Biafran civil war was mostly about all that, and it still rankles the Ibos and other tribes in the southeast.

There was another case in which an American family – actually he was the British head of an American firm, and his wife and daughter were American – was attacked. At the time there were serious breaking and entering problems in Nigeria. In one of the most widely publicized cases, robbers armed with AK-47s and Uzis were stymied by bars on windows and doors, so they “borrowed” a tow truck from a bus company and went back to the house. They wrapped chains around the window and door grilles, and jerked a whole wall off the house. Then they snatched what they wanted and went on their merry way. Virtually all foreigners in the city had guards, backed up by supervisors who checked on them every hour or so. The American family lived in a suburb of Lagos which we had advised people to avoid because of the high crime rate. They were attacked by men with knives – no guns. The wife and daughter were gang-raped repeatedly, and the man was cut up pretty badly. I had just met with him, and when I heard about the attack I invited them to come stay with us. They did so while trying to get their lives back in order.

That incident created a sensation in the American community, and the Ambassador had a hard time quieting the staff. At his first community meeting with the staff and spouses after that, several people asked for a ticket home that day. He was challenged to specify what he planned to do to make the Embassy family safe, since “Washington didn't seem to care.” He was asked why he, the DCM, and the RSO hadn't foreseen such a problem. People demanded to know where they were when it happened, and why there wasn't better protection. He pointed out that the general situation had long been mentioned in Department advisories, and tried to explain that predicting attacks was almost impossible. He said the Embassy had hired guards to protect all USG residences, and stressed that Nigerian crooks are tough and nasty. Afterward, he called the Country Team together and we cobbled together a more intense effort to provide families with better protection. As usual, we had no money for more guards, but Tom appealed to Washington, saying he had a revolt on his hands, and would lose some of his best staff unless agencies met at least some of the concerns at once. We finally got a bit more help from Washington and devised some new ways to help ourselves.

I traveled a lot, mostly by road. Getting on an airplane in Nigeria at that time was (and may still be) an adventure, shall we say. For domestic flights, airplanes were parked on the tarmac a couple of hundred yards from the terminal. Everyone had tickets, but no boarding passes. When a flight was announced, the ground staff opened the doors and everybody ran for the plane. It's amazing how large women in long skirts, carrying armloads of bags, can beat a skinny, athletically inclined American to a seat on a plane. They trip you up, knock you over, beat on you, and get there first. So there's no place for your bag, which you hold on your lap in the middle of the last row of seats. I didn't like to travel like that, so I mostly traveled by road.

We bought a van for the Commercial Section in which we could sleep, if necessary. But Nigerian roads were horrific. They were mostly two-lane, but the only lane drivers wanted to use was right in the middle, because the shoulders were eroded away. The most wonderful spots on Nigerian roads are river crossings. On both sides of the bridges, usually at the bottom of a ravine, we often

saw dozens of overturned hulks of burnt-up trucks. That's because when one truck driver saw another one coming the other way, he became desperate to beat him to the bridge. So they both roared down as fast as they could, often missing the bridge or crashing together in the middle. When the trucks burned, the drivers who survived just walked away and left them. Nobody tried to clean it up, so approaches to many bridges looked like war zones. Another amazing sight was the road from Lagos to Ibadan. It was lined with discarded Coca Cola cans which looked like red lines on a map from 20,000 feet up. It was incredible. Nigerians never seemed to clean up trash.

The Nigerian Government was building a new national capital at Abuja. It was potentially a big source of money for contractors and construction people. Many American companies were interested, and some were in business there from the outset. To be of assistance to our firms, we had to go to Abuja. On my first visit there, we were accommodated at the construction camp of a French company, Bouygues. They were very nice. I had my wife along, and they were not quite used to having ladies there, but it was the nicest place to stay because we were given a private, air-conditioned trailer, and the food was first-rate. At the time, the French were the only ones there. We were accommodated because I was a friend of their office manager in Lagos. Some American firms showed up a bit later, and managed to get a little business. Abuja was bribery central when I first went there. I told the sub-Minister I met with that, while we wanted some of the business, we would not play that game. He didn't believe it, but our companies got some – cleanly, as far as I know.

*Q: What was the feeling towards the new capital Abuja?*

GRIFFIN: None of the embassies wanted to go. It was out in the center of the country, in the middle of nowhere, which is why the Nigerians picked the spot. It was roughly where the three major tribes – the Yoruba, the Hausa-Fulani, and the Ibos – come together, but was not in any of their territories per se. It's a barren sort of place, with nothing much in the way of attractions. It was picked in an attempt to quiet tribal rivalries some 15 years after the Biafran War, so politically it made sense. But geographically it made almost no sense. It is a miserable place, but the government passed a law, as did others in Brazil and in Pakistan, saying that foreign embassies would only be welcome in the new capital, and soon. That was another reason for us to go up there. The Ambassador went several times, as did the Administrative Counselor to pick a site. Then we had to get FBO approval of the site, and to have a design, all long before any move could be made. Burt Moore was the Administrative Counselor. He had been one of the hostages in Tehran, you may recall.

*Q: Was also moving to Abuja designed to get away from the mess of Lagos?*

GRIFFIN: I suppose so. It was becoming an almost impossible place to live, especially in terms of daily crime. Not that there would be much less eventually in Abuja, but the Nigerians who first moved to Abuja were people with paying jobs. They were not part of the downtrodden, jobless criminal class that inhabits Lagos. But even they camped out in pretty primitive shanty towns, unlike foreign workers who had air-conditioned trailers. Crime wasn't so bad there at first, but tensions existed. Once in Enugu, the capital of Ibo-land, I heard dozens of horror stories about the Yoruba. I think it was Lord Frederick Lugard who, when Governor General of Nigeria in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, called the Yoruba the most venal people on Earth. Some of them today

try to prove it. The Ibos are the smallest of the big tribes. Some colleagues who served there in the 1960s say they were the most put-upon. There are many smaller tribes as well, and tribal rivalries remain a problem.

Another reason I liked to go by road was because Nigerians have a terrific sense of humor. One thing that distinguishes West Africa from East Africa is culture. East Africa has animals. West Africa has a lot of fine ancient art, and they love music. That's where, of course, jazz has its roots. So it was fascinating in that regard. West Africans also have an uproariously good time. They love to tell and make jokes. Nigerians can twist the English language in hilarious ways, better than the English themselves, and *double entendres* are a fine art. There are thousands of signs for small businesses, such as barber shops or food stalls, which are uproariously funny. You should see some of the garish statues. I always took plenty of photographs.

*Q: Commercial-wise, did the division in the tribes cause special consideration?*

GRIFFIN: When I arrived, Shehu Shagari, a Muslim Hausa from the north, was President. The Yoruba are the largest tribe, and the most capitalist. They complained loudly about the northerners who, they claimed, didn't understand Yoruba or international business. But it was easier for Americans to deal with non-Yorubas, because they tended to be more straightforward and cheat less than the others. Ibos were nicer to deal with, but they had less money, so there wasn't much business there. My staff spent a lot of time in the north, especially in Kaduna and Kano, at trade shows trying to push major American products. We tried to go where the money was.

*Q: How did the money flow? The oil companies, whom were they paying?*

GRIFFIN: Well, they pay taxes to the Government, and a percentage of all production to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company, or NNPC, which at that time was under the Ministry of Finance. Those organizations watched the oil companies carefully, because that's where most of the Government's revenue came from. The oil companies certainly make big profits and have to pay for their exploration and production, but Nigeria gets a good cut of it, and whoever's in charge of the Government decides where the money goes.

*Q: And then it's distributed, and that's where you're going after it?*

GRIFFIN: Well, the various economic ministries decided where much of it went, so we met with them often. But people in the southeast where the oil comes from often told us they couldn't afford to buy much from the U.S. because they weren't getting their share of the national income. Generally, that was probably true. Almost the same in the north; there's no oil up there. The current President, Obasanjo, is from a minor tribe about halfway between the Yoruba capitals of Lagos and Ibadan and the Hausa-Fulani country around Kaduna and Kano. He is fairly acceptable to everybody because he's not from one of the big tribes. But it takes guts and wits to deal with his countrymen. Nigeria has a quarter of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa, and I expect the population is over 150 million by now. It never stops growing, and Nigerians cannot be held down. They like their freedom and, somewhat like Americans, can be difficult. Everybody speaks his or her mind.

The women are sharp-tongued. They control a lot of the basic economy, but don't get much credit for it. One chief with whom I dealt was Chairman of the national Chamber of Commerce, and became Co-Chair of our binational Business Council. He had altogether seven wives, at least three of them living with him. One of them told me that he gave her no money, but allowed her to sell soft drinks out the back door of their house. So she would buy a truckload of Coke or ginger ale or something and sell it for a slight profit, which was her only money. But she told my wife that when her husband wanted that money he would take it. She said he doted on their mutual children, but at one point kicked out all the girls and kept a boy he liked best. In local markets, one dealt with very astute women, or "mamas," who run an economy of their own. If you try to negotiate with them, a man will generally lose. They must be sharp to survive in that environment. But trying to find a business woman in corporate offices or at the head of a major firm was almost impossible. Businesses that could buy serious American equipment were all fronted by men, no matter who really owned them.

*Q: What about orders on both sides? Did you get a lot of trade complaints?*

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes.

*Q: I would think there would be a lot of scams on both parts.*

GRIFFIN: Yes. One FSN's entire job was essentially focused on cleaning up such problems and negotiating trade disputes. It was discouraging, and we sometimes gave up, after realizing that there was just so much we could do. We didn't run the country. We would give Americans our list of good local lawyers, and tell them they could go to court if they wanted, or call the police. We would have to warn them that the latter approach generally hadn't worked in the past. It kept lawyers busy, and there were plenty of them around who wanted some of that business. My deputy, the Attaché who had been there longest, would complain that that wasn't part of his job. He didn't think it was the function of FCS to handle trade complaints. He argued that it should be the consular section because they were the ones to take care of people in trouble. My response was that we were the primary contact point for American business people, and must help them.

*Q: Did you get involved at all in military sales?*

GRIFFIN: We did at times, because the Ambassador wanted us to. But it was essentially a function of the Defense Attaché shop. We usually were involved in cases with dual use possibilities. For instance, we supported the purveyors of tethered balloons, which were military in origin, though the first application in Nigeria was to be civilian. It was a huge potential sale. Such aerostats, as they were called, were used in World Wars One and Two by lookouts spotting German planes in the UK. And they were used in Florida by the Coast Guard watching for Cubans and smugglers. It was one of our major projects.

*Q: Must have been a large amount of radar inside the thing.*

GRIFFIN: Yes, the gondola could hold a lot. But the proposed application in Nigeria was for television broadcasting. They also thought of using one to lift heavy equipment to Abuja because

the roads were so bad. But neither proposal took off. I never really thought it would, because of the expense. The vendor was a subsidiary of Westinghouse, whose Africa representative was David Miller, who became Ambassador there later on. After I left, the economy went downhill and it became tougher for us to do business. But during my time, business was booming, and people on both sides of the Atlantic made lots of money.

One thing that I did with my award money was to buy a boat. A good way to maintain one's sanity in that very crowded city was to go "up the creek." It was quite a popular thing to do. It meant that, on Saturday or Sunday, we would get in our boat and cruise through the port and up an inland waterway. Some of our friends had beach houses, so we would go in our boat to visit them. It was a little dangerous at times because of piracy. Local thieves would sometimes try to come after us, especially if they thought we had money, so we tried never to take any. They were also after cameras, jewelry and watches, but our boat was faster than those of most of the pirates. Over time the harbor became clearer because there was a lot less international traffic, but then the pirates multiplied.

Then there was the wonderful story involving the Nigerian Navy. The Embassy had a beach facility near the main entrance to Lagos harbor, but it had fallen into disrepair. DCM Don Gelber, after crime got worse, suggested that our community association put some money into it. All it needed was some repair carpentry and paint. Christina was on the committee, so we helped the effort. It had a nice little beach, where we could go swimming and water skiing. Not quite as nice as the private places up the creek, but most people couldn't afford those. It was on a little inlet off the harbor, not on the ocean side. One day we were told by an armed guard that we couldn't walk to the ocean beach because of a military operation. It turned out that Nigeria's brand new, and only, frigate had been steaming into Lagos harbor. Somehow it missed the harbor entrance, and ran aground. The whole ship was out of the water, so it must have been moving at full speed.

*Q: It's not a small ship.*

GRIFFIN: It was not the biggest warship afloat, but as the whole thing was out of the water, it really had to be moving, though it was probably high tide, too. The Navy was very embarrassed, and didn't want anyone, especially the press, to find out about it. Of course, the press found out within hours and were all over the story. Many people went out and took pictures. It prompted some of them to repeat the old "WAWA" comment – "West Africa wins again." Almost everyone in West Africa says it when something goes wrong.

*Q: Was this a place of African hands?*

GRIFFIN: To a certain extent. But there were people who had served all over. Tom Pickering was an Africa hand, in a way. His first post was in Dar Es Salaam, but he hadn't had another tour in Africa, as far as I know. Before Lagos, he had been Ambassador to Jordan and Israel. The political officers had mixed backgrounds. Several of the economic officers had served in other oil-producing OPEC countries outside of Africa. DCM Wes Kreeble had been in Africa before, but I don't think Don Gelber, who came after him, had.

*Q: What was your impression of Nigeria and its absorption of all this money? I'm talking about the time you were there.*

GRIFFIN: It was clear that some people were having a party that had to end before long. The money was flying around in ways that could not be sustained, especially as corruption got out of hand, which, of course, it did. I told you about the Embassy fire. There were many other fires. We estimated that there was at least one major fire every month in Nigeria. Mostly in places containing records that some people did not want made public. For example, the headquarters of the National Oil Company, NNPC, caught fire mysteriously as an investigation began into corruption in the oil patch – surprise! We flew in a portable power station from the U.S. when the national radio and television center burned up. That cost the U.S. Government a lot of money, but we managed to patch it together in the name of friendship and national security. The Foreign Ministry caught on fire just after the fire at the Embassy. In the press, fingers were pointed in all directions, casting blame.

Ambassador Pickering personally oversaw the firefighting at the Embassy. He was charging about outside in the dark, and stepped into a ditch and fractured his ankle, but didn't quit. Two or three days later I accompanied him to the Foreign Ministry. The office of the Minister was on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor, but because of their fire the elevators didn't work. Tom practically ran up 13 floors without flinching or even breathing hard. I was huffing and puffing, and I was in perfect shape. That said, it was not a good idea to ride those elevators even if they did work because they were always jammed full of people, many of them on a joy ride. There were two places I tried to avoid elevators: Nigeria and Korea. Koreans eat kimchee, which is mostly garlic, so you don't want to be in close quarters very long.

As for where the money went: it went in a lot of pockets. There were two *coups d'état* during my tour. The Army officers who took over always used "cleaning up corruption" as their rationale, saying they would fix everything. They would declare that many government projects were phony; started just to line politicians' pockets. Those were canceled and other projects were started; mostly things that would benefit the military.

A couple of interesting diplomatic stories. Our chancery, thanks to some clever bureaucrats, was next to the Bulgarian Embassy. One of the most dedicated recorders of our fire was a cameraman at that chancery. Our communications vault was in a corner closest to the Bulgarians. Both embassies had lots of antennas. After the fire, the FCS office was moved to that side of the building, as we were one of the least sensitive sections. Two doors past the Bulgarians was the Indian chancery and residence. The Indian Ambassador, because of my history, refused to speak to me. He would dodge away across the room at large receptions, and turn on his heel if I got too close. But his wife was the sister of India's national tennis champion, who was a friend of ours in Calcutta. A couple of weeks after we arrived in Lagos, I asked someone where to get a haircut. The most common answer was "Try the Indian Ambassador's wife." She ran a unisex hairdressing shop in her residence. Since I had heard of her and knew her brother, I took the bit between my teeth and called for an appointment. She signed me up, and as she was cutting my hair, she said, "I think I have heard of you." I replied that I was a friend of her brother. She seemed delighted that I knew Calcutta, and wondered if we had been in touch lately. I said, "No," and told her why, offering some of my history with her government. She said, "Oh, that's

so silly. Why did they do that?” I said, “I don’t know. Ask your husband.” After my third haircut I bumped into him in the hallway, and told him I thought avoidance was unnecessary. We should at least say hello politely. I said, “What’s been done has been done. I’m not going to assassinate you; nor you me.” He seemed to agree, and suggested that my wife and I come for dinner. An invitation never did come. Years later, I met the man we PNGed in retaliation for my being bounced from New Delhi. He, of course, was immediately made ambassador to Malawi, or some such place. He came to a conference of Indian chiefs of mission in Nairobi, and made a point of being introduced to me. He said he was delighted that I came despite our mutual history, because he wanted to meet me. He said, “Thank you for helping my career.”

**NICOLAS ROBERTSON**  
**Office of African Affairs, West Africa, USIA**  
**Washington, DC (1981-1984)**

*Mr. Robertson was born and raised in California and educated at the University of California. Joining the Foreign Service of the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1978, he served abroad as Public Affairs and Cultural Affairs Officer in South Africa, Barbados, Argentina, Nigeria, Ghana and Venezuela. In his Washington Assignments, Mr. Robertson dealt primarily with West African matters. Mr. Robertson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*

ROBERTSON: At that time I thought I might do something else. In South Africa, I’d had wonderful times and done things that I’m still delighted to have done but I hadn’t really found anything in the Foreign Service that really, per se, interested me or grabbed me, emotionally and intellectually. That came later. And Barbados we had good programs, all the standard USIA programs well funded, but West Indians know the U.S. so well. Americans come to the West Indies in such numbers; you’re not a key player there. There was nothing I was doing there that was really grabbing me; that really came when I went back to Washington and ended up with a job in the Office of African Affairs in 1982. And that’s when all this began to come together, all the exciting stuff you could do in the world with USIA. I was working on West African stuff, Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and I walked in there, everybody was very busy. Bob Gosende called me in. I didn’t know him then, and he had a very intimidating presence if you didn’t know him. A wonderful and brilliant man, who later became ambassador to Somalia and took the hit for the failure there. He called me in, and said “I hear good things about you. Okay, your job’s simple; you just have to know everything that’s going on in Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. I’ll call you when I need you. Call me if you can’t figure stuff out on your own. Have a good day.”

And I took him seriously so I read and memorized everything. At this time we still circulated cables by paper so I’d get this overflowing inbox of cables – including everything, administrative, like we’ve just sent five boxes of this or that, five boxes of books, or increased some allotment, or approved some travel. I started taking notes on everything. I took him quite literally and you know, in addition to reading everything I could on the countries themselves I felt I had to know how many books they had in their libraries, how many people visited on an



average day, the replacement schedules for furniture and autos. He wasn't really expecting me to do that but he was glad I did it. And that was when all of a sudden I found a job where making these connections between U.S. people and institutions and some Africans; gee, you could do really important stuff.

The Nigerians had set up this crazy federal government; they didn't really know how it worked. And I thought the best thing you could say about U.S. Government information programs is that the Nigerian government, when they got oil rich, decided to buy from the State Department, and USIA, all these programs. They had this monster Fulbright program where the Nigerians just said you bring them, we'll pay them. Every elected official in Nigeria was sent over here for some kind of familiarization visit in Washington and the state capitals. The Nigerians think this USIA stuff is so good they're going to pay for everything themselves. Dealing with Nigeria wasn't easy and there were a lot of slip ups. But it was exciting. Nigerians wanted to see how a federal system works. They never learned.

Ghana was a different story at that time, a very nasty Jerry Rawlings regime with a surprising level of support and understanding from the Reagan Administration. And I think when you're looking for real success stories for U.S. diplomacy you have, in Ghana, this continuation of a fairly constant line - get your economic house in order and build a democratic system. And administration, through administration, ambassador after ambassador, everybody followed the same script and it worked.

*Q: Yes. Well did- What sort of things were you doing, besides absorbing all the information?*

ROBERTSON: Well, we had General Doe's visit to Washington; funny.

*Q: Who was General Doe of Liberia? How was- What were you getting from people who had to deal with him?*

ROBERTSON: Well, you had a bizarre success story in that he took power in this crazy episode, killed a lot of people; very bloodthirsty.

*Q: Yes, the episode on the beach was well, you know, sent shudders-*

ROBERTSON: Yeah, Sergeant Doe's Beach Party everybody called it. And of course he killed people who were well connected in the U.S. through the Fraternal Organization of the Masons and all this kind of stuff. I think his initial inclination probably would have been to look to Libya and he was sort of weaned off that. We had this long historical relationship with Liberians - much more important to them than to us, obviously - and a very able team at the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia worked with Doe to, well, make him look almost presidential. The problem with that was we ended up with an impossible relationship with him - you know, we had responsibility for him but we couldn't make him do anything.

*Q: Yes.*

ROBERTSON: Doe came to Washington; not many African leaders had been on the schedule

then. There was a reason for keeping Doe on our side, it's not hoping to create some order.

*Q: Voice of America.*

ROBERTSON: Voice of America, Omega transmissions for navigation before GPS (global positioning system for satellites); the State communications stuff. So we had genuine interests in Liberia, aside from the humanitarian ties and the historical ties and the personal ties. So we wanted this visit to go well. There were people in the embassy in Monrovia who wanted to make this a big public event. It was a different point of view. If you had seen Doe from 1980 to 1982 you saw a guy who was better than he promised to be at the outset. He was better than many people thought he could be. He calmed down after the initial slaughter but he still wasn't ready for prime time. And we had people in Monrovia who wanted to make this a big story and those of us who lived in Washington, figured, ah, if anybody finds out that this is "our guy" now we're dead. I mean, you know, you want to keep our relationship with Doe off the front page, which we succeeded in doing for four days in Washington. Until a woman on "The Washington Post" sidled up to Doe at a reception and made an arrangement to speak to him later and then she got a real story out of him for the Style section. Fortunately, that morning Doe and his entourage had already left town to visit the Firestone headquarters in Ohio. The media conflagration was containable...

One funny episode was that we were all joking about finally inviting an African head of state with a name that President Reagan could pronounce, because the President had some problems with previous heads of state. At that time, we had a closed circuit TV system in USIA and State for all this stuff like the Rose Garden ceremony. We were sitting around with a bunch of the Liberian press and those Liberians officials in the entourage who did not rate the White House.

So we are sitting around the TV, watching this moment that was such a big deal for the Liberians. We're all sitting there and President Reagan said, "I would like to introduce my good friend, General Samuel K. Moe." And we all fell over laughing. I mean just, of all the things to go wrong, so we had to edit that feed before we sent it back. Gosh, I'd forgot, you know, how different all this telecom stuff was at that time. I remember booking satellite feeds; you had to book a two stage link, where we sent it to Europe via our NTSC television system, and then it was converted to the European PAL system, and then retransmitted to Africa. Actually, that led to another funny episode with the Doe visit. Worried about the Doe entourage in Middle America – Ohio – on their own, the Embassy in Monrovia wanted to assign a USIS officer to join them as the Liberian press officer. That was, of course, illegal according to the USIA charter about not broadcasting or publishing in the U.S., as well as being a genuinely bad idea from the point of USIA and the individual officer if journalists figured that we were providing Doe's spokesperson. The officer assigned was African American, a great officer, and as soon as she got the phone call suggesting that she join the Liberians as press officer she came into the office and we put our heads together to figure out how to kill the idea without pissing off the Ambassador. We explained that it was cheaper, and faster and more reliable to put her on the plane to Monrovia with this all-important tape of Doe in Washington rather than do all of the uplinks and downlinks and risk complete failure from the Liberian crew at the ground station over there. So Charlene Duline set out for Dulles with the tape in hand – with the President's mistake edited out - and we all shared a profound feeling of relief that disaster had been avoided.

I think the best job I ever had in the Foreign Service I got out of that office, which was road manager for a blues band on a seven week tour of Africa. I went with the Johnny Copeland band in September of 1982.

**LEON WEINTRAUB**  
**Political Officer**  
**Lagos (1982-1984)**

*Mr. Weintraub was born and raised in New York City, educated at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and the Universities of Pittsburgh and Wisconsin. After service in Liberia with the Peace Corps he entered government service, first with the Navy Department and then with the State Department Foreign Service. His service in Washington and abroad involved him with a variety of countries and issues including African Affairs, International Organizations, Narcotics and Peace-Keeping operations in Africa. His foreign posts were Bogotá, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Quito and Geneva. Mr. Weintraub was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.*

*Q: Well then, in '82 where did you go?*

WEINTRAUB: We were transferred to embassy Lagos. We had a home leave, of course. Arrived in Lagos, I'm not sure when, probably late August or early September. I remember people in embassy Israel were kind of surprised I put this high on my bid list and in fact I was fairly happy about being assigned to embassy Lagos. Embassy Lagos had a pretty strong reputation of being one of the more undesirable posts in the Foreign Service but with my previous background -- Peace Corps volunteer in Liberia, doctorate research in Sierra Leone, some African area studies types of courses at the undergraduate and graduate level -- I wanted to get back to Africa. As I mentioned earlier, I had not accepted the offer for my first assignment to be kind of the ambassador's executive assistant in Freetown, Sierra Leone, but I thought if one was going to go back to Africa, one wanted to go back to the 900 pound gorilla in the neighborhood. And if you were going to be in West Africa and you wanted someone to pay attention to what you were doing in addition to the desk officer, this was the place to be. So I was quite happy with that assignment.

*Q: You were there from when, from '82 to when?*

WEINTRAUB: '82 until the summer of '84. It was a summer transfer cycle, from '82 to '84.

*Q: What was your job?*

WEINTRAUB: I think I had a very good assignment. I was one of the officers in the political section. I had main responsibility for the internal politics, the political parties and the legislature. This was a time after a number of coups in Nigerian history. There had been elections in 1979.

The first of the military coups was in '66, then there were a succession of coups, one following pretty closely after another. Finally in 1979 the then-military ruler – who in fact is the current president of Nigeria right now, Obasanjo – presided over elections. There were elections in '79 and we went there in '82. So this was a window in Nigeria's long and checkered history when there was a democratically elected government; whether the elections were free and fair is another subject. But they were operating under a government with an elected president and a parliament. So I went there to follow human rights, the legislature and the political parties.

*Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?*

WEINTRAUB: The ambassador when I got there was Mr. Pickering. Tom Pickering was our ambassador.

*Q: What- how would you describe the situation? You said there had been a freely elected president and all. How would you describe sort of the situation politically and economically in Nigeria at that time?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, there had been, as I recall in the late '70s and early '80s, there had been a significant downturn in the price of oil. By this time oil was accounting for, I believe, over 90 percent of Nigeria's export earnings, so the government was kind of in a funk, economically. Things, expenses had to be cut. One heard endless stories, particularly from those in the economic section working on the commercial end, of all the rampant bribery and corruption in Nigeria and these were consistent with everything else you'd ever heard, so you had no reason to suspect it was not true. Similarly in the government's awarding of contracts, in almost anything that took place in the political sphere, one was met with a lack of transparency and things that were not going too straight.

Apparently, in order to control the use of foreign exchange, most goods were imported under import licenses and when one wanted to import certain goods one had to apply to the central bank to purchase hard currency in order to pay for your imports. So this created a position where people could be, in economic terms, "rent seeking." So what I mean by that is typically when these licenses for importing certain equipment were prepared or given, word was that the majority of licenses went to politicians. They controlled the licenses for imports. And then what they did is any legitimate businessman who in fact wanted to import - whether it was construction equipment, electrical equipment, heavy machinery, automobile parts - whatever it may have been, a legitimate businessman would have to go to the politician who had the license and enter into a kind of partnership deal where the politician would be the silent partner, if you will, who would get a certain percent of the business just for allowing the license to be used. And there were apparently endless ways in which the politicians would work the system.

Obviously, our advice, of course, was to open the economy, a free market economy was the best way for the country to prosper, but it was apparent that a lot of people were not so much interested in the country prospering as in themselves prospering. So there were all kinds of stories always about licensing and contract competition in a way that favored those that had, favored those who already were part of the elite structure.

*Q: Well, just in the last few days the former king of Saudi Arabia Fahd died and one is struck by they had a controlled system in Saudi Arabia that at the same time it delivered a hell of a lot to the people but you know, I mean, universities, clean cities, all sorts of things. And then you look at Nigeria where I've never been there but I'm told that very little got delivered really to the people and I mean really mostly ended up in the pockets of the crooks.*

WEINTRAUB: Well, the, you know, the comparison is that in certain other countries that were characterized by corruption, things got done but they got done at 50 percent over the cost of what they should have been done. So bridges were built, roads were built, the corruption was that the inflated prices that went into the pockets of certain people. Nigeria was the worst system where you had the corruption, you had the payoff but things never got done. So a construction company backed by a politician would get the contract, they'd buy a certain amount of equipment, start a certain amount of the project and then suddenly the business would go bankrupt and the funds would be gone. And this type of pattern was repeated over and over and over. I mean, this is how that kind of corruption compared to corruption in other places.

*Q: Well, one of the things that anybody, I mean, it used to be sort of within the Foreign Service and international community but now taking to the use of the Internet, the multitude of ways that, taking Nigerian immigrants and people in Nigerian can manipulate systems, banking systems, the Internet, what have you, as scams, to get money out of people and deliver nothing, is renown, and in Nigerian, Nigerians, you know, if you see a Nigerian you want to zip up your wallet. Was that the feeling when you were there?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, there was a saying within the expatriate community at the time that the way to make a small fortune in Nigeria is to start out with a large fortune. The Nigerians are just very industrious, very energetic, very intellectually active and bright; in a way they got a tremendous inheritance from the British when they left, they left fairly good universities in a number of places within Nigeria; a reasonably educated and intelligent civil service, particularly at the middle and senior levels; good professional people; good and capable people in the law, in medicine; good business people.

As I said, most of the other countries in that part of the world West Africa, are much smaller in size, much smaller in population, and less well-endowed with natural resources. Those other countries if I may use a phrase, kind of know their place in the international arena. Countries like Niger or Burkina Faso, or Guinea or Sierra Leone or Togo, Ghana or even Cote d'Ivoire -- they know they play very modest roles in world events, and the politicians and the people at large tend to be more humble, more deferential, if you will, to the wishes of the international community. They tend to listen with a great deal of respect to what the United States has to say, what the UK has to say, what other major world powers have to say. They tend to rely, I believe in many cases, upon other major world powers, particularly the French and the British as the former colonial powers, as intermediaries, interlocutors, to the rest of the world, in order to get them what they need from the World Bank, from USAID, from other aid organizations. The Nigerians just have a completely different attitude. There are over 100 million people. They have a lot of petroleum. They had a good, solid commercial basis, a very good intellectual foundation that the British left behind them. And they're going to swagger around the stage, at least the regional stage if not the world stage, and humility doesn't seem to be in their vocabulary.

And it's just a shame that so much of that energetic capability or dynamism is just directed into criminal behavior or scamming activities or scheming activities. There's not enough of a desire to invest, to create jobs, to work at a job, to get your reasonable return on capital investment. Typically too many Nigerians, I believe, chose to make their money from being middle men, being a trader or being a licensor where they don't have to worry about inventory, about labor, about utilities, about expenses, about warehouses, they just have to sign on the dotted line and then allow someone else to do the work and then they get a percentage of the deal. I don't know how this happened or why this happened, I'm not in a position to explain it but it seems to me that that seemed to have been the preferred route to wealth creation in Nigeria rather than building up industries.

No doubt it was a tough business environment. The whole licensing procedure, the labor requirements -- the labor unions were very obstinate and annoying in Nigeria, almost mired in an anachronistic Third World neo-Marxist ideology where anything that the capitalists want to do was suspicious. There was a lot of Third World rhetoric. I think they were much affected by the Soviet attempts to infiltrate the trade union movement, so it was not a productive business relationship with organized labor. It was a hellish place to business. The oil companies did well. Of course, they were offshore, they were enclave economies. They just dug the wells, either offshore or onshore, laid the pipelines and sucked that stuff out of the hole in the ground and put it offshore to tankers and they weren't really an integrated part of the economy. But even then you may have known in recent years, there have been a lot of labor disputes in the Delta of the Niger River where there are a lot of oil deposits. There is a very difficult relationship between the local population and the invested companies, whether it's British Petroleum, Exxon, or Mobil.

Apparently there has been very poor investment in the local villages and people thought they were being exploited. Because the government was not doing a good job of investing in the local infrastructure, helping to clean up spills, it fell upon the oil companies to build health clinics and pay for school teacher salaries. And, I mean, it's one thing to be a good neighbor to the people where you're working and taking out the wealth, but really, I see it as usurping the role of the government. I think entities like these, whether British Petroleum or others, should pay taxes, taxes should go to the government and it should be the government's responsibility to perform these municipal services or other government services. But then whenever these companies did pay taxes to the federal government there was a carefully worked out formula in which the federal government was supposed to delegate certain amounts of money to state and local governments, but one never knew whether these funds got through. The legislative process was if anything even murkier than our own by a long shot, so once money entered the treasury of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, lord knows what happened to it, what kind of bookkeeping there was. So it's a very difficult place to do business.

*Q: Well, speaking about doing business, I mean, here you are a political officer looking at labor, human rights, was there, I mean, from your perspective, what was the political process like? A completely commercial operation or?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, a political scientist who came to Nigeria and has written about it for a

number of years, called the Nigerian process a kleptocracy. And almost everything was for sale if it wasn't nailed down and could be stolen. One heard stories all the time -- even in the universities, the university administration would get a certain amount of money that was supposed to be used to pay teachers' salaries, to equip the libraries, to equip the laboratories and somehow the funds would disappear before the money was spent in the intended fashion.

The business community is aware as possible of the environment, if they would think of making an investment, of what they were likely to get involved in. As far as the political process, elections were supposedly bought and sold, often through ballot box stuffing. There was an election when I was there in August of 1983 to elect a new government and as has happened in the past, there were widespread allegations of stuffing of the ballot boxes and other improprieties during the campaign. And finally, right on December 31, 1983, there was another military coup. So the elected civilian government lasted from roughly late '79 to late '83. And then there was a military coup. So it was a very interesting period, a challenging period. While the elected government was in power I spent a lot of time at the legislature seated in the gallery occasionally, talking to politicians, arranging for USIA (United States Information Agency) visitor programs of politicians, or some of their staffs. We were helping them to develop a capable and professional legislative reference section, something akin to the Library of Congress. The first thing the legislature did in Nigeria was vote themselves high salaries, vote themselves housing stipends, vote themselves automobiles and big offices, and they didn't really pay much attention to running the country. So we were trying to help them to create a professional legislative staff with the resources available to help the legislators. That worked for awhile until the military coup.

*Q: I would think all of this would be very discouraging to try to work in something like that because, I mean, we come in with- we've got our own problems, every country does, but a relatively orderly process and all and one in which milking the system for all the money you can get personally is anathema to any system that sort of the western mind might hook up. And, you know, if you're looking at this, were you reporting on how the system wasn't working and what was the feeling? I mean, keep plugging away or what's the point?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, you don't have to look at this as a personal mission to transform Nigeria into a replication of Switzerland or Finland with honest government. Obviously it's not going to happen. And you're not there as a secular missionary, if you will, to create and establish systems of good governance. I mean, I think some of us see it- in the best of all possible worlds - as what we might like to do. I think people deserve good governance but the Nigerians, like other people, get the system they deserve. One might say that Nigeria kept having these military takeovers of governments, kept having coups, in fact, because there was disgust with the government. And I remember in the early months of 1984, speaking to many Nigerians, many educated Nigerians, and they were not displeased, they were not displeased at all with a military takeover. They said they didn't think it would necessarily be a clean government, if you will, in our terms, but the perception was that at least the military was not endless in the avariciousness of its behavior. Yes, there would be a certain amount of corruption, but the military, as professional men, with officers in charge, knew their limits, they came from a career in the military so they particularly were not accustomed to overly lavish lifestyles individually. Sure there would be corruption for them and their families, but it would be within reason, it would be within a range that was

acceptable to the Nigerian society. But under a civilian government, I mean, you had - it seemed like every month some other region wanted to create a new state, wanted to secede from an existing state.

When I was there (1982-1984), I think there were 19 states. A number of years later, when I was a desk officer for Nigeria (1990-1992), I think there were 37 states. And the main reason, I think, and many others did as well, for this creation of more and more states, was the additional sources of patronage. Every state had a governor and a whole staff that served the governor. Every state had a legislature and a whole staff and all these people needed their housing stipends. I mean, it just replicated on and on and on. So I think most people saw civilian government as endless, endless avarice, they didn't know where it would end. Whereas in the military government you believed it had its limits and if someone exceeded those limits as defined by the military they could be subject to punishment. It wouldn't be a trial that would go on and on and on, and people would not be able to buy off the judge or influence the judge. If the military wanted to get you you'd be gotten. So most educated Nigerians were not very upset about this event, this military coup at the end of 1983.

*Q: Well, what was sort of the feeling, your own feeling and say your fellow political reporters on the situation there? I mean, it sounds almost hopeless.*

WEINTRAUB: Well, I'd say, for the most part -- look, it's their country, they're going to run it the way they want to run it. And yes, we would have visitor programs under the former USIA and we'd bring some members of the legislature to the U.S., some legislative staff, perhaps, and they'd go around on visits and they'd see how a professional legislature is run and what it looks like and then they'd go back to Nigeria. Would it do any good? Who knows, for them to go back to the same system? We'd have speakers come out to Nigeria, USIA-sponsored speakers would come to talk about things like how to run a professional government agency. And the university students who would hear these speakers would always rail at the corruption within their own system. You know, these are the idealists, and they'd want to throw out the bums, throw out the corrupt ones but, you know, typically these students wanted to get a job, they wanted to get a cushy job, they wanted to get a government job, and once they did - they could very easily be corrupted by the system.

And, you know, as a diplomat you're representing the national interests of your government, of the U.S. government. In the international arena you look for Nigerian support at the United Nations and other arenas. But at the same time, when you wrote the human rights report, obviously you spoke to NGOs, you spoke to human rights activists and you also spoke to people in the office of the attorney general of the republic, you spoke to others in positions of responsibility. You said look, this is a mandate we have to write this Human Rights Report. Here's the UN declaration of human rights, which you subscribe to, here are these other documents which should be binding on your behavior and this is the reality as we see it; we have to write it and tell it like it is. But you do your best to try to help the Nigerians help themselves as best we see fit, but you can't look at it as a personal mission to reform this society or else you're going to be knocking your head against the wall. And I don't think any ambassador would stand for that. And that's not the mission of the State Department.



*Q: Well, on the human rights side, what was happening in Nigeria while you were there?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, you know, the whole legal system was very inefficient; that would probably be the best way of putting it. A lot of the magistrates and judges were - at the highest level, at the supreme court, you had judges who were trained at Oxford and Cambridge, were members of the British Bar for a time before they came back to Nigeria, they were very respected. There were a few Nigerians who served as judges on the World Court at the Hague, at the highest level - you know, top notch people. But once you scratch the surface and went down to lower levels, things were very disjointed and you saw a very different picture. There were different levels of training for magistrates and judges, no record keeping, no supplies at offices. And then there was always, in certain areas of the country, the question of: "Do we apply Nigerian civil law or ethnic law, or local law?" Or should Islamic Sharia Law be applied in northern Nigeria?

As far as the prisons went, the administration of prisons, there was a very indifferent attitude, with little or no training for prison guards, not much expenditure in the way of prisons for rehabilitation. In another area, there were very strong laws on the books about insulting the head of state, or insulting major figures. As a result, one had to be aware of limitations, freedom of speech was not quite the same as we're accustomed to. But there was a pretty good press, a lively and generally free press. They had to be careful about overstepping the bounds, but within reason they could report on a good number of things. It was for the most part what we would call a yellow press; not overly responsible. A lot of accusations would appear in pretty drastic terms, in lurid headlines, and they were not always followed by any facts. But there were a lot of papers - kind of the like the "penny press" as they started out in the UK maybe a century or more earlier. But it was very interesting and quite disorderly. You never knew what would be happening from one day to the next.

*Q: Well, did- in a way was there a political process- talking about the time before the military took over again- was there a political process that you could follow or did much come out of the legislature?*

WEINTRAUB: The legislature was - they had to ratify certain documents, they had to pass a budget, they had to obviously pass laws. The effective bureaucracy to implement the laws, however, was generally indifferent, so laws about pensions, social security, laws about regulating economic activities, regulatory powers were only weakly enforced. For example, as written in the human rights reports which I prepared, there were certain rights on the books about the rights of labor to organize, but the labor unions in fact had little power. There was almost a complete absence of inspection of safety standards at factories or at petroleum fields. So the nature of the government as a regulatory authority was very weak. So there was a functioning government, there was a police force, but as far as government as a licensor of activities, it was either indifferent or subject to manipulation. Schools existed but there were stories one heard all the time that students in high school and colleges had to pay off their professors in order to get a passing grade.

I mean, it was a dysfunctional society in many, many ways. There were elected governors of the states, there were elected legislatures of the states and of course of the national government.

There was a foreign ministry that we interacted with. In the case of the foreign ministry, when they replied to a demarche on a UN issue in Geneva and said, "Oh yes, that's a very important issue, we'll send a note to our ambassador in Geneva to act on that," you never knew if the message would be sent or not. And then you'd get a response from our mission in Geneva and they'd say, you know, we spoke to the Nigerian ambassador several days later, he said he hadn't heard anything on this. So you never knew if anything happened as people said it would happen.

*Q: Well, how did the - both the religious division, the north Muslim and the south being Christian and Animist, I guess, and then the tribal thing, one thinks of the civil war and the Biafran thing. How did that play out while you were there?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, it was always a bit of an undercurrent. I think after the Biafran war of the late '60s, I think Nigeria did get over that, similar to the effect of the Civil War in the United States. We said well, we'll have our rivalries, we'll have our regional rivalries and competitiveness, but let's not live through that again. I think there was a general feeling that that was not going to happen again. But the religious differences were still pretty strong, as I mentioned, with the influences of Sharia Law in the north, for example. And it still happens to this day with reports of women subject to being stoned for adultery. So it's the Muslim north, as you said, against the mainly Christian and Animist south.

Then there is the tribal rivalry between the Ibos and the Yorubas and the Hausas. At a certain level, one must admit, there was a fair amount of intermarriage - particularly among the Yoruba in the west, there was a lot of mixed marriages of Muslim and Christian. Apparently the Muslim behavior was affected by a Christian spouse, so the types of religious behavior in the north are more austere, if you will, the type of Islam was different than in the west, but there was always rivalry. And when the elections took place, the national elections in 1983, I think it was August '83, there was endless debate about the need to balance the ticket, if you will, between a northerner and a southerner. Typically it always had to have a northerner. I mean, the three old regions of Nigeria were the north, the east and the west, the north being the homeland of the Hausa, the east being the home of the Ibo, and the west being the home of the Yoruba. And you could never balance the ticket simply with east-west candidates. Of course, the north was much too large to be ignored, and a lot of the military officer corps was from the north as well. So ethnic politics, tribal politics, regional politics was always a part of the mixture, there's no doubt about that.

*Q: I realize you weren't in an economic officer, but sort of what were we telling people, Americans that came to invest there?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, as best we could, we had to tell it like it is. They were aware of this. I can follow this up a bit later when I was desk officer several assignments later with all the scams that started taking place. This was a little before that, but we had to tell the American investors - typically there were not that many uninitiated potential investors coming in; the environment was much too tough. It was mainly the oil companies, banks, insurance companies. And these people did their risk analysis and they knew the environment fairly well. Most had been there for a number of years. They probably had better inside information about the business environment than we did at the embassy; they had to deal with it on a daily basis. You didn't get, for example,

a small investor from the Midwest United States who heard about a business opportunity; that was kind of rare. So we were dealing with the big guys mainly.

*Q: Where did the money go? Was it, you know, with this corruption? Was it all heading to Switzerland or?*

WEINTRAUB: A lot of the stories that emerged after the coup New Years Eve 1983, into '84, were rife with allegations of where the money went. Supposedly a lot of it was traced to both London and Switzerland, perhaps some to the United States, I'm not sure. And I think over the years since then, some of it has been repatriated back to the government of Nigeria. There are endless legal battles between the former dictators, former politicians, the families of the politicians, endless legal wrangling of one kind or another, but apparently most of it did go abroad.

*Q: You were there, the coup happened the turn of the year basically '84, you left in '84, but for about what, about the six months you were there, what did you see happening? I mean, did the military make a difference?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, obviously there was no more legislature for me to follow since this kind of political activity was suspended. I focused more on human rights, speaking more and more with activists, speaking with the former politicians who had not been arrested. Some of them, some of the politicians I knew had been imprisoned for a few weeks, and obviously the embassy wanted to get firsthand responses from these people, concerning what they were subject to in prison and how they were treated. So since I knew a lot of the politicians I was able to meet with them when they were released and have a chat with them. Nigerians love to talk. They are generally very friendly and outgoing. So there aren't a great many secrets in Nigeria. That's one thing; it's conspiratorial, but things do come out. People there - Nigerians just are very friendly and like to talk to people.

So I followed human rights, civil society, NGOs, making do under what things were like at that time. We had a visit there of Vice President George Bush. I don't remember whether this was before or after, it was probably before the coup; I doubt whether he would have come under military government, it was probably before the coup. There was the Bar Association of Nigeria; that was one of my major contacts into civic society, the Bar Association of Nigeria. They had a human rights committee and I got to know members of the human rights committee. And we had meetings with them – and I arranged a meeting with them for Elliot Abrams, who was then State's Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, during the visit of Vice President Bush.

So it was interacting mainly with what we call now civic society and what the politicians were trying to save and nurture, if you will, the remnants of civic society. They were looking forward for the day, sometime in the future, which came many years later, when they could again have an elected government. So it was mainly maintaining contact with non-government organizations, with the labor unions, with the Bar Association, with the church, with the business community, those organizations. Obviously there were no political parties, no political organizations, but there were these organizations that were allowed to function within the society. They may even have been the beginnings of an environmental organization concerned about oil spills. So, I

mean, these were little grouplets, if you will, you wanted to nurture them in their own kind of self-government, and hope that when the time came and people could organize as a political organization, these people would have certain kind of skills that they could use in that arena.

*Q: How heavy, during the time you were there, was the hand of the military?*

WEINTRAUB: Oh, it was quite heavy during the military rule, but even during the election of the government. Apparently, as I believe is also the case in a number of South American societies as well, the military, as an institution, owns some of the armaments, depots, and armaments-manufacturing facilities, so they generate some of their own income. They own hostels and hotels as well, so the military had certain income-producing investments. In Nigeria, with its history of coups, even during the period of elected government from '79 to '83, there was always concern and anxiety about "the boys in khaki," as they used to call them, and obviously that concern was warranted because they did take over again in late '83. So the influence of the military was never far from anyone's mind.

*Q: Did the embassy go into a sort of a- I mean, did we, when the military take over did we go into an almost non-recognition or limited recognition mode or did we do anything?*

WEINTRAUB: I have to think back to that period. I think we did go through a period like that, maybe for a short period of time until we saw what kind of stability there was. I remember during the period of the coup, the immediate period of martial law, you know, there was a certain amount, a period of time without -- we didn't know who was in charge. The military was not upfront about announcing members of the council, the military council. But I don't think that period lasted very long. There was a fairly rapid acceptance by the population. There was no underground resistance and most European countries were -- well, here we go again, the Nigerians are at it again. And as I recall, within a short period of time, we -- I don't think we ever really technically suspended our relations or recalled the ambassador. So things just continued on for the most part.

*Q: Were there any other- well, what was social life like? I mean, not just under the military but in Nigeria? You're saying these were a friendly people, how did you find-?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, I loved socializing with Nigerians and I think- I always used to say I had the best job in the embassy. Other people in the embassy who interacted mainly with the bureaucrats, whether in the foreign ministry or with any other ministry of government, for the most part they were talking as professional to professional, particularly in the foreign ministry, you know, diplomat to diplomat. Whereas in the legislature, you know, you're dealing with elected politicians. Like politicians anywhere, they're all over the map; some are friendly, some are not but they're not bound by dictates, by the policy that the minister set down. Every politician, every elected politician is responsive to his or her own constituency, so if he wants to shoot off his or her mouth he can do it. So I enjoyed speaking to these people; I had a number of great discussions and conversations with them.

They all had voted themselves official flats in Nigeria or apartments. There was a block of apartments not too far from the legislature where they all lived. So whenever I had an

appointment, I generally had to visit a member at his apartment, because as best I can recall they did not each have offices in the legislature. There was an office for the speaker of the house, and president of the senate; but again, this was a fairly rudimentary parliament, without much history behind it. This was 1982, and the country had only returned to an elected government in 1979, after about 13 years of military government. Most of the members operated out of their government-furnished offices-apartments, so they set up an office in their apartment. And one could go to visit a politician in his or her apartment, have a chat, and then walk down the halls and see who else was available. In that way it was like a dorm, it was like a college dorm, and all the MPs lived together in this huge, 15 story apartment building. You never knew who you were going to run into, they all lived there. And it was kind of a collegial atmosphere. I also entertained fairly frequently. People in the legislature were easier to invite than senior government officials, so we invited a varied group of elected legislators. I often got the head of the political section to come to some of those, I got the deputy chief of mission to come, occasionally the ambassador might drop by depending on who I'd put together.

And of course with your guests being Nigerians – and this was typical with other people in the embassy as well – you never knew if they were or were not going to show up. Would they show up on time or would they show up several hours later? If married, would they show up with one wife or would they show up with several wives or no wives? One never knew, and one had to be flexible when setting the table. One never knew what one was going to end up with. And, you know, this was acceptable in their society and this was not something one needed to stand on principle about - that's the way it is and you just live with it. And so, we had a lot of very enjoyable evenings, a lot of informal discussions.

In fact, I got into a little bit of trouble with the government at one time, due to the nature of my interaction with members of the legislature. I don't recall what specifically may have generated it, but one day the embassy received a diplomatic note from the foreign ministry complaining that I was making appointments with members of the legislature directly, rather than going through the foreign ministry. It seemed apparent that legislators knew nothing of any such requirement, and the foreign ministry did not, as a rule, emphasize this as something that was a rigid rule. I don't know if the embassy ever formally responded to the note, but I think I may have had some discussion with the ambassador about it – he wanted to know if there was some particularly egregious behavior of mine of which he should be aware. I assured him I could think of no such incidents, and that was the end of the matter. But I did make sure to make a personal copy of that diplomatic note for my own records.

I don't think we developed great friendships, though, because the worlds were just very different. Typically the spouses, if the principal I was relating to was a male, as it was in most cases - often the spouses were much less educated, very often they might not speak any English, maybe they went only to a year or two of grade school. So other than this official entertainment it was hard to socialize on any extended basis. And there was not much to do in Lagos in the way of movies, in the way of artistic endeavors, in the way of cultural activities -- such as museums, theatre, cinema, restaurants; it was all very limited. So there was a fair amount of expatriate socializing.

I served on the school board. My wife served on the American Embassy Recreation Association, which worked on the commissary and related activities. So we socialized with a lot of people –

not as much from the American embassy, because you'd see those folks at work, but people from the other embassy communities. On the school board I would meet people from other ex-pat communities and other embassies. And there was a British embassy-sponsored theatrical group – groups such as these seemed to flourish all over the world. And they always put on these kind of amateur plays and it was kind of fun, they did a very good job. You could close your eyes, listen to the play, and be almost anywhere in the world. One of the European embassies, I want to say Austrian, they had a fellow who could sing excerpts from operas, and they would hold little soirees, if you will, with a piano accompanist. So there was a fair amount of socializing among the ex-pats but we did have something uniquely Nigerian, I remember, we did attend at our deputy chief of mission's home, a kind of “at home” society evening. Once a month at the deputy chief of mission's house we would invite a prominent Nigerian to be a speaker and we'd invite U.S. embassy people and people from other embassies as well and other prominent Nigerians. And one time it might be a discussion on the Nigerian economy or it might be on the traditional societies, on something else. We were trying to have a society, if you will, for a higher level of discussion. So I think that individually, and the embassy as a whole - we each tried very much to mix and pull in as much as possible, host society and Nigerian society with ourselves and with other ex-pats. It was something we had to work at.

*Q: How did external things- our South African policy, did that play much of a- was that much of an issue or-?*

WEINTRAUB: Oh yes, particularly within the foreign ministry. I would comment that the foreign ministry, like many faculty at the universities and other intellectuals, seemed to be mired in kind of a time warp with a lot of old rhetoric, a lot of tired rhetoric about neo-colonialism by American investors, British investors, the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund). The line would be that they're really just instruments of global capitalism and domination, and that we were in bed with South Africa. Let me add there was a certain amount of truth about our support for the South African government, but a lot of it was kind of stale, rehashed old rhetoric on ongoing issues, like the Arab-Israeli dispute, on South Africa, and other international areas. We were often a lot better at the ambassadorial level with the head of state, but for the most part a lot of the routine contacts I had with the foreign ministry simply produced a lot of the old, stale rhetoric of the '70s, which was kind of discouraging. But then again, the local universities that educated these people didn't have the hard currency to purchase all the newer periodicals and books, so I don't know what these people relied on. And there were typically a lot of editorials, a lot of articles in the newspaper and the media by Nigerian intellectuals. Again, these often produced a lot of stale, rehashed discussions about the Cold War and Nigeria's place in Africa, with often a very inflated sense of Nigeria's place in Africa and the world and what kind of deference and respect should be owed to Nigeria.

*Q: Was there any group that spent particular time in the Soviet Union?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, I think a certain number of Nigerians, particularly in the labor movement, had gone to Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. I think the more current intellectuals, the more dynamic intellectuals, had been educated in the West, mainly in the UK and increasingly in the U.S. The first generation of Nigerian intellectuals were, of course, those who went abroad in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, almost all of whom were educated in the UK. In the '60s and '70s more

had gone to the United States. But certain elements had gone to Moscow and other East Bloc universities on scholarships and they were still- they were in their prime. They had gone as youngsters, maybe, in the '60s and '70s and now this was the '80s and they were in their prime, and there was a lot of that type of stale Cold War rhetoric there that we had to contend with. For the most part, most of the population was pretty Western oriented. The Nigerians were so entrepreneurial, as we said earlier – not always in an honest sense of the word, but so entrepreneurially active. The idea of a socialist type of a worker's paradise didn't seem to be in the cards for them; they all wanted their own action.

**CHRISTOPHER E. GOLDTHWAIT**  
**Chief, FAS Office**  
**Lagos (1982-1986)**

*Ambassador Goldthwait was born in Georgia and raised in Illinois, New York and California. He was educated at American and Harvard Universities. Joining the Food and Agriculture Service (FAS) in the Department of Agriculture in 1973, the Ambassador served in several high level positions of the FAS in Washington, D.C. as well as in Germany and Nigeria. In 1999 he was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Chad, where he served until he retired in 2004. Ambassador Goldthwait was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.*

GOLDTHWAIT: From Germany I went to Nigeria. I was actually the head of the FAS office there. That was a pretty good-sized office for FAS because at that point in time we viewed Nigeria very much as an up and coming market. We thought it was going to be the next country to break a billion dollars in sales. It has in the meantime but it did not while I was there because the Nigerians banned rice imports for a period of time. What that means is that exports were often then directed to neighboring countries rather than directly into Nigeria, and then smuggled in, but the level of trade suffered some.

*Q: What was agriculture like in Nigeria at the time? This was like '80-'84?*

GOLDTHWAIT: That would have been '82-'86.

*Q: '82-'86.*

GOLDTHWAIT: Yeah. Agriculture there is very much like what it is today in Nigeria, it hasn't changed a whole lot. There were two structures, one was small subsistence level farming and most of the producers or farmers participate in that kind of agriculture. They grow enough for their own immediate needs and families and sell a little bit in neighboring fresh markets.

The other structure is large, what you might call plantation farms, with some mechanization, some higher employment, not a whole lot different from American farms in that regard although probably the balance between mechanization and hired help is much more in the direction of hired help on those large scale farms. They didn't tend to do very well. They had a number of

American farmers that came over and thought that they were going to introduce their own highly mechanized way of farming. Some of them spent millions of dollars trying and nearly all of them failed. There are a few large operations; some financed by World Bank loans other development agencies in the country. They've done a little better but they aren't nearly living up to the promise that they were supposed to achieve.

*Q: What was our concern? Did you find yourself overlapping with AID there or not?*

GOLDTHWAIT: Initially when I got there, there was no AID office and what little bit of work that was done developmentally in agriculture came my way. It was people like Ambassador Pickering saying, "Chris, I'm going up to somewhere upcountry tomorrow I want you to come and listen to what they are asking for and see if there is anyway we can help them." So I did a fair amount of that in the absence of an AID mission. What we could actually do without an AID mission was generally fairly limited but at least we could listen. There was probably, again because there was not an AID mission, our office was probably more directly involved with other embassy sections than had been the case in Germany.

One of the more interesting projects was getting some improved peanut seed for the head of the Nigerian Air Force. His father had a farm up country, and I met him through a business contact. He had a habit of sort of holding court with his pals over dinner when he got home from work around 5:00 p.m. in the afternoon. If I had some progress to report I would drop by at that time and join the group for long enough to bring him up to date. Eventually we got the seed peanuts from a USAID multiplication project over in the Cameroon.

*Q: What was the problem with the Nigerians...I'm not talking about the small farms but about the big ones?*

GOLDTHWAIT: The infrastructure was not available to support the level of mechanization that people were trying to apply. In other words, you had a mismatch between let's say the scale of mechanization that people thought they wanted to apply and the work that could really be supported. It was aggravated by problems with employment, equipment and spare parts for equipment, getting import licenses. In those days the foreign exchange situation was very badly skewed, the Naira was highly overvalued and what this meant was the Central bank had to ration the foreign exchange so it was difficult to pay for imports. There was no electricity outside of the capital and in Lagos it operated maybe fifty percent of the time.

*Q: Well Nigeria has a worldwide reputation for being corrupt and all. How did that play out agricultural wise?*

GOLDTHWAIT: Well it was a problem to get anything done. People had to grease palms. It helped to know important people in the country to avoid it.

*Q: Well did you get involved with...in a way what did we care about Nigeria?*

GOLDTHWAIT: Well from an agriculture standpoint it was an important market for rice initially and wheat and feed grains, and for sorghum and barley malt for the brewing industry.



*Q: Well did the corruption factor intrude on that?*

GOLDTHWAIT: It did. The rice importers all had to use corrupt methods to get their import licenses. I hesitate to say it because most of them are American owned but I suspect the flour mills found a way to do the same thing. The mechanism I think is fairly familiar. You have a local partner who handles those things; the American company doesn't have to be involved.

*Q: Yeah. How did you find working there? Was it frustrating, fun? Or what?*

GOLDTHWAIT: I found it fascinating. Initially it was quite overwhelming, it was very difficult to get anything done and as I sort of figured out how to get a few things done I found that immensely satisfying. Again I had a lot of good friends there and a lot of very good contacts some of whom I'm still in touch with. I quite enjoyed my four years there.

*Q: How did you find Nigerians as people?*

GOLDTHWAIT: Most of the people I ran into were either Yoruba or Hausa. The Yoruba are very much like New Yorkers and if you relate to them the way you relate to New Yorkers you get on just fine. It could be very enjoyable working with them and socializing with them. The Hausa, who tended to be the northern agricultural people, are quieter and reserved. You need to be very courteous and treat them with a great deal of respect.

*Q: Sounds like Norwegian farmers in Minnesota or something like that.*

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, yes and again we got on very well. I had some excellent contacts in the northern community.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the reach of the government, the Nigerian government?*

GOLDTHWAIT: The reach of the government?

*Q: I mean how they influenced and then controlled things.*

GOLDTHWAIT: Well basically you had to have government support for just about anything that you wanted to get done in the country. It was very useful to be able to relate to a few people who were well connected. I found that I did my own little thumbnail analysis of the government structure in Nigeria in those days. There were many changes of government during the time I was there. It was initially a presidential form of government, then there were two coups d'état so there were actually three different governments in that four years. What I saw was that the governing structure was what I would call a rather narrowly defined republic. By that I mean that in those days certain interest groups, certain families, certain influential politicians and tribal groups were all represented in the inner circle of each of those three governments. When the elected president was thrown out in the first coup d'état all of the ministers got fired and all their cousins and brothers and third cousins came in and took the same jobs. When the next coup d'état took place the same thing happened but the core group of the people who were influential

remained pretty much the same. It was almost like a republic in that all of these interests were balanced in each of those governments. Later there was an additional coup and one of the military dictators who came in centralized everything a lot more and behaved more dictatorially, and that system went out the window. But that was after I was gone.

*Q: Hearing a professor talk about Africa saying that, "In the United States or European countries if your government changes you lose your job and you have to move on and become something else. But in Africa," he said, "if you lose that job with the government there is nothing else to go to." So it's much more crucial to hang on or to do whatever you can.*

GOLDTHWAIT: Yeah, this is one of the reasons that I think much of our effort to promote democracy in Africa is misguided. In many of these countries there is no really independent private sector, everything is directly or indirectly dependent on the government so there is only one basis for power, which is the government, and you can't really have contested political elections with multiple political parties when none of the parties except the ruling party have resources to compete. I think that if we had focused our attention on helping a diverse group of people develop an independent basis of power and authority in the country they would get a lot further in eventually promoting democracy, rather than by insisting on a structural formula.

*Q: Who are the organizations or groups of people that you ran across in the United States who are interested in our agricultural ties with Nigeria?*

GOLDTHWAIT: It was mainly trade promotion groups. It's probably not generally known but pretty much every commodity of the major commodity has its own trade promotion group. You've got one for wheat, Wheat Associates; you've got one for food grains, called the U.S. Grains Council; you have them for rice, cotton, most of the fruits and vegetables and different groups like that. So all of those groups, not all of them but a number of them viewed Nigeria as a very important and up and coming market for their products and they would send people over there to work with me on various efforts of trade promotion.

*Q: Well did you see this given the restraints or constraints of corruption and just the Nigerian market structure and all? Did you see it as much of a place to try to sell stuff?*

GOLDTHWAIT: Because they are so food deficit they had to have a certain level of imports even with the corruption, even with trying to do things from a policy standpoint that would interfere with the trade, ultimately they still needed to import a certain amount. When I was there they were importing around a million tons of wheat a year and now they are importing two million tons of wheat a year. So somehow or other you have to have those imports to keep people fed. So a way is and what's found to keep some level of the trade flowing even if people at the top decide that they wanted to try and interfere either to get paid off or because they thought it made good policy to say well we are going to be self sufficient next year.

*Q: From what I've heard the city is like Accra and the new capital. In fact ACCRA got so...is it Accra?*

GOLDTHWAIT: Abuja.

*Q: I mean...*

GOLDTHWAIT: Abuja.

*Q: Abuja, I mean when it gets too crowded you move your capital and go somewhere else. But there must be an awful lot of people who have to be fed that aren't really able to earn enough to feed themselves.*

GOLDTHWAIT: There is a problem with unemployment and poverty in the country. The country has a lot of oil income but the distribution is very skewed so you have a lot of people that are hawking pencils in the traffic jams and that kind of thing.

*Q: At the time was there a good market for commodities?*

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, yes.

*Q: How did it go? I mean did it go with major firms who then distributed or how did it work?*

GOLDTHWAIT: In the case of most of the principal import commodities there were a handful of importers. In the case of flour there were I think four milling companies each of which had two or three flour mills in different parts of the country.

*Q: This is Tape 2, Side 1, with Chris Goldthwait. Yeah, you were saying?*

GOLDTHWAIT: There would be a handful of major importers for each of those commodities. The rice went pretty quickly into retail channels, it was not further processed, the wheat was milled, food grains were milled and barley malt and sorghum for the brewing industry went into the breweries and ultimately then into regional channels.

*Q: Well now I don't know if timing changes but I can remember there was a period when Nigeria was renown for the backlog at its port. I mean it would take two months to get a ship unloaded. I'm just making up a figure but anyway there was a tremendous problem. How did that...was that happening in your time?*

GOLDTHWAIT: That happened a couple of years before I arrived and the worse period was right around 1980 and by the time I got there the backlog had pretty much dried up. The country was having foreign exchange problems and I don't know maybe oil production had fallen off a little bit temporarily. So there wasn't the same level of imports. A lot of what had been imported was targeted for infrastructure development and a lot of that had been finished or as finished as it was going to get by the time I got there.

*Q: How about ministers of agriculture? Did you have much to do with them?*

GOLDTHWAIT: I would see the minister of agriculture several times a year and I would also see the number two person, the permanent secretary in the ministry, more frequently.

*Q: Did you have any principal points of contacts in the United States of people who were interested in Nigeria from the agriculture aspect who would come to see you all the time?*

GOLDTHWAIT: We had a sort of binational commission, if you will, of people interested in agriculture. It was something called the Joint Agricultural Consultative Committee and it had about 30 members from businesses and organizations on the U.S. side and a similar number of Nigerian participants and a few people from the government on each side. Those folks were trying to do things like joint ventures and investing in Nigerian agriculture or food processing.

*Q: How did visitors in the United States react to Nigeria when they got there? I mean coming through the airport, the city and all that?*

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, some of them were shocked because particularly the airport can appear to be very chaotic. Often times if a person had not been to the country before and I was going to be helping them I would meet them at the airport. The embassy had a certain number of passes so that we could get in beyond the counters and you could actually meet people as they were approaching through the immigration line and help them through and the people at Pan American airlines would also let us through sometimes. So we could do that and we could help people that were otherwise going to be overwhelmed.

*Q: OK, well then you left there when?*

GOLDTHWAIT: In 1986.

*Q: And where did you...we will end here for this session but I like to put at the end where we will pick up. In 1986 where did you go?*

GOLDTHWAIT: I came back to Washington.

**ROBERT RACKMALES**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Kaduna (1983-1985)**

*Robert Rackmales was born in Maryland in 1937. He graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a degree in history in 1958 and studied in Germany on a Fulbright fellowship. He also did graduate work at Harvard. In addition to Nigeria, Mr. Rackmales served in Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Italy. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 11, 1995.*

*Q: Where did you go when you left Rome?*

RACKMALES: To Kaduna.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

RACKMALES: '83 to '85.

*Q: Kaduna being what?*

RACKMALES: It was a consulate when I got there and became a consulate general a few months later. It's our only post in northern Nigeria which covers geographically about two-thirds of the country, and in terms of population, I think it's over half the population of the country.

*Q: You were what -- principal officer?*

RACKMALES: That's right.

*Q: In Kaduna, what was the political situation when you were there in '83 to '85 in Nigeria?*

RACKMALES: Well, for the first four months approximately September through December 31st of 1983, there was a civilian government in Nigeria, and civilian governors in each of the provinces. On January 1 there was a military coup. I seem to time my assignments in Nigeria to arrive with shaky civilian governments, and to witness coups. The coup was a complete surprise. We had gone out on an overnight camping with a number of the members of the British military advisory group. The British had quite a substantial group, I think they had, 40 or 50 military advisers near Kaduna training the Nigerian army. We stayed overnight, we got back early on January 1st, early in the morning and there's my vice consul waiting for me saying that radio broadcasts had announced a military coup. I said, how is that possible, I was just with the British military advisors. They were quite embarrassed about how they could have missed it since the coup was led by their present or former students. So from then until the time of our departure there was a military government which then in turn got overthrown by another faction, another military coup took place just after we left.

*Q: This northern part of Nigeria, what made it tick? Economically and tribally.*

RACKMALES: Well, of course, it's the Islamic area. The northerners were used to a much greater extent by the British as local rulers. The British tended in the southern part of Nigeria to establish a more direct rule, meaning that Britishers had the key administrative positions. When they conquered northern Nigeria, they felt that the northern administrative tribal structure lent itself to their playing a much more indirect role. So they would give the northern Emirs and other rulers a lot of leeway in running matters. So the north felt that they had, compared to southerners, much more of a tradition of rule, and the history of Nigeria has largely revolved around southern reactions to northern attempts to call all of the shots in the whole country. This north-south rivalry has basically triggered all of the coups because the army has tended increasingly to be dominated by the northerners. So that's kind of a long way to answer your question.

*Q: What sort of relations did you have when you first arrived with the civilian government?*

RACKMALES: Quite good. I should preface that with a brief description of my actual arrival

because that, I won't say set the tone, but I got off literally with a bang as the result of an explosion that occurred while we were in the air between Lagos and Kaduna. The consulate was installing a new fuel tank for the generator in the back of the house and the workers managed to blow up the tank. Three people were killed, two of them consulate employees, the third was the welder who was actually doing the welding. The house burned down, so it was a difficult arrival but we got full support from the local authorities, including from the representative of the Nigerian security service which is usually quite secretive and only would meet with designated liaison people. There was no problem with any anti-Americanism. They were primarily concerned, at that time, with their election process, which turned into one of the factors that helped precipitate the coup that took place the end of December. Just prior to the coup we had the up-grading of the post and the move...

*Q: From consulate to consulate general?*

RACKMALES: That's right, and also in that same period in my first four months I was concentrating on moving us out of the building that we had been in since the consulate opened which was in terrible shape. Some FBO people came and said it was the worst Foreign Service facility they had ever seen. There were enormous cracks in the walls, it was a bad location. All of the services were in terrible shape. I had been asked by the African Bureau to see if I couldn't do something to break the impasse that had lasted for five years of trying to get out of that property. So that is what I was heavily focused on in those first months, and I did succeed and we inaugurated our new consulate building I think literally days before this coup. It was in December, so between September and December we were focused heavily on these administrative tasks and moving the building. And then we had an entirely new group to deal with. The governor was fairly approachable, the new military governor, but everybody was extremely nervous and uncertain for a number of months, and a lot of things had to be put on hold.

*Q: What was your impression of a Nigerian type military rule at that time because some military rules are one way, and some are quite another. How did you find the Nigerian form at that time?*

RACKMALES: Well, being in Kaduna, a northern city where a number of the leading businessmen, and others, were in fact close to the people who had carried out the coup, and somewhat sympathetic to the coup. I suspect the reaction to the coup was very different if you were in Lagos, Ibadan or in Enugu. I think there was a feeling that the civilians would be able to influence the military there. This would be a transitional period, and that it would redound to the benefit of at least that region. I didn't find many people there in Kaduna who were saying, isn't this terrible. And also since there was not a great threat emanating to the new leadership from that area, it was probably less harsh in terms of the impact on the population. But I think that as months wore by, there was more and more a grumbling about the military leadership which was eventually, as I mentioned, overthrown in 1985, and you began to see signs of a kind of paralysis, and stagnation. So the elite of Kaduna, the business elite, and some of the religious leaders were becoming more and more openly restive about military rule. The Nigerian army is a lot better at seizing power than in figuring out what to do with it after they have seized it.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?*

RACKMALES: Tom Smith.

*Q: How did he operate as far as your relations with him?*

RACKMALES: We had excellent relations. I had worked with Tom in Nigeria in my first assignment. Tom was the number two in the economic section, and we got along quite well. He was an excellent ambassador, traveled frequently to the north. We were always delighted when he and Jane came to stay with us. He had an excellent manner with the northern Nigerians. They appreciated his dignity, his bearing was very sympathetic to the northerners. I think they looked forward to and welcomed his visits as did I.

*Q: Did we have anything such as Peace Corps, AID projects in your area?*

RACKMALES: We had cut off aid, including Peace Corps in the 70's when Nigeria's oil revenue started rolling in in a major way. So our AID mission was essentially eliminated. I don't recall if there was one person there from AID who was more of a regional person. There may have been a tiny AID office, but there were no AID programs to speak of, and there was no Peace Corps.

*Q: How was the oil revenue working when you were there? Was it getting to the north, or what was happening?*

RACKMALES: They had used it to build a good road network, much better than when we were there, but for the most part it was squandered either on showy buildings, or simply going into peoples' pockets and then out into offshore bank accounts. And you would still find even after these tens of millions of dollars of oil and revenues had flown in, you would still travel into villages and see terrible poverty and no sign that the poor were receiving any benefit at all from this, except that it was easier to get there because of the roads.

*Q: What was your major job besides getting yourself re-housed, which is always a problem, but as far as American interests there.*

RACKMALES: We had a trade fair. It was actually the largest in Nigeria, and we had a full-time commercial officer. So promotion of commercial activity was one of our primary tasks, but that activity dropped off considerably following the coup. Reporting on the political situation, our other primary task, also became more difficult. Even though the governor would always see me, getting him to speak frankly was hard and his civilian aides were pretty much, I think, kept in the dark. The Nigerian military do not put a lot of confidence, at least on sensitive matters, in their civilian staffs. So it was difficult to get inside information. Probably our best sources were again, some of the business elites who had dealt with westerners before. Many of them had spent years in the UK, or the United States, knew the west and although they were not necessarily privy to inside thinking they usually had some access to these people and could give us some of their impressions. So that was helpful.

*Q: Was Islam a major factor in your area? I'm talking about from a political point of view because fundamentalism has become quite a concern of ours. How about it in Nigeria at that*

*time?*

RACKMALES: Well, again, I would differentiate between the civilian period when I think the role played by the Islamic leadership was to undermine confidence in the secular political process. So indirectly, I'm not saying that they directly encouraged the military to take over, but in terms of public attitudes they helped lay the groundwork for a reaction against civilian rule. Anything that would threaten in their view the Islamic character of their area of Nigeria, they would be strongly opposed to. So any kind of a multi-party system they viewed with great suspicion. During the period of the military leadership there were indications that some of the military leaders were close to some of the senior religious leaders, but how that played out was hard to say. And I had the feeling that for the most part the military were calling the shots themselves, and not relying heavily, but would pay deference to the more prestigious of the religious leaders.

*Q: Could you make contact with the religious leaders?*

RACKMALES: Yes. I would call regularly, for example, on the Emir of Zaria who was the most influential leader in the area near Kaduna. The person who was the preeminent religious leader for all of northern Nigeria was in his 80s, if not 90s, and extremely ill throughout the period I was there. He took a long time dying, and that was one of the factors that reduced somewhat the influence of religion because there was a vacuum there at the top. He was moribund, and everyone else was jockeying for position to see who would replace him.

*Q: You left there when?*

RACKMALES: The summer of '85.

*Q: Were there any other events that may have happened then that I haven't hit on?*

RACKMALES: There was some inter-communal violence that took place. Again, there was a history of inter-communal violence in Nigeria between northerners and southerners, and there was one episode of that that took place I think in '85, shortly before we left. Beyond that, no, I think we've covered the main trends. It was a period that began the steady deterioration that Nigeria has seen to this day. Nigeria today is a country that we no longer have good relations with. It's a country that continues in a state of political stagnation and paralysis, and that process really got underway in that period in '85. So we were basically frustrated observers of that. We had no particular levers to use to improve the situation. We had no AID programs as I mentioned, and we would report on what we saw, what was going on, but there wasn't a lot we could do.

**THOMAS R. HUTSON**  
**Regional Consular Officer**  
**Lagos (1983-1985)**



*Thomas R. Hutson was born in Nebraska in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska in 1962 he served in the US Army from 1962-1967. His career has included positions in Teheran, Belgrade, Winnipeg, Moscow, Lagos, Taipei, Belgrade, Bishkek, and Mazar-e-Sharif. Mr. Hutson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in April 1999.*

HUTSON: For people in my situation, the first assignment had to be one that "was hard to fill."- i.e., a job no one else wants. In my case, that was the position of regional consular officer in Lagos, Nigeria. That turned out to be one of the best jobs I ever had. I was there for 2 years until 1985.

*Q: What was the situation in Nigeria at the time?*

HUTSON: The country was filled with hope. It was to be the leading democracy in Africa and was to be the model that others would have to follow. The governmental structure was similar to ours and the hope was that would also catch on in Africa.

I arrived in June after a brief brush-up in French, which I needed since my responsibilities were regional and covered some French speaking countries. A new set of elections were scheduled in Nigeria for August. I became very involved in that particularly in light of my experience with the American Council of Young Political Leaders - an organization that sponsored young Americans politicians to visit foreign countries to observe elections. In fact, the head of the Democratic representatives in the Pennsylvania state legislature came out to observe the Nigerian elections - at his own expense. Unfortunately, there was very little that was democracy left after those elections. The military took over the government on December 31 of that year, expelling the elected officials. They ran the country until General Olusegun Obasanjo was elected as president.

Nigerian oil had produced unprecedented resources for the state. That allowed Nigeria to send huge numbers of students to the U.S., for advanced studies. They had beautifully printed scholarships awarded to them by the Nigerian state governments. Unfortunately, in many cases, these documents were primarily decorations because they had no money to support the awards. There is a wonderful book "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe. He has written a number of books many of which emphasize the importance of a young Nigerian being sent by his or her village for an education. The future of that village is placed on that young person's shoulders. These young people had to succeed. No excuse would do, even if there was no money behind the elaborate scroll given to the youngster. The American colleges and universities kept these students as part of their communities hoping that eventually some money would come. It didn't. The whole enterprise ended up as an enormous fraud perpetrated by some Nigerians who could not bear to return to their villages without that education for which they had left their homes. Lots of fraud was perpetrated to keep these young Nigerians in school.

*Q: I had a classmate of mine who was a banker in Baltimore who told me that one practically had to keep your hand on your wallet when a Nigerian came into your office. They had become real experts at gathering money from banks, individuals, institutions, etc. They were miles ahead of any other criminal.*

HUTSON: Right and they still are. I just came from Houston which has a large Nigerian

population. It is almost unbelievable what you hear about those people's activities.

In the mid-1980s, Tom Pickering was the ambassador. It was the first time I had ever worked for him. I found him to be an utter disaster as ambassador - although we overlapped only for a few months. He didn't know how to relate with people. He didn't know and seemed not to care.

He was very nice to me. In addition to being a regional consular officer, I was also supposed to reopen the consulate in Enugu. He never asked the Nigerian's blessings; he just said that that was what we would do. Of course, the Nigerians did not agree. The military was even less forthcoming than the civilian government. They eventually shattered all the high hopes for Nigeria. We tried to put the best possible face on the elections - we are good at that. We believe that any election is a "good" one - it moves "democracy" forward. It ain't necessarily so. I witnessed many similar election disappointments in Bosnia since my Nigerian tour.

A good friend of mine was consul general in Lagos. He convinced Pickering to approve a visa-management policy which called for the issue of visas to all Nigerian applicants who were not demonstrably ineligible thereby turning the law on its head. But it became the policy for our visa operations in Nigeria. I had about a one month's overlap with this friend. He didn't want to hear about all the fraud the Nigerians were perpetrating in the U.S. There had been a fire in the embassy. The department had instructed the post to keep NIV applications not for only one year, but for five in light of the extensive fraud in the process. This friend of mine refused to do so using the excuse that the fire had reduced the amount of space available and that therefore was no storage space for such a large file. I think in fact that they could have accommodated the department, but he and Pickering just didn't want to have evidence of this fraud in their compound. It is a lot easier to issue a visa than to deny one.

*Q: What was your job? How did you manage to serve in 12 countries?*

HUTSON: I was the deputy chief of the consular section of the embassy in Lagos and the regional consular officer for 12 countries. Joan Clark was the assistant secretary for consular affairs at the time. She was very interested in this regional approach. There were five regional jobs, to the best of my recollection: Nairobi, Dakar, Lagos, Johannesburg and Kinshasa. The job turned out to be a lot of fun. I had been away from consular work for an extended period, so that I had some catching up to do.

The posts that I serviced were primarily staffed by Agency personnel. Some took their responsibility to represent the U.S. government very seriously; others were much more interested in their narrow Agency responsibilities. I think my availability to these twelve posts was a useful function. I got to travel to Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroons, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea. It was a wonderful opportunity to see all of these places. Sierra Leone was my favorite African country - the most African country I had ever seen. Now of course it is a disaster area, rendered by strife and turmoil. But then I could read for the first time, Graham Greene's "The Heart of the Matter" in settings described in the book.

*Q: But what was your job? Was it to give advice or to actually issue visas?*

HUTSON: I had a different approach to the job than my predecessor did. He had had good support from the consul general, but he had some difficulties. He ran into some difficulties, particularly in Ghana, where he encountered a generally recalcitrant consular officer, who did whatever he pleased. He was an embarrassment. This officer should have been sent home. My predecessor, with the support of his consul general, sought that the officer in Ghana found greener pastures, but the department did not take any action.

This officer would issue U.S. passports from 3-5 p.m. on Fridays - only! An applicant who might have come in on Monday would have to wait for five days. Passport issuance in those days was not a very difficult job; it should have been taken care of immediately. But the officer said it was more efficient to wait until Friday afternoons.

He had another quirk: he would not issue visas to any Ghanaian citizen. There may have been a few exceptions, but his attitude toward Ghanians became well known. I took a different approach: instead of trying to get him moved, I tried to work with him. I offered my advice, as I did in the other 11 countries as well. I didn't file efficiency reports on the people I worked with; I told the officers what my views were. I saw my role as one of assistance, not supervision. I think my approach worked well. I did what I would have found useful had I been in the shoes of those consular officers in these twelve countries.

The guy in Accra was less than a success. He made sure he would not be in country when I arrived in Accra. I couldn't even sneak in; he would just disappear.

I loved Africa. It was fascinating. I had a wonderful time in Lagos. I formed a University of Nebraska alumni club. We would be sent films from football games. I think there must have been 90-100 people who belonged to the club. Many were from the agricultural school which did considerable work in Nigeria and nearby countries. The club was highly organized: we had club officers responsible for this or that. It was great. The best part may have been that none of the members tried to use me to get favorable treatment for visas from the embassy's consular section.

*Q: Well, was your regional work mostly advisory or did you actually also issue visas?*

HUTSON: I was an advisor. I did fill in when the consular officer job was vacant in Burkina Faso. The interesting aspect of that assignment was that the consular officer for whom I filled in was actually the station chief. He had been PNGed. Only when I got to Ouagadougou did I realize the delicate position I was in.

*Q: In Nigeria, however, you did have line responsibilities. Were Americans getting into trouble there?*

HUTSON: Fairly often. We had one case of some note. We had woman from New Jersey who was a prominent African-American politician. She came to Nigeria as an advisor to a local politician. The Nigerian military threw her in jail. She was there for a long time - almost a year, I think. She was never charged; the military just held her. It became a *cause celebre*, but

eventually we managed to get her released. We got lot of commendations for our efforts. Our consul general, Joseph Segars, was a wonderful guy and did an extremely effective job on this and many other cases. The consular section ran well and was staffed with a nice bunch of people. None of us were there by choice; circumstances had gotten us this assignment. Nevertheless, the mission functioned well and most of the staff was quite happy.

**KEITH L. WAUCHOPE**  
**Deputy Director, Francophone West Africa**  
**Washington, DC (1984-1986)**

*Ambassador Wauchope was born and raised in New York, graduated from Johns Hopkins University and, after a tour in the US Army in Vietnam, in 1966 joined the Foreign Service. His specialty being African affairs, Mr. Wauchope served in a number of African posts, including Ft. Lamy, Asmara, Bamako and Monrovia. In 1989 he was appointed Ambassador to Gabon, where he served from 1989-1992. In his several Washington assignments Ambassador Wauchope dealt with personnel, cultural, Latin American affairs and Sudan affairs. Ambassador Wauchope was interviewed by Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

*Q: Then you took over Western African Affairs?*

WAUCHOPE: I was the senior Deputy Director responsible for the Francophone nations of West Africa. AF/W had an Anglophone and a Francophone section. Most of the AF/W countries were Francophone, but the ones that generated the greatest concern and assets were the Anglophones, which is to say Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone and the Gambia. There were 17 nations total, and I had the other 12 French speaking countries. I worked for Ed Perkins, the office director for the first year. Len Shurtleff was in the background orchestrating this personnel ballet. He was then DCM in Liberia working for Bill Swing. Ed Perkins, his predecessor as DCM in Monrovia, was later nominated to replace Bill Swing. So Len worked for Ed for Len's last year in Monrovia, and I worked my first year in AF/W with Ed and my second year in AF/W for Howard Walker. We dealt with an exciting set of issues. As I said, AF/W was known as the "Coup of the Month Club" because, with 17 countries, there seemed to be a political upheaval every month. The Western Sahara's fate was also one of our issues. From time to time it became a hot item because the underlying conflict between Morocco and Algeria, which impacted Mauritania, which was an AF/W nation and an ally of Morocco. There were always things brewing on the Francophone side.

*Q: Chad?*

WAUCHOPE: Chad was in AF/C and we didn't deal with it directly. We had similar problems such as Senegal which had fractious elections and subsequent student rioting. It was also undergoing significant restructuring of its foreign assistance program. In the Cote d'Ivoire, Houphouet-Boigny was aging and leaders were jockeying for position in the succession. The Anglophones Liberia and Nigeria, took up a great deal of our time and energy. Liberia was our

hottest concern. As the senior Deputy, I used to take over for Ed while he was away. He used to travel to the region and domestically a fair amount. He had the good sense to get out there to show the flag in the entire region and to have a better feel for it. Our extensive assets in Liberia, the VOA facility, the diplomatic telecommunications relay facility, and the Omega navigation station were a key concern in the region. These were the greatest aggregation of American assets of any country in sub-Saharan Africa. I was the acting director, AF/W. There was an coup against Samuel Doe's government in October of 1985. Jim Bishop was managing the crisis for the AF bureau, and Ed was now Ambassador in Liberia at this point. Howard Walker was away and I was running the show when the coup took place.

*Q: This was where?*

WAUCHOPE: Liberia. Quiwonkpa came damn close to overthrowing Doe. The significance was not only the disruptions and repression that occurred thereafter, but also the watershed for Liberia transforming from a non-tribal government as it had been under the Americo-Liberians, to one in which tribalism became the definitive test of loyalty. The Americo-Liberians had successfully suppressed tribalism during their rule. For the first five years of Doe's stewardship the nation continued to avoid tribal conflicts. Quiwonkpa, by contrast, was backed by two large tribal groups. Therefore, when he went after Doe's Krahn supporters, it took on the aspect of a tribal conflict. From that point onward, politics in Liberia became explicitly tribal in their orientation. Our concern was driven by the size of the American presence. We had so many Americans there, the U.S. Mission itself was over 225, and there were about 5,000 American citizens counting returned Liberians who had gone to the United States and obtained U.S. citizenship. So, we had a lot at risk and we monitored very carefully how we in AF/W backstopped the Embassy's efforts to do what was necessary. Unfortunately, our military mission chief did not handle themselves very well and we had some problems deriving from his conduct..

*Q: What were the problems?*

WAUCHOPE: Well, there was a great deal of resentment against Doe among Embassy personnel because they had reason to believe that he had stolen the election a month earlier, and the U.S. had been compelled to certify the election for political reasons. Further, they felt that Doe was recalcitrant and uncooperative on a range of issues. So, when Quiwonkpa who was a military man, launched his coup attempt, our military people, in particular, took it upon themselves to go out into the streets, ostensibly to look after the Americans living in various parts of the city. In reality, they ended up encountering the insurgents who for about 12 hours or so, seemed to be on the verge of taking power. They were observed talking to and joking with the insurgent forces. Inevitably, Doe's people saw this as well. When Doe's reinforcements arrived and put down the insurrection, Quiwonkpa was captured, killed and dismembered. Doe strongly resented the American military for having "collaborated", with his enemies. Doe wasn't so sure that our MilMish people hadn't work with Quiwonkpa and his supporters, and encouraged them to take action against Doe because our relations with Doe were not good at that time. We prevailed upon Doe not to expel these people. They were still assigned there when I arrived. It was probably a mistake. They probably should have been allowed to leave quietly. It would have taken one less irritant out of the relationship.

What struck me when I was in AF/W, was the degree of intensity with which Nigeria and Liberia seemed to dominate the thinking of the bureau whenever they thought of West Africa. We tried to explain that the Francophone West African countries were much more stable, had shown much more promise in many ways. While the French were still influential in their former West African colonies, we could have played the game much more effectively than we did. We tried to get more attention devoted to these countries. Chet Crocker was the Assistant Secretary at the time, and his focus was almost completely on South Africa. Constructive engagement was the AF watchword and it was a challenge to get his attention on problems elsewhere. The Deputy Assistant Secretaries, particularly Jim Bishop, were more focused on the West Africa, and the non-South African side of the continent. He was a consistent supporter of our efforts to persuade the Francophones to be more cooperative and responsive, and to provide more assistance where the opportunities existed.

*Q: What are we talking about to be cooperative?*

WAUCHOPE: In supporting us in the United Nations, supporting us in the Cold War, and against the Soviets when they were out of line. We hoped that the Francophone would stand with the West, and condemn Soviets transgressions. In the Falklands War, for example, the Senegalese were prevailed upon by the British to allow their aircraft to fly reinforcements and supplies through Dakar to the Falklands. There was still that strategic aspect of the Dakar. We also dealt with them on fisheries issues. We wanted to expel the Soviets from their exclusive fishery zones, and to actually take on the Soviets. You have to put yourself in the context of the time. Under Ronald Reagan, the NSC representative for Africa was Fred Wettering. We used to call him "Free World Fred" because he came up with bizarre ideas of ways in which we could put a stick in the spokes of the Soviets, even at the expense of our relations with the West African nations. He proposed that we ought to seriously consider ways to drive the Soviet trawlers out of the West African coast, particularly off Mauritania and Senegal, which are very productive fishing grounds. Specifically, he suggested that we persuade these nations to provide letters of marque to privateers. They would lease ships crewed by Spaniards or Portuguese and outfit them to seize Soviet ships. We were to encourage the creation of these privateering ventures. They would then capture Soviet trawlers off the coast of Mauritania and the Mauritanian government would allow the captured vessels to be sold off to the highest bidder. Of course, the Francophone Africans would not have agreed. Thank God, we were able to quash this concept before we had to go to the West Africans with it. This gives you an idea to some of the thinking that was going on at this time.

Again, the valuable former French colonies really were our principal focus. Niger had significant amounts of uranium and provided the French nuclear its principal source of uranium. The Ivory Coast has cocoa and coffee, and timber, and Senegal, was of interest for its strategic location and its model of democracy. We had a very significant increase in the assistance program to Senegal under Abdou Diouf. There had been a peaceful democratic transition from Senghor, and Diouf was a very presentable guy. He was six feet nine inches tall and very dignified, poised and intelligent. He was attractive to all the donors. We wanted to make Senegal a model for successful development. We were on the same wavelength with the French in the endeavor. Charlie Bray, our Ambassador in Dakar, was one of our most talented ambassadors, and he

worked very thoughtfully and cooperatively with the Senegalese. They are a very educated people, and had excellent officials at the top ranks of their government. Their middle ranks tended to be weak, but in terms of corruption, we considered the Senegalese a cut above most of the other AF/W countries. It was a civilian government that hadn't come to power through military machinations or by coup, so we were comfortable in trying to make them an example. The two countries in West Africa that we wanted to play the role model were Senegal on the Francophone side and Ghana, under Jerry Rawlings, on the Anglophone side. We wanted to see them succeed. We wanted to provide them the wherewithal to develop their infrastructure, develop their people, their leadership and their managerial skills. We had longstanding ties with Ghana going back many decades. We wanted to see the extent to which we could achieve the same thing in Senegal

One of the remarkable things about the 12 nations of the former French West Africa, at that time, five of the chiefs of state were still receiving pensions from the French government for their service to the French government or military. By contrast, a very significant number, we figured almost half, of the leaders' families had children studying in the United States. We considered this a realization of a change in the drift of allegiances which we thought quite significant; it was ongoing, but accelerating in this time frame. The Francophone African leaders began to perceive a disengagement of France from Africa. They saw the United States having a greater and greater degree of influence in the world, and France was changing its world view by virtue of two things. First, their investments in Africa were now no longer as great as they had once been. both in absolute terms and in proportionate terms. Its economic focus was on the EU rather than Africa. Secondly, its commitment to Africa has diminished with the departure from the scene of de Gaulle and many of his lieutenants like Jacques Foccart, his fixer, if you will, for Africa. The departure of these actors diminished France's sense of historical commitment to Africa. Much of what the Frenchmen knew about Africa, they knew from their personal experience during Second World War. For example, they knew that Chad had been the first colony to join up with the Free French. I remember on my way to Chad in 1969 a cab driver in Paris immediately recognized Chad, saying something to the effect "Oh yes, my uncle served there during the war." That was fading away with the progression of time. Further, the military power and economic strength of France vis-à-vis the United States was diminishing. Under Reagan, the U.S. was inclined to exercise our influence and to project our power militarily and economically. The Africans were beginning to recognize this and it was an important transition. While we were not so much trying to exploit this change, we were trying to live up to their expectations. In the contest of promoting democracy and capitalism, we did implicitly encourage African leaders to consider sending their children to the United States for training in management, finance and economics. We felt that the U.S. provided a model that they could usefully apply in their own countries

In that regard, our relationship with Francophone Africa was generally positive. As I say, we didn't have any major disruptions in our relationships. There was a sense in AF that the Francophones were beginning to move in our direction. This is in marked contrast to Nigeria with which there was constant friction. They seemed to feel that we were trying to manipulate them or to push them around. At that time we had a range of issues with the Nigerians. I remember one time Ed Perkins went to a convention of chiefs of police in Houston, Texas. He was to make a pitch to show that the Nigerians, in general, were decent people. They should not

automatically be distrusted and abused by U.S. law enforcement and by the immigration service. He gave the best, most reasonable presentation he could. He reported that in conversations after his presentation that whenever they mentioned the Nigerians, the police chiefs' attitude was, "Just put them in jail. I mean they're all a bunch of crooks, it's just a matter of finding out which scam they're involved in." Now, this was in the days when the Nigerians were big players in credit card fraud and narcotics smuggling. They were also developing the scam about the availability of blocked funds and then looting American sucker's bank account.

*Q: Blocked funds?*

WAUCHOPE: Yes. We received constant calls and appeals from Americans who lost as much as \$50,000 or more. The reality was that they lost their money because they thought they could get their hands illegally on blocked Nigerian funds. We'd have to try to explain the scam to them. Nigerians were increasingly being detained for narcotics smuggling, which they claimed was racism. Nigeria had become a way station for narcotics entering the United States from the Middle East. The smugglers were shifting from transiting Southern Europe to transiting Nigeria, and Nigerians were being used as mules. Then the smugglers would shift the traffic further along the West African coast and the next thing you knew they were coming out of Ghana.

*Q: There was something about stolen automobiles, too?*

WAUCHOPE: Yes, luxury automobiles were being stolen in Europe and driven to Nigeria across the Sahara Desert. They bribed the border guards and then sell them in Lagos. Narcotics trafficking was so lucrative that many senior Nigerian officials became involved. Despite Nigeria's tremendous oil revenues, the corruption and mismanagement was absolutely staggering. Therefore few leaders in Nigeria were untainted by the drug money or by the corruption from the oil revenues. We tried to make the point that as the most populous nation in Africa, estimated at that time at 120 million, later to be determined to be closer to 90 million, should play a constructive role in the region. Subsequently they did play a role in peacekeeping efforts, which hasn't always been that constructive. In any event, we couldn't turn our back on Nigeria. So, we tried our best to work with them, with constant strains on the relationship.

**CLAUDIA ANYASO**  
**Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Lagos (1984-1988)**

*Ms. Anyaso was born and raised in North Carolina and was educated at Morgan State University and American University. She joined the State Department in 1968, where she specialized in Education and Cultural Affairs, with particular regard to African countries. She had several tours in Washington as well as abroad. Her foreign assignments include Lagos, Abuja, Port-au-Prince and Niamey, where she served primarily as Cultural and Public Affairs Officer. Ms. Anyaso was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*



ANYASO: We left off at Lagos. I had gone over to see my good friend who was heading up, in USIA, the Africa area office. I talked to him about an Excursion Tour as a civil servant at that point. Let me back up a little bit. In the Foreign Service there were certain restrictions on people you can marry and being assigned to their country of origin. For example, I had married a Nigerian and I could not be assigned to Nigeria. The rules were there but they changed so at this point they have changed the rules so I go to see my friend and I say, "I'm interested in an Excursion Tour where do you have an opening?" John Clingerman said to me, "We have an opening in Lagos." They always have openings in Lagos all the time even now. It is one of the hardest posts to recruit for in the Foreign Service. It's big, it's sprawling, it's dangerous and if you talk to any of the diplomatic security people, it's a security problem...

*Q: Mainly because of crime.*

ANYASO: Because of crime, yes, it's sort of like New York. They have gangs, area boys they call them, but anyway a lot of people don't want to put themselves in harm's way, this is before 9/11 where we are all putting ourselves in harms way. But in those days you tried to protect yourself a little bit by the assignments you took. So he said, "Oh, we've got this opening in Lagos, we need somebody out there to clean up things, there is a CAO job that's opening up; CAO, cultural affairs officer," and I've always loved culture, music and dance and literature and art. Cultural affairs officers were in charge of all those cultural programs, libraries, Fulbright program, students and professors, this was heaven. So I said, "Lagos, I don't know if I can do this." Well, of course, I hadn't talked to my husband; every time I can go to Nigeria he pushes me out the door. So we decided together that this would be a great opportunity for me to get my feet wet in the Foreign Service so I did.

In 1984 we did the paperwork and I went to Lagos as a cultural affairs officer. I think Thomas Smith was the ambassador at that time. It's interesting how you can be assigned to a country, especially young officers who come in, they should know this. You can be an econ, political officer or consular officer and then go back and become consul general or ambassador. Well Thomas Smith had been an econ officer in Nigeria and now he was back as ambassador and they have this beautiful old colonial building as the residence. Old, old trees, lots of foliage and right at the back of the compound is the lagoon, Lagos is named after a lagoon, a Portuguese word, Lagos; it's just exquisite. The USIS building was separate from the embassy, the embassy was down on a crescent, which also looked over the lagoon, and we were over on Kings College Road. Now because Lagos has such a bad reputation I thought I would bring this book this morning to share with you on Lagos. It's called EKO, E-K-O, which is the Yoruba word for Lagos. Our officers were at One King's College Road; King's College was a high school.

*Q: You are showing us a beautiful colonial style building that you think of eaves that protrude over to keep out the heat and all of that.*

ANYASO: It is very well ventilated.

*Q: Oh yes.*

ANYASO: And our office was just up the street from King's College, we were at number One

King's College Road, which was a very good address. The college was there, it was one of the preeminent high schools in Lagos in Nigeria; the Supreme Court was also next door to King's College. One of the things that we were always interested in doing was reaching out to their institutions and building up relationships. So very often I would go over and talk to the students, present books to the school library, get the teachers interested in using our library for research for their students if they are doing research on the United States and then I would hop over to the supreme court and talk to the chief justice and present law books, maybe some law schools in the United States would send us books and we would have these books to present. So this was my introduction to actually being overseas as a cultural affairs officer and I loved it; I was like a kid in a candy shop.

Having come out of the civil rights movement I was very interested in the society and what was going on in the society; I would have been anyway but because of the civil rights movement I had a particular interest in doing this. I think everybody who is anybody has been through Lagos, not just me I'm a peon but high-level people. Secretary Shultz came to visit while I was there and it was his birthday. His wife had baked a cake and so that was really sweet; she had traveled with him. We had named our USIS, US Information Service library after a civil rights leader Whitney Young. So we had the Whitney Young library there.

*Q: He drowned didn't he in...*

ANYASO: Boy you are a...you must be reading these interviews, he did.

*Q: ...swimming off...was it in Nigeria?*

ANYASO: It was Bar Beach. The EKO, the Yoruba word for Lagos, hotel was right on this wonderful beach, which is right on the Atlantic Ocean. Well one thing about the Atlantic Ocean is that there are these undercurrents and they are very strong. You are not to swim in the Atlantic Ocean because you drown. Knowing the embassy, I'm sure people must have told him this but nevertheless there is this beautiful water and this beach, they have these little chairs, these thatched coverings to keep out the sun...and you enjoy yourself. Well he decided to go into the water and he got caught in an undertow and he did drown. We named our library after him and his widow came to Nigeria and helped us to open the library. This was done before I got there so this must have been in the late seventies when this was going on; I arrived in '84; so the library there is named after Whitney Young.

The student non-violent coordinating committee, which I had been a member of, SNCC, had a sort of favorite son, his name was Ralph Featherstone and we called him Feather, of course. Ralph Featherstone was too long to say so we called him Feather. After the civil rights movement a lot of people were lost and didn't know what to do with themselves, should you go back to school, should you not, should you go out into the community organizing, should you not? So some of these people were lost lambs and so he started traveling. He ended up in Nigeria and I don't know what happened but I just know that he is buried in Nigeria in the Ikoyi cemetery. There are two islands where most of the expats lived, Ikoyi and Victoria Island. So there is a big cemetery on Ikoyi and he is buried there so that was another link to the civil rights movement.

So here I am in probably the second largest embassy in Africa and I have a great staff. I am the cultural affairs officer, I have two assistant cultural affairs officers, American, and I have a program officer, American, and I have a staff; so there are about 30-40 of us just in the cultural section. I am told by one of my cultural assistants that there is a woman who has been bothering them; she has this relative who was a former slave who came back to Nigeria from the U.S. and she wants to do a program on her relative and this isn't the kind of thing we need to be worried about. So I said, "Okay" and I talked to her. The lady turned out to be Ayo Vaughn-Richards and her relative was a Vaughn who had come from South Carolina as a slave, back to Nigeria, and joined the Baptist missionaries. There are a lot of missionaries who are in Nigeria, in Abeokuta. She wanted to do something to show this link between the United States and Nigeria. One of the things we did was I said, "All rights Mrs. Vaughn- Richards what can we really do?" She said, "I have this Ebony magazine," and Ebony magazine had done this whole spread on her ancestor. I said, "Oh, why don't we take these magazine pictures and get them blown up and make a little exhibit." So we started with Ebony magazine and then she told me that she had a cousin in the United States. I said, "Well, who is your cousin?" She said, "My cousin is Jewell Lafontant." I said, "Jewel Lafontant?" She's the deputy solicitor general of the United States she was a big Republican from Chicago and I don't know whether she had been appointed by Reagan or Bush?

*Q: Or for the Reagan administration.*

ANYASO: Yes, so he had named this relative of hers to be the deputy solicitor general. I said, "Hey, that's incredible Mrs. Vaughn-Richards, maybe we could get an interview with your relative." So in those days the U.S. Information Agency was great. We had a whole section that made films. So I got in touch with them and I said, "Could you do a video interview with the deputy solicitor general so that we can use it in a program? Jerry Krill was one of the producers and he said, "Sure, we'll do it." He made this beautiful video so we had more. Then she said, "Well you know, I'm related to the first Supreme Court justice of Nigeria whose wife is a part of this family and they have a family bible." I said, "Really?" She said, "I could probably get a collection of those early papers and things and we could make a little exhibit of them. I could have maybe the supreme court justice and his wife come." I said, "Why not?" They did and we are still working on this program and finally brought it together. Well our auditorium in USIS was full; it was packed. She had also brought one of the chiefs from Abeokuta, which is where the Baptist missionaries were where this relative was and we had his story.

Now, there is a Vaughn house, I'm not going to be able to find it but her relative left the Missionaries and became a businessman and owned two shops in Lagos. He had a house and his shop was downstairs, it was called the Vaughn House and I'll find it at some point. At one of his houses he had water, he sold water because Lagos, which is surrounded by lagoons and all this water from the Atlantic Ocean had a water problem. The available water wasn't potable; so he sold water and made a lot of money. We had the history of her relative, we had the Ebony magazine, we had the film, we had the chief and off we went and we had a wonderful Black History Month program in which we were showing relationships between the Nigerians and the Americans and a relationship that had gone back to the very early days when her relative had come back to Nigeria. That was a good thing.

*Q: How did you find the Nigerians? We'll come to this in other African countries but responded to the fact that there were Nigerians abroad who are in the United States because sometimes emigrants the people who stayed behind don't look that favorably upon people who have left their country in one way or the other.*

ANYASO: I think you're right but no society is monolithic so while there were probably people who felt some kind of animosity about those people who had gone away one of the things we did at USIS was student advising. We counseled students on studying. Where? In the United States. We couldn't keep up with the numbers that was one of our biggest activities so it was prestigious for these Nigerian families to have their kids study in the United States.

*Q: Did the kids come back?*

ANYASO: Yes and no, mostly no because there had to be job opportunities. Now in the eighties it wasn't difficult and many of them did come back. The economy was good they had found oil in the seventies; they always knew they had oil but it became a big deal. There were cargo ships at the wharfs every day bringing in bags of cement, a lot of building was going on. So a lot of things were going on in Nigeria in the seventies and spilled over into the eighties. It was very prestigious, people were coming back, a lot of the Nigerians who were trained in our universities as professors came back to teach in Nigerian universities because the salaries were competitive; in the eighties they were competitive. So I go over to the University of Lagos and I meet professors who had studied at Columbia, in fact, there was a Columbia mafia. I would meet them, they had studied in Texas, and they were all over the place so this was a good period for Nigerians to return.

*Q: I remember talking to a retired Foreign Service officer who has been involved in diplomatic history at the University of North Carolina got himself I think a Fulbright to one of the top universities in Nigeria. He came back with a very negative report saying that the students weren't serious and that there were strikes all the time and there wasn't much teaching. The universities are run down because nobody was disciplining the students.*

ANYASO: Universities were quite good in the sixties that's when they were getting started. Michigan State helped start the University of Nigeria in the Eastern part of the country. The first vice chancellor is what they called their presidents at these universities. The first vice chancellor at the University of Nigeria was from Michigan State and they had a big, big role in that. Nigerians had started their premier university which was the University of Ibadan and they took a graduating class from Yaba College of Technology made it the first class in this Ibadan University. They had a very big linkage program with the University of Pennsylvania, not Penn State, the University of Pennsylvania. The University of Lagos also had connections with U.S. universities as did the University of IFE and you're right, we would put professors at all of these universities. Things began to slide I would say I was there '84-'88, late '80s and '90s things are beginning to go bad in terms of the economy; they weren't keeping up support for the universities. Universities are not private they are funded by the government so the government was not providing the budgets that they used to provide. So they were becoming run down and the security of these universities because of this crime situation you are talking about wasn't very good. We had our concerns about where we were placing our Fulbrighters both the students and

the professors because we wanted to make sure that they were safe and that they were having a good experience. One of the things we always advised them to do was yes you are coming out as a lecturer, yes you will be lecturing and teaching in these universities, have a research project in your pocket, have something else you can be doing because we never know, as you say, when there are going to be strikes.

When I arrived in Nigeria this whole drug problem, the Nigerians who were carrying drugs being mules, to get the drugs into Europe and into the United States this was a real serious problem. We had all kinds of restrictions against Nigerians traveling too because they were carrying drugs. The other problem we were having was that maybe it's a spill over from the sixties but there were a lot of American women, it became trendy to wear your hair in braids, wear dashiki's, relate to Africa, go back to your roots and many of them had married some of the Nigerian students, as had I, and gone back to Nigeria to live and things were not going well.

*Q: Certainly in the Middle East we've had horrible problems with women marrying Middle Eastern students.*

ANYASO: Exactly and things were not going well. These women wanted to leave, they had children many of them and they not only wanted to leave but they wanted to take their children. The law in Nigeria is unequivocal about who these children belong to and who will get custody of these children; the father will, the father's family will, you will not take these children. So they were trying to sneak their kids across the border into other countries and get them back to the States. I think our consulate had a very liberal policy we tried to help them as much as we could to get them and the kids back to the United States; that tapered off after a while but for awhile there it was just crazy.

Culturally speaking I talked to some students a couple weeks ago about cross-cultural communication, cultural shock and things like that. Culture shock is very real, you see the graph it's way up here and you are excited and you are there and it's wonderful. It's a new experience, new adventures and then gradually you go down into this trough and you are very depressed and very unhappy and then you start going back up again. Well this had to happen to these women. I mean this happened to us as Foreign Service officers but we had a little cocoon, we were living on compounds. We were in the American community, we maintained our traditions we had turkey for Thanksgiving, trees for Christmas. These ladies lived on the local economy and in these families; these were extended families and they weren't used to people descending upon them at all hours of the day and night and so many of them. After a while it became very difficult for them to cope.

*Q: Not just on the Islamic side but other places were there multiple wives or at least a good girlfriend or something sort of officially I mean mistresses or something? Was this the tradition over there?*

ANYASO: There was polygamy especially strong as I say among the Yoruba and we were in Lagos so we were surrounded by Yoruba communities and the Yoruba people; so that was another thing that one had to cope with. Additional wives, they had children, you had children and there has to be a pecking order you know whose child is on first; and there was that. I discovered

Lagos, as I say, is the closest thing to New York that I can think of in Africa. Forget Pretoria and other parts of Africa where you think oh yes it's pretty groovy, it's nice. Lagos is the closest thing to New York that I can recall in Africa so there is this organization called Niger Wives, you've probably heard about this in your other interviews. Well this organization consisted of wives who were married to Nigerians and this was their little support network. They could get-together and talk about the problems they were having and help each other out. I discovered at that time that this Niger Wives organization had about 364 members from everywhere Russia, China, Yugoslavia, the United States, of course, Latin America; the Nigerians are very catholic they marry from everywhere.

They don't care. There are all these women in this organization who are doing nice things. They had bazaars, they raised money for the communities, you know how we do things. They were very active, Doris Dada who was an American woman out there married to a Nigerian minister and Doris was sort of the dean or the doyen of the Niger Wives and she was very good. One of the wives was from New Zealand; she was a professor at the university and had done a lot of research about Nigerian women's political activity so I got involved with the Niger Wives. I told them I could not join because I was a representative of the U.S. government and I didn't join, I could help organizations. I wanted to be available to everybody I didn't want to limit myself to just one organization so I maintained that I couldn't join but I got their newsletter and I supported their activities. They had children and they were eligible to use our libraries, and to be counseled; in fact, our foreign student advisor was an American woman married to a Nigerian who was a professor at the university. She was doing our student counseling so we got involved with them and as I say we helped them as much as possible.

But in the eighties it was a very interesting situation. We had become complacent and uninteresting, we had become boring as a cultural center so one of the first things I wanted to do was to reenergize this cultural center. As I say, I started with the Vaughn family and then since I knew them they were having trouble with this Martin Luther King birthday celebration in the United States; they were trying to make it a national holiday, it wasn't at the time but they were lobbying for it. We would celebrate it; we would celebrate the Martin Luther King birthday in a small way so I started celebrating the Martin Luther King birthday. I was in one of the embassy cars one day and I went past this church in Lagos. There are lots of churches Episcopal, Catholic, Mosques, everything was there but there was a Baptist Church. Now this Vaughn family where the relative had been with the Baptist missionaries had also been involved with this church in Lagos so I saw this church, it was Baptist and it said Ebenezer and I said, "bingo."

*Q: Ebenezer Church in Atlanta.*

ANYASO: Martin Luther King's church in Atlanta is the Ebenezer Baptist Church, what is this church doing in Lagos? So I called my friend Ayo Vaughn-Richards; at this point we had become bosom buddies. I said, "Ayo I saw this church with this sign. Do you know anything about it?" She said, "That's my church." I said, "Oh, we are going to have a Martin Luther King program at that church, you have to talk to the minister." She did, we did. We had a video, I forget whoever the secretary of state was or the president we did a video with them so that they could say something nice about Martin Luther King's birthday. At this point, Ambassador Smith had been very ill and left so Princeton Lyman was the ambassador. Ambassador Lyman came

and he read in the service and we had talked to the choir there and they did some American spirituals as well as Yoruba songs in the service; this was wonderful. We read the Martin Luther King I Have A Dream Speech and then we had the commercial or agriculture officer sing, his name was Johnny Brown. He was one of these big, tall African-Americans you know but he could sing like a lark. I said, "Johnny could you come sing on our program?" and he said, "Yes." I said, "Can you come and can you sing If I Can Help Somebody?" That was Martin Luther King's favorite song and he said, "Sure." Johnny came and he stood up and he opened his mouth and he started singing and he brought down the house. It was just great so we were on a roll here; we were getting our cultural program going. I had never been a cultural officer so I didn't know any better, I just did what seemed reasonable and this seemed very reasonable. So we had it going and going and going. The agency sent out art shows and we had art exhibits but Nigerians have some of the best artists in the world.

*Q: Oh yes.*

ANYASO: They do and they have now generations of them. I think they are on their fourth generation but I was there during the second generation or the first generation. This very famous Nigerian artist because I've always said we can't just do our thing we have to do something that we can show together. So Bruce Onobrakpeya, one of their famous artists, more of a graphic artist than a painter and from the Midwest, he was Urhobo or one of the minority groups. Bruce did an excellent, excellent show for us. I said, "Okay, you studied in the United States somebody studied in the United States so that's our hook." We did a show and it was great, wonderful.

Then there was a photographer Sunmi Smart-Cole who was the photographer for the Guardian Newspaper but he was a freelancer and he had studied photography in California. So I said, "Ach, Sunmi why don't we do a photography show and show your prints and we did that; it was packed, he brought the foreign minister. On the side Sunmi also cut hair, he was a barber. So he cut the hair of the foreign minister, he whispered in his ear that he was having this show and why don't you come to my show; so the foreign minister comes and said a few words. Sunmi had magnificent photographs and it went on and on and on so we really built up the American cultural center; I think we were on par with the French cultural center. The Italians at that point had a cultural center, of course, there was the British Council and while I was there Maggie Thatcher came out with her husband Dennis walking ten paces behind. They opened a new British Council building and we all went because we were actually a community; you did your thing and they did their thing but when it came down to it we all helped each other. So we all went to open the British Council, which is a wonderful facility.

Under President Reagan we had a director of USIA by the name of Charles Wick and Mr. Wick liked to play the piano. He felt he was very good at this; actually he could just play Happy Birthday sort of like Richard Nixon. But anyway he had it in his head this is good music and under Charlie I had one thing I was really very upset with him about but there was one thing on the music side I was very happy about. He started a competition for young American pianists all over the United States. We had these competitions and get the best ones regionally and then they would have a national competition and we would send them overseas to have concerts. So I said, "Yep, got to do that, got to bring one of those people to Nigeria to help beef up our cultural program." They sent out some wonderful young men, they had a Metropolitan Club, which is

one of the local clubs and they used to have musical programs. So we had our musician play on that program. I think we had Michael Caldwell, we had another young man come out but we would always go to the Metropolitan Club and I always took them outside to the universities so that the students could hear them and see them; these are young people like them.

Remember, I think we had Philip Hosford and Philip was tall and had a moustache, looked great in a tuxedo, a dream of a pianist. So we had these posters done up with Philip and his moustache in his tuxedo, we plastered the campus at the University of Lagos with the posters. Come the night of the concert and I am driving along on the campus and I look around for our posters and they are gone. I asked my assistant, "Did you put posters up here?" "Yes ma'am." I said, "Well why don't we see the posters?" "I don't know." Well it turns out that Nigerians like Moustaches, you'd be great, and Philip had this moustache and they were treating him like he was some kind of rock star and they took all the posters and they were in their rooms; that's where they were. So I could consider that a success because we had lots of interest in this. They had, it wasn't a Steinway piano, it was one of those German pianos but they hadn't tuned it in ages and it was hard to find piano tuners; it was just miserable. He would get to the upper register of the piano but we'd hear this horrible grating sound but he got through it; he was devastated inside but he got thorough it. So I said, "Philip, we are going to take you to Eastern Nigeria, why do everything in the capital city, let's go out."

I don't know if many of the people over there ever heard classical music but there was an American over there working with a dance group, he was a choreographer so he was over there and working with the cultural center and here we come with this pianist.

*Q: Where was over there?*

ANYASO: Over there is in Owerri, which is the capital of Imo state now in the East. My husband's people...I'll get into the politics a little later but Nigeria is under military rule so there's a military governor. He had been invited and he came; he was a Navy guy so he was all in whites. We had a full audience, they had found people I don't know where and they came and they listened but they didn't know when to clap. So we said, "Okay, Philip when you finish you bow your head so they know you are finished and then they can clap." We had it all arranged and he did, he would finish a piece and he would bow his head and then they would clap; I thought okay we've brought culture to this area. So afterwards people came up and shook his hand and he was really very good, he was a good guy. This one man who had been in the audience came up and he shook his head and I said, "Did you enjoy the concert?" He said, "Yes, but he didn't play Brahms." I said, "Oh?" He said, "Yes." He had studied in the United States and he knew classical music; he had really enjoyed it but he was waiting for Brahms and there was no Brahms. I said, "Well next time we will you have him play some Brahms." So that was one of my experiences; I had a great time this first year.

*Q: Well tell me here you are in Lagos.*

ANYASO: Yes.

*Q: And you've got this vast hinterland where the Hausa are and they are Muslim and it's quite a*



*different culture. How could we penetrate that society culture wise?*

ANYASO: Okay, well I'm in '84, '85, '86, '87' and '88. One of the stereotypes about Nigeria is that all the Muslims are living in the hinterland in the North is not true. A lot of the Yoruba are Muslim so yes, they have mosques, there are several in my book. There are Mosques there because a lot of them, fifty percent or more, are Muslim. Islam came from Saudi Arabia into Sudan and went across I don't know where your map of Africa is...

*Q: It's behind you.*

ANYASO: Oh there.

*Q: Through Chad and sometimes...*

ANYASO: Yeah, this whole Sahelian region below the Sahara, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania came from Saudi Arabia and over like that. Well there was also another strand of Islam that was typically African and spread along the coast; it came along the coast into the western part of Nigeria. There was a Catholic priest, Father Ryan, who explained this to me at one point because I didn't know that these people were there and they were Muslim, I knew they were Muslim but I didn't know there was a different form of Islam from that in the North. So there is that culture already there and we are already interacting with them.

The Yoruba are probably one of the strongest cultures I've ever encountered; they are very proud, very arrogant about their culture. They can be sitting in a room like this and you speak English and you don't speak Yoruba, they don't care they are going to speak to each other in Yoruba. I remember we were interviewing for one of our grants and I had my selection committee and they started speaking Yoruba, I said fine, okay. They have Oba's; they have O-B-A's who are kings and there is an Oba of Lagos who is very important. As I say, some of it is traditional and some it is Muslim and how do you penetrate that culture; that has to be my next story when I come back to Nigeria and I go North and I talk about how we try to do that.

*Q: Nigeria has left a pretty negative impression in the United States because of confidence people through the Internet, counterfeit...I had a friend who was a banker in Baltimore your place, John Howard Eager and he was a classmate of mine in the Howard's and all that area. He was saying that it was an expression saying if somebody came in to the bank identified as a Nigerian all the tellers were to close their windows and sit back and regroup because they thought the Nigerians could out think them, outsmart the bankers as far as how to illegally extract money. Did you run across both this manifestation from how it was portrayed in the United States and also was it being done to you?*

ANYASO: In the community? Yes, we had to be very protective of our personal documents, we had shredders at the office but you kept your checks locked up, any of your account numbers you kept locked up. You could not use credit cards in Nigeria anywhere; not in hotels not anywhere because once they got that number you were wiped out and this still is the case. Lagos has a bad reputation, Nigerians have a bad reputation and it's probably merited but it's not all Nigerians.

*Q: Of course not, but...*

ANYASO: One of our good friends was a big lawyer in Nigeria and he had been the minister of information in the first Nigerian Republic T-O-S Benson and TOS was always very upset because here are very respectable, well dressed, well spoken people who behaved like any other people and whenever they traveled they were treated so miserably by the customs officials by everybody as though they were these Nigerian crooks. This was very, very humiliating for them.

*Q: I'm sure it was but the reputation wasn't just prejudice there was a real...*

ANYASO: No, it has nothing to do with politics.

*Q: ...and today on the Internet I mean one of the jokes is...*

ANYASO: 419, which is the Nigerian code 419, which has to do with these financial scams. So we call them 419ers. Our consulate has produced a booklet so that we can give it to people who are traveling, our tourists, our business people so that they can be careful. People are so innocent and they keep falling into these things.

*Q: Well you have to remember most people are amateurs in dealing with fraud and we are up against professional frauders.*

ANYASO: Clever and they make it seem so real. They send you this letter with letter head from the central bank and they talk about this money they can't get out.

*Q: Yes.*

ANYASO: And if you would send them money then you could help them get out millions and then you would take half of the money; people fall for that. It's not only Americans. I was talking to the British ambassador and they figured \$5 billion just for them. The Germans were involved; we were involved this is so clever. If we could only turn this...

*Q: It's really an attribute of the Nigerians as they are smarter than most other people.*

ANYASO: But if we could turn it into something productive and legal you know...part of the problem, of course, is the economy the way it is structured. The Country Director of the World Bank tried to explain it to me. It is like a desert economy, like you have a sheik or something and he's got all the resources one person or just a small group of people and that is basically how their economy works. So what are all these other people supposed to do? That's a part of it.

*Q: Well let's talk a bit about when you got to this '84-'88 period about the government in Nigeria and how the embassy worked within this framework.*

ANYASO: When I got there in '84 they had this wonderful moment of elected government and Democratic rule was going to be returning to Nigeria. Shehu Shagari was the president and one of my husband's friends was one of his very close advisers in this government. By the time I got

there the government was gone; it had been overthrown by Buhari, military, General Buhari. Nigerians always promoted themselves (unlike the Ghanaians, Rawlings always kept his rank as Flight Lieutenant). Once they had a coup then they became general whatever. So you had Buhari and Idi Obong and this was a military government, which was very, puritanical. They wanted to clean everything up and they wanted to follow all the rules and it was pretty harsh.

Now our offices are on One King's College Road and the ministry of defense is on an angle to our building. So these military officers are coming out in their convoys all the time and they are not nice people. You are to get out of the way and if you don't get out of the way you will be run over. Unfortunately, there were tourists, I remember there was a German woman tourist who was shot; you get out of the way when you see these things coming.

We laugh now about our politicians here being on message. They come on CNN or Fox and they are always on message; they've got their talking points. You talk about Nigerians being smart. This government had everybody on talking points; they were on message and they did not like the United States; they were very open about it and very rude about it, everybody was on message. So I visit the University of Lagos, this is a liberal arts institution, and I'm meeting with faculty there and the dean of this particular medical faculty stands up and gives this speech, this tirade against the United States; this is how they wanted to start every meeting. They would get up and deliver a tirade against the United States. So that wasn't very pleasant and it happened all the time.

However, they didn't ostracize us. They would work with us but in their own way. When we had American speakers, we took them to universities, we scheduled them in our cultural center, or we took them to meetings with other organizations. At one time, we had invited a speaker who was going to talk about the U.S. economy and we co-sponsored the program with the Nigerian Economic Association. Remember, this is during the Cold War and the Nigerians didn't want it to appear that they were leaning toward the U.S. so they invited the Russians to join us in this. So we had somebody from the Russian embassy on the panel and then there was a professor from the University of Calabar, I think, which is all the way over in the East who is a Marxist and they invited him to come and be on my program. I was livid, but what could I do. I couldn't disinvite them since they were our partners. They had a right to select people but it was very uncomfortable for me anyway, but it was a very interesting discussion. You would have the different points of view and all of that. So we went through that period with them.

One of the speakers I programmed was Herman Cohen who at the time...

*Q: Hank Cohen.*

ANYASO: Yes, Hank Cohen who was assistant secretary...

*Q: For African affairs.*

ANYASO: He was assistant secretary later on but at the time he was Ambassador to Senegal. He wanted to do some traveling and so since he was coming we figured we'd use him as a speaker. Nigeria has this wonderful organization, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs; it's sort

of like Brookings. They have researchers on staff and many of them are American trained and they have an auditorium and they have people from all over the world speaking there. So we said we have this ambassador from Senegal, Would you program him here at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and they said yes; he's a wonderful speaker. He didn't get easy questions but he was very adroit in answering.

*Q: Were we in competition with the Soviets at the time or were the Nigerians going their own way?*

ANYASO: We were in competition. It wasn't like earlier in the '60s but it was still there, they were a super powers still, we were a super power. The Nigerians didn't want to side with either of us. They wanted to be independent of both of us and so they weren't going to be nice to either of us. They made sure that if they did something with them we were involved, if they did something with us they were involved because they didn't want to be seen as favoring one side or the other. This was also the time, I forget what had happened, this must have been early on because Kissinger wanted to come out for a visit to Africa and they told him no because they felt very independent. The other thing the Nigerians were involved with was apartheid and getting rid of apartheid in South African. They were the African country that carried the anti-apartheid movement in Africa; they got others and beat them over the head and got them involved in this. But they put up the money and they were always out there talking about it and they were the ones who came up with the boycott of South African sports. Secretary Kissinger was going to come out, no, we are not going to meet with Secretary Kissinger and they didn't. Yes, this was Nigerians being Nigerians; they wanted to be independent of our politics especially this particular regime. Plus they didn't like our Africa policy towards southern Africa, South Africa and Angola.

*Q: This particular regime was there during this four-year period?*

ANYASO: They were in the seat when I got there and making things very unpleasant. I mean it was under this regime that they said we are Nigerians, we should look like Nigerians and women shouldn't be wearing pants and they should be wearing traditional dress. Nigerian women weren't going to stand for that. There was a governor in my husband's part of the country who told all the civil servants, all the women, no more pants. They must wear traditional dress. Even women who didn't wear pants got pants and they went to work the next day and they said, "Look, we are wearing pants. When you take off that western military uniform and wear traditional dress we will too, but we are wearing our own clothes and what we want to wear." It did not last but this was some of the thinking that this particular group came up with. They were relatively honest and they were trying to get rid of corruption. They were also going into the ministries at seven o'clock or eight o'clock or whenever it was that you were supposed to be at your desk and if you weren't at your desk you got fired; so they were just doing all kinds of things.

*Q: Would you say that the cultural side was one of the few places we could make some points in Nigeria at the time?*

ANYASO: Yes I would say that. We felt we were neutral they sort of understood that culture

was not really well they knew it was sort of political but it was less political than the rest of it. So we were able to have our programs. At one point they called us to task on the Fulbright Program because they wanted to have a say in who got selected and we told them that is not the way that it worked; it was a selection by peers, Nigerian academics would help us to select but not them. So they let us get away with that so it wasn't all bad.

*Q: At the embassy did you have the feeling that all of you were kind of marking time until they got rid of this I mean that they'd return to a Democratic non-military government? Was that the feeling?*

ANYASO: After the first coup, which was in '66 they had about 36 years of military government in Nigeria so it was a long slog. We weren't marking time; we did have access. It was just that we had to hear these speeches before we could really get down to business. At that time, I presented a lot of sports programs. They liked sports, they had a good sports federation, we did lots of sports programming even with the military. Our political section had access to the military and they were very chummy with one of the military officers by the name of Babangida. I don't think he was a general at that point but he was articulate, he's smart, he came to a wedding. I think one of the military attaches got married to one of the American secretaries. He came to the wedding at the ambassador's residence and so we knew the military officers and what they were doing. In 1985 when my parents had finally, finally gotten passports and decided they were going to come and visit me there was a coup. Babangida and some of his cohorts had staged a coup and my parents decided this was not the time to visit Nigeria. They were sort of nervous and I didn't want to pressure them I figured they would be okay; I wasn't afraid of being there but they were different. So Babangida became the next military leader and we had wonderful access. We had high hopes for him and what he could do for Nigeria and in those early days he was pretty good; Nigerian national day is October the first, this Friday is October first?

*Q: Thursday.*

ANYASO: Is it Thursday?

*Q: I'm not sure.*

ANYASO: Yes, well that is Nigerian National Day. The first national day after the coup, which had been in July or August he decided he wanted to have a parade on national day and it rained on his parade, buckets. There you have this handsome military officer on a white horse in this pouring rain; I will never forget it. He just looked like he was the next savior of Nigeria. Well he wasn't. He became probably one of the most corrupt military dictators that the country has had and that was unfortunate.

*Q: Oil wealth had really started to come in by his time hadn't it?*

ANYASO: Yes, oil wealth dominated the seventies; that's when they had all these ships bringing in cement for all the building. Everybody had his own private plane; the Nigerians bought all these private planes and had executive jets. They were flying British Airways into London over the weekend for shopping sprees. Starting in the seventies the money was tapering off but the

few people in power had access to what money there was. A barrel of oil in those days it wasn't like now it's \$12-\$15 I think it went up to \$20 something but \$12-\$15 primarily back in the eighties. But psychologically, two things had happened to Nigerians. The Nigerian Biafran war had left a big, big wound in that society and the values in that society. The next thing was this oil what they called the curse of oil because they let everything go. They had cocoa plants, they stopped tending the trees, they weren't exporting cocoa, and agriculture just died. They started importing a lot of their foodstuffs, they weren't growing it anymore so it became a one product economy and that has been the kiss of death.

*Q: It's the curse of oil and so often here is a very rich country, which is not going anywhere.*

ANYASO: Eighty-five percent of the budget is from the oil; without oil they would collapse.

*Q: How was Lagos at the time living there?*

ANYASO: You know I think that the public diplomacy people see the best of society. I wasn't getting people out of jail, I wasn't doing consular work, all those visa lines which became...the three biggest visa operations in the U.S. government overseas is Manila, Lagos and Mexico City and that's it; lines of people, lines and lines and lines of people. I didn't deal with that I dealt with academics, journalists, and cultural types like actors. The only repertory theater in Africa, at least in West Africa, was in Lagos. J.P. Clarke who had been trained at Princeton ran it; we had an American teaching at the University of IFE who was teaching theater and he was involved with Wole Soyinka and presenting plays; Soyinka's plays and things like that. So I'm into the plays, I'm into the writers, I'm into the artists, I'm into the students, I'm into the professors so I'm having a good time and I'm thinking this is the best place to be; now I will still say that. I served in Abuja and people said, "Well how is Abuja?" I thought, no, Abuja is not like this, there is no energy here, there is nothing happening here everything happens in Lagos. It was wonderful. They had Jazz clubs, Jazz 38; we were friendly with them and we'd go to the club. They would have jazz night at the museum; all the people in culture were having a good time.

The British Council person said to me, "You know Claudia, this is the best kept secret in the world." Nobody realized we were having such a good time and you can have a good time. You meet so many wonderful people, judges and lawyers. In USIS whenever people didn't know what to do with something they would say why don't you call those people in USIS and see if they can help; we got all the overflow. There was an AID contractor's husband who came out with her. We had child and maternal health programs; the one thing about oil countries is you can't have an aid program in an oil country because they have too much money, right? Most of the people don't have it but we don't give U.S. aid so it was a regional aid program and they had a couple of people in Nigeria. So they were doing child and maternal health programs, anyway somebody was coming out to do that and her husband was an astrophysicist. He volunteered and offered himself as a lecturer and I thought it was a non-starter. Who are you going to find to listen to this guy? Why are you calling me? Calm down, why don't you see what you can do. He's coming anyway. I said, "Well if I'm going to have an astrophysicist I'm going to find something for him to do." So I called the University of Lagos sort of you know I've already decided this will never work. I said, "You know, I have Professor so and so from the University of Texas or wherever he was from and he's an astrophysicist and he wants to come and talk to

your students about greenhouse gasses.” The professor said, “Yes, send him over, what did you say his name was again?” He took his name down “And what’s his last name?” and took that down. “Oh, yes some of our guys had worked there and we know these people.” They had the best time. Whatever you wanted to do you could find a Nigerian who knew something about it and wanted to help you do it. So I had a great time. In fact, I had such a good time and fashion, ah fashion, fabric, fashion, wow. They had tremendous fashion shows. Of course, I was a judge at these fashion shows.

So I said this Foreign Service isn’t all bad, it’s pretty good so I decided that I would apply to join the Foreign Service after this Excursion Tour; now you had to do the oral exam and the in-box and all of that. I came home one summer and I did that and went back and they selected me. Nigeria was my first overseas tour but I was on an Excursion Tour so my first real assignment as a Foreign Service officer was in Haiti; I had to get my French requirement out of the way. I had my bid list and I had all these wonderful places at the top and I had Haiti at the bottom. So I got a call at home one night; they don’t do this they call you during working hours, at home at night. I knew something was going on, I knew something was wrong I was suspicious. “Hello, Mrs. Anyaso? Great news for you.” “Yes?” “We are so delighted to tell you that you are going to Haiti.” I said, “What? What about all those other countries?” “Well, Haiti was on your list and we need people to go to Haiti.” And so that is how I went to my next assignment, Port-Au-Prince.

**Joyce E. Leader  
Political Officer  
Lagos (1985-1988)**

*Ambassador Leader was born in Pennsylvania and raised in Ohio. He was educated at Dennison University, the University of Chicago, and the Columbia University School of Journalism. After work in the private sector and with the US Department of Education, he joined the Peace Corps, serving in Kinshasa and at headquarters in Washington. Joining the State Department in 1982 he began his career in which he was to deal primarily with African concerns, both in Washington and abroad. His foreign postings include Kinshasa, Ouagadougou, Lagos and Marseilles. In 1999 he was appointed Ambassador to Guinea, where he served until 2000. Ambassador Leader was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.*

LEADER: I went to the post that I had put on my bid list as an afterthought: Lagos, Nigeria. I was initially very upset about having to go from one hardship post in West Africa to another hardship post in West Africa when I was trying to get out of Africa. I was trying to broaden my base and thought that by putting Dhaka number one on my list that I would surely be able to go. I thought that trying to get into South Asia would be a good entry point because there wasn’t much demand. It turned out that as soon as they saw my name on the list for Lagos -- the only name on the list for Lagos -- I was assigned in the second week of the assignment process without any prior consultation.

It turned out to be one of my best assignments. I learned a lot about Foreign Service reporting and I had a very good boss, Peter Chaveas, who is currently the ambassador to Sierra Leone. It was a larger embassy, a bigger political section. I had to learn not to do everything like I was doing in Burkina Faso but to carve out a little niche for myself. I just had a great time there.

*Q: You were there from '85 to when?*

LEADER: I was there from 1985 to 1988. I actually left there in 1988 on a direct transfer. I extended, but I left on a direct transfer in the middle of spring.

*Q: In 1985 you arrive in Lagos. What was Nigeria like then?*

LEADER: In some ways, it was already somewhat dangerous. I recall that there were some incidents that people at the embassy faced. One fellow had his car hijacked at gunpoint. There were other incidents involving guns and foreigners and Americans. It was an extremely lively place. The Nigerians loved talking to foreigners. As a political officer it was so easy to get information because everybody wanted to tell you their side of the story. If you didn't come to them, they would come to you, because you had to know their point of view. But while it was very easy to get information, the harder part was to assess it. Everybody was telling you their particular side of the story. This was not long after a coup. The president, Babangida, had come to power about six months before I got there. He was promising a return to democratic rule and political stability. The people who had been in charge of political parties were already starting to maneuver. I had the good fortune of being sent up to Kaduna one summer when there was a gap between the consul generals who were the principal officers there. I was able to go around and talk to all of these would-be political leaders and send in reports of their aspirations and what they were envisioning. This was very welcome and very much appreciated throughout the U.S. government. Those reports put Kaduna on the map at that time. It was a very exciting time. The Nigerians in the south were very vivacious and fun loving. They liked to have foreigners at their events, and when I say "events," I mean their weddings, their chief inductions, even deaths. They wanted you always to come to their events and so we got involved in a lot of these kinds of things. You really got into the culture.

I worked with the Democracy Fund. By that time, we had the Democracy and Human Rights Fund. I worked with people who were human rights activists. There was a woman who was very involved... She was the Nigerian representative to the African-American Institute and she was very involved in trying to reach out to women on democracy. We funded a project that she had and funded some human rights projects. We were very busy and very involved, very engaged.

*Q: The president was whom?*

LEADER: Ibrahim Babangida.

*Q: How did we view him and how was he running the country?*

LEADER: It was after I left that everybody began to turn sour on him. While I was there, we had



hopes that he would do the right thing. He was delicately balancing all of the various groups in Nigeria. You asked me about groups in Ouagadougou where they existed but they were not combative. In Nigeria, the groups were very competitive in trying to get access to the resources of Nigeria, basically oil. Oil had already become the black gold of that country and had pretty much drowned out agriculture. The country was now beginning to import food. It was under the IMF (International Monetary Fund) program and it was having a great deal of difficulty conforming to the expectations of that program. We talked a lot at staff meetings about having the exchange rate be a floating exchange rate.

*Q: You were in the political section. What piece of the action did you have?*

LEADER: My particular portfolio was external affairs. I did the foreign ministry, its UN involvement and so on. The part of my portfolio on which I spent a lot of time and which was most interesting was religion. I was covering Christianity versus Islam. That was just absolutely fascinating and so important even now to the relationships of people in the country.

*Q: Was Islam spreading? Was there almost an agreed upon line between the two religions?*

LEADER: Convention had it – and I think that in general we could say – that the northern half of Nigeria was Islamic and that the southwest was both Islamic and Christian in the Yoruba area and that the north was the Hausa area and that in the Ibo area it was overwhelmingly Christian. You did have that kind of rubric to start out with. But certainly in the north there were a lot of pockets where Christianity predominated, so as we saw more recently when they tried to impose Sharia, there were a lot of people opposed because there were a lot of people who are not Muslims. The thing that we found when we looked at it – and this was confirmed in a few articles in the newspaper very recently – Evangelical Christianity was making inroads in the north-

*Q: That is odd because normally you don't make inroads against Islam.*

LEADER: Well, the Muslims were very upset by it. Christianity was attracting the youth and it was offering people some answers to things that they weren't getting in their own religion. They were trying to keep them out, but they couldn't do it. Islam was kind of under attack from the other side because the type of Islam that was practiced was the Sunni Islam and not fundamentalist or radical in any way. There were some people coming in from more fundamentalist groups. The Lebanese community was very big in the north and there were some members of those families who were sending their youth over to Nigeria to work in businesses that were owned by their extended families. They were bringing with them some Shiite and fundamentalist ideas. Some influences came from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. And there were some riots – the Christian-Muslim riots. Sometimes you weren't sure who was in charge of them, who was running them from the Muslim side, whether they were going to turn on the Americans or anything like that. The traditional leaders were not interested in attacking the Americans at that point in time, but there was always that concern.

*Q: Was Qadhafi involved?*

LEADER: I don't think Qadhafi had a great deal of influence and I don't think we saw his hand in there. But the Muslims felt that the Christians were trying to get rid of them and they felt the Christian ways of looking at things – the calendar, the work week, all of these things that were associated with the Judeo-Christian world – were being imposed on Nigeria. But the southerners felt that the Muslims of the north were trying to take over the whole country. There was an oft quoted phrase that the Muslims in the north had said that they were going to dip the Koran in the sea, which was interpreted to mean that they wanted to take over the entire country and make it an Islamic state. That friction is going to continue for some time in Nigeria.

*Q: How about corruption?*

LEADER: There was a lot of corruption, but I wasn't personally able to identify or see a lot of it. I wasn't following that particular line.

*Q: How about democratic institutions and the courts? How were things going?*

LEADER: I think there was always a question about whether there could be a fair trial or whether it would be colored by the desired political outcome. The group that I was observing that was most often involved in courts were the journalists, who were frequently having their newspapers closed down or being arrested and held. Unfortunately, sometimes they would also be killed. There was a lot of subterranean subterfuge going on. I had to do the human rights reports as well. I just tried to report the way things were functioning, but I have to confess that I don't know in great depth how the courts were managing.

*Q: By the time you left there in 1988, how did you feel things were developing in Nigeria?*

LEADER: When I left, I thought that there was still some hope that the country would in fact go back to some multiparty democracy. A constitution was being written. The political parties were being allowed to form again. The leaders were staking out their positions. Some of them had a broader view than others. But it seemed that there was some sense that the country needed to continue as one and so on. It was not long after I left that it tended to turn and it looked as if Babangida was not going to follow through on his commitments and just let them be pushed off and pushed off and pushed off until they were just forgotten.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

LEADER: The first ambassador was Thomas Smith. He was very ill. His DCM was our chargé. Don Gelber was the DCM who became the chargé for a considerable period of time. Then Princeton Lyman came as our ambassador. He was the ambassador for the rest of the time that I was there.

**PRINCETON LYMAN**  
**Ambassador**  
**Nigeria (1986-1989)**

*Ambassador Princeton Lyman was born and raised in San Francisco. He was educated at Stanford University, University of California and Harvard University. In 1961 he joined the Agency for International Development (AID), where he served as Program Director in Korea and Ethiopia. In his long and distinguished career, Ambassador Lyman held a number of high positions at AID Headquarters in Washington, D.C. as well as with The Department of State. After serving as Ambassador to Nigeria and later to South Africa, Ambassador Lyman was Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations from 1996 to 1998. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.*

*Q: Then in 1986 you became U.S. ambassador to Nigeria. How did that come about?*

LYMAN: Actually, it resulted from a tragic event. Tom Smith, the ambassador and a great expert in West Africa, became very ill. He could not continue in Nigeria. So I was asked by Chet Crocker whether I would be interested in the assignment and I said "yes." Smith was a fantastic guy who worked right up to the end of his life. In fact, when I went to Nigeria, Tom wrote me a 21 page letter. It was the best orientation and briefing that anybody could have. He covered everything. He wrote because he had difficulty in speaking. It was a fantastic orientation on what it would be like to be the ambassador to Nigeria. He was a great man.

*Q: You stayed in Nigeria from 1986 to 1989.*

LYMAN: Correct.

*Q: Did you have any difficulties being confirmed?*

LYMAN: None. There was a lot of Congressional interest in Africa. The hearings were right on target and I didn't have any problems.

*Q: When you left the U.S., what did you expect in Nigeria?*

LYMAN: At the end of 1983, there had been a coup in Nigeria when the democratic government had just won its second election. It had been a fairly corrupt government, but nevertheless it had been re-elected. What replaced it was a stern military dictatorship led by General Buhari; previous military regimes had not been too harsh in Nigeria prior to 1983. It rapidly became very unpopular. On the other hand, Buhari was fairly clean and was vigorously pursuing corruption, including some corrupt dealings in the military. Then in early 1986, there was another coup led by General Babangida. He was much more benign than his predecessor. He also may have acted because of the corruption investigations.

So when I arrived, Babangida was the president. The two main issues were the return to civilian rule and the restoration of a functioning economy. I found Babangida to be extremely shrewd; he was one of the few African leaders who had a grasp of economics – at least the relationship between economics and politics. So for the first part of my tour, I thought that Babangida was a very constructive leader. He later made some major mistakes which led Nigeria into a very bad

situation.

But during the early parts of my tour, we were relatively optimistic about Nigeria's future. The major argument within Nigeria centered on whether Nigeria should sign off to an IMF loan program, which called for considerable austerity and adjustment. The exchange rate for example was unrealistic; it had generated a lot of corruption. Budget deficits were out of control, etc. The IMF would demand a lot of changes. Babangida conducted a major public debate about the IMF loan program. The answer from the public was negative. So Babangida said that Nigeria would conduct its own economic recovery program. What he did, in fact, was institute a program which certainly had IMF and World Bank informal approval. In essence he called for the same remedies that the international institutions would have – devaluation, elimination of the multiple exchange rates, freeing of the foreign exchange market. His program did bring a lot of austerity which was unpopular in the urban areas, but it did have a positive effect on the economy. The economy stopped its downward spiral; it began to recover a little bit; there was more production and more exports.

Babangida then launched a very complicated multi-year program intended to return the government to civilian rule. It was to end in 1989 or 1990. It was a very tightly managed program. The basic assumption was that Nigerian politics were so corrupt that the process could not be left to politicians but had to be directed from the top. The government was to approve each political party and oversee every step toward democratic elections. If it had been carried out with a great deal of sincerity, it might have worked, but in fact Babangida missed an opportunity. During my tour, both the programs seemed headed in the right direction. The economic program was reasonably on target; when it seemed to be veering off in the wrong direction, I had two allies in the government that I could contact with my views; they would in turn go to Babangida to tell him that he was going off the rails. It is interesting that later, when all programs were being misdirected, that both of my allies in the government had left office.

*Q: Did you see Babangida shortly after your arrival?*

LYMAN: I presented my credentials fairly quickly. Actually, having a meeting with him was something that I had to learn how to do. What we learned was that going through the foreign ministry, which we were told was required, was the wrong approach. At first, there was a foreign minister who was a super-proud academic – we are good friends today, but he was prickly then. He had a bit of the negative third world outlook on western countries. In any case, the foreign ministry did not have much influence in the presidential palace.

So I had to find allies within the presidential office if I were ever to have access to the president. At first, I used his aide-de-camp who is now living in Virginia and is another good friend. That got me in at first. Later, I began again to have great difficulty with access. By dint of good fortune, I was asked by a Lebanese business man – he represented a very important community in Nigeria (Lebanese businessmen ran a lot of industries and had very good contacts in important Nigerian circles) – who called me and said that Aliyu Mohamed who was the head of military intelligence, wanted to see me. I didn't know him, but I agreed. The meeting was to take place at the Lebanese businessman's house. I found out that what was on Mohammed's mind was that he had applied for a visa to travel. In Nigeria, the availability of a visa was an important

achievement – I used to be importuned about visas more than any other subject. He had received the visa, but he told me that one of his aides had made a terrible mistake. In sending a picture of him to the embassy, he had sent one that showed him in uniform. He never traveled with a picture of himself in uniform. He asked whether I could have the visa reissued with the right picture. I told him that he would have to have a new passport because our visas were stamped right into the passport. If he did that, I would have a new visa issued. But I told him (hinted at a quid pro quo) that I was having a great difficulty in seeing the president and asked him what he might be able to do about my problem. So he became my entree to the president. Whenever I wanted to see the president, I would call Mohammed and he would arrange a meeting; the foreign minister was very seldom there.

*Q: What was Babangida's background? What did you think about his style?*

LYMAN: He was a military officer. He was from the middle of Nigeria. He was a Muslim. He was called the Maradona (a soccer star) of politics. He was clever and shrewd. He played politics extremely well; that is he played people off against each other. I admired him because he understood in principle that if there traditional sources of corruption in Nigeria were to be broken, it would require breaking the national government's hold over the economy. For example, the government would have to abandon requiring licenses for foreign exchange because that made everything corrupt. So he canceled the need for licenses for foreign exchange. He liberalized, to some extent, the Nigerian economy so that the sources of power were more widely held. That is what I meant when I said he understood the relationship of politics and economics.

As I said, he had planned a way to manage the political processes at all levels – local, state and national. I found when I went to see him that he was quite knowledgeable and understanding. There were times when we had some real differences over issues, but on the whole, I was impressed by his regime. He surrounded himself with some very shrewd people – the minister for finance and governor of the central bank. They became my two allies. So on the whole, I had very positive views of Babangida.

There were issues of concern to us which we could not quite eliminate. For example, Nigeria had a ban on the import of wheat and rice which was an anathema to American exporters. It was a source of corruption, stimulating smuggling of those products and making some Nigerians very rich. They used to pretend that the smuggled wheat had been grown in the north, which was really not true. I once gave a speech on that issue which caused a scandal because it suggested that we would apply trade sanctions.

We also wanted to get Nigeria to recognize Israel. That did happen after I left. Babangida had a wonderful response when I first broached the subject. He said that this issue was a political problem for Nigeria; it was not a religious issue – “after all they are not Christians!”

*Q: The Nigerians have a reputation for being very shrewd, particularly about financial matters. Did you observe that?*

LYMAN: It is true. The tragedy of Nigeria is that its people are so clever, but it is misapplied

and used for purposes which really do not move the country forward. The Yoruba are great traders – this is one of about 200 tribes living in Nigeria, but three main groups: Hausa in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest and the Ibo in east. Many Nigerians are great traders. They are not great investors in production and manufacturing. But they are brilliant traders. Everybody one talked to was in the “import-export” business. That covered a broad spectrum, including some illegalities. Nigerians are very clever. There is a whole division in the FBI devoted to Nigerian crimes. When I was in Nigeria, the Nigerians were beginning to become involved in the drug trade in a major way and that continues even today. They don’t grow any of the narcotics; they are just traders. Because Nigeria belongs to the British Commonwealth, they had almost unfettered access to India, Pakistan and other opium production areas. The Nigerians became the conveyers and traders. The drugs would enter Nigeria and then be spread around Europe and the U.S. Now Nigerians have become major heroin traffickers. While I was there, the Nigerians did not have control over this traffic; in fact, they were in denial as are a lot of other countries. They used to excuse it by saying that they were poor and this was a way to get rich off the rich people. We used to point out that the use of the narcotics was becoming a domestic problem for Nigeria and that it was demeaning to the whole country. Gradually, they began to see what was happening, but by this time, the corruption had reached very high levels of the government.

We had a DEA agent on the embassy staff; he was very cynical. He used to complain about the Nigerians that I used to invite to my house because he suspected that all Nigerians were involved in the drug trade. So I asked him to give me the name of one Nigerian whom he felt I could invite with perfect confidence that he was not involved in the drug trade. When I was having my farewell party three years later, I told him that I was still waiting for that one name. He said he was still looking!

The Nigerians are a dynamic and fun people. I keep telling people that when I go to Nigeria, I have a lot of fun. I say that even when the Nigerians have their hands in your pocket, they are fun. Once I was in a large crowd and a Nigerian did put his hand in my pocket. I stopped him and all he had to say was: “Sorry!” This trait is unfortunate because the Nigerians are a dynamic people; they have a rich art culture, in which we got involved. But they have a tendency to focus on the buck, trading primarily, and not to invest for the long run. Huge amounts of Nigerian capital is outside the country. That is a shame. They have let their agriculture slide precipitously. That is the negative side of the Nigerian character.

The other matter we worked on was Nigerian assistance for our efforts in Angola. Chet Crocker was still the assistant secretary. I went to President Babangida and former President Obasanjo – who lived about 1 ½ hours away. I wanted them not only involved in the peace process, but to open the door for Africans to deal with Savimbi, the rebel leader in Angola. That was a very delicate matter in those days. We and South Africa had been supporting Savimbi and therefore made him an anathema to many African states. Savimbi was not welcomed by most African states because he was supported by South Africa. Chet was engaged in a very complicated process trying to settle the Namibia crisis, by getting the Cubans out of Angola. Part of the solution was to bring Savimbi into the political process.

So I went to Babangida and he was intrigued by the possibilities. He was willing to play, but the person most interested in this opportunity was Obasanjo. He was then a distinguished ex-head of

state. He was willing to try; he went to Angola where he had good relations with the government. He did talk to Savimbi and did open some doors. So I found myself having two roles in Nigeria, dealing with the current and the former presidents of the country. I must say that in general we and the Nigerians did not have a lot of disagreements on foreign policy. Sometime the foreign ministry would issue some typical anti-American complaints, with the South Africa issue being the main cause. This was the Reagan administration which was not very keen on sanctions against South Africa.

But on the whole, our relations with Nigeria were good. One thing I did with Babangida, which my successor did not do, was to meet with him alone. I almost never took any of my staff to these meetings. He usually didn't have anybody with him; except Mohammed from time to time. I never mentioned these meetings in public, nor did I share the substance of the conversations with any other ambassadors. Not many people saw the president; some of my fellow ambassadors complained about that and therefore I did not tell them of my meetings. The British High Commissioner and I were the only foreign representatives who had regular access. We protected that and I think it made a lot of difference.

I gave a lot of speeches. I talked about democracy, but I was careful in my remarks not to slam the government. That I think also added to the confidence that Babangida had in me. As I said earlier, later Babangida went off the tracks for a lot of different reasons, but for some time he did a fine job in my eyes.

This was my first experience in managing a "country team." I had had some very good advice from Tom Smith, who understood thoroughly how important an ambassador was to the morale of the embassy staff. One of Tom's hobbies was to make furniture. One day, while doing that, he cut his hand. Someone said to him then that when his hand hurt, all the hands in the mission hurt. He learned that if an ambassador carried a frown on his face, everybody became worried. In an embassy such as Nigeria, everyone keyed off the ambassador. I found that what had told me was absolutely true. The ambassador set the tone; if things were going well and the ambassador was happy, everybody worked that much harder. If the ambassador worried and fretted, so did the staff.

We had a very good mission. It is not unusual that morale is high in a "hardship" post. Morale does go up and down. We would have great spirit, and then one month later our medical officer, who was one of my guides to tell me what was going on, would walk into my office to tell me that morale had sunk in the toilet. So I then had to rebuild it. But the country team was very good. Not surprisingly, there were differences, but we could always come to some agreement. The Inspector General's office praised us for being one of the four best managed missions in the world. I was very proud of that. People worked well and hard. We used to have ship visits which were very popular. We tried to keep the community involved in various activities.

We had a very tiny assistance program. But we had a full country team, including some military representation. We had a very tough station chief; she was consumed with ferreting out possible recruitment of our staff by the communists. That created a little friction because she investigated some of her mission colleagues.

*Q: Was the fact that the station chief was a woman part of the problem?*

LYMAN: That was part of the problem, but it was also during this time that the Sergeant Lonetree activities in Moscow became public. The Marines were accused of letting Soviet nationals into the embassy after hours. Our station chief worried mainly about our Marines and communicators, who she felt were the most vulnerable to penetration attempts in part because, as in many embassies, these groups felt somewhat separated from the rest of the staff. There were a couple of bars near the embassy; many communicators and the Marines went there for a drink after work. She found out that there were some suspicious characters in the bars as well; she was worried that some of our Marines might make good targets. In fact, one was enticed into an affair with a Nigerian-Indian woman, which was at least questionable. I found out later that the station chief kept files on various embassy staffers. I think she had a legitimate concern since the Cold War was still raging. We had to tell the Marine to break up with the woman – she was married and had a lot of Soviet friends.

But the larger problem was alcoholism. I had to send two people back to the States for treatment. One came back after his treatment and became an advocate for Alcoholics Anonymous. I must say that the Department has a good system for treating alcoholics.

*Q: What was the process for that?*

LYMAN: We had four cases while I was in Nigeria. I had a very good medical officer who was very good at spotting alcoholics. He was very sensitive and attuned to the usual signs. We had one spouse who got terribly drunk and with her husband's agreement, we sent her home. We had a communicator who had a serious alcoholic problem; we sent him back for treatment. He got excellent treatment in the Department and returned and formed the first AA chapter in Nigeria. He toured the country and helped set up additional chapters. We had a third person who had had previous bouts with alcoholism and showed signs of returning to former habits. We worked with him and he sobered up again. I had to send one Marine home for alcoholism.

I felt I could send people home if alcoholism created a problem at post. If they were members of the Foreign Service, they were treated by the Department's medical staff. The Department's program was a good one; it was sympathetic, not punitive. We had to be alert for signs of alcoholism; being overseas was sometime an invitation to do some heavy drinking. I think alcoholism was my biggest personnel concern. One of the problems of working overseas is that living in a small community, one tends to become much more familiar with the personal lives of your colleagues than you would when working in the U.S. When I was a deputy assistant secretary, the personal lives of my staff were none of my business. But overseas it is another situation entirely. In the first place, you can't avoid knowing almost everything that goes on in the official American community – and beyond. For example, there were two couples who had swapped spouses; that became a major issue. Life overseas is not private; you live in a fish bowl and what you do affects the whole community. It is just one of the facts of overseas life you have to deal with.

*Q: What about the economic issues?*



LYMAN: They were vital. Fortunately, we had a strong economics staff, even though recruiting people to serve in Nigeria was generally difficult. We were fortunate in that we had people back in Washington in the personnel assignment process who cared about Nigeria. Marshall McCallie was there; he had worked on Nigeria; he chose bright young officers just out of their initial training program or ready for their second tour. He encouraged them to go to Nigeria; so we had lots of bright young officers who were the backbone of the mission. I recruited John Campbell as my political counselor; he had been in Geneva and had never worked on African matters, but he was terrific. [In 2003 he returned as ambassador to Nigeria.]

The economics section was key because we were heavily engaged on economic reform. I was trying to get the Export-Import Bank to make or guarantee some loans to American firms willing to invest in Nigeria. The only way we could do that was to ensure that the Nigerians would repay the loans. That was a problem because Nigeria was already overburdened with debts. So I assigned two junior officers to sit in the finance ministry to collect the repayments of these loans. I told them they would learn a lot because they would have to follow a paper trail and learn the process backwards and forwards. They would also have to badger Nigerian bureaucrats. I told them they would learn more about the Nigerian economic system than they would have in any other way. We were successful; we collected millions of dollars for the Export-Import Bank. I nagged the senior officials and these two young officers followed the paper trail to make sure that the loans were repaid. The officers told me that they had learned a tremendous amount doing that.

I did a lot to encourage American business – some successfully, some not. I worked a lot with oil companies. Export-Import Bank provided financing support for a large shale oil project for Mobil which has turned out to be a great success. Shale oil was easy to extract; it was right on the earth's surface. Most of the American oil exploitation in Nigeria is off-shore, in deep waters. Shell was the principal producer there. Mobil had a grant for one shale area, where the oil was present and cheap to mine. But it needed a big Export-Import loan to do it. I worked tirelessly with the Export-Import Bank, with Mobil, and with the Nigerian government. It was a very successful as was the Kellogg fertilizer plant, which unfortunately later the Nigerians screwed up. But for many years, it was a very successful project for Kellogg.

*Q: Where did the money that the American companies undoubtedly paid, go?*

LYMAN: Oil companies made money; Kellogg made money. The Nigerians are partners in every one of these investments. Usually, the Nigerians guarantee that they will plow back so much money into maintenance and further development. However, the Nigerians never live up to their end of the bargain. So the American companies either cover the deficits or they let the production decrease. So Nigeria produces much less oil than it could because the Nigerians refuse to plow some of their earnings back into necessary maintenance or expansion. They take all of their share and fail to recognize their shortsightedness. This was typical in the oil business and was true with the fertilizer plant. That plant really was worn out in a few years. The oil companies would constantly complain about the Nigerian lack of contribution. Granting ownership of oil off take was also a major means of corruption in Nigeria.

That attitude is part of the problem. This is one area where Babangida failed to take action. The

temptation of making short term investment in oil is so great that the president in the final analysis made millions and really neglected the long run.

Lot of the money earned by the Nigerians went into off-shore banks. Chet Crocker recently wrote a paper in which he used World Bank data showing that capital flight from Africa has been about \$150 billion. In Nigeria, the estimate is that in the three years – 1976-79 – that Obasanjo was president about \$11 billion left the country. This revenue is primarily generated by oil returns, although some of it also comes from the drug trade and other commerce.

The system works as follows: the Nigerian government has a 40-50% share of the oil production. That allows it to give contracts for the shipment of the oil to world wide destinations. If someone wants to help just one crony, you would allow him to use one tanker and never record the transaction. That would make him a millionaire over-night. If he has friends, he splits the profits. About 90% of Nigeria's foreign currency earnings comes from the oil business. The temptation for corruption is overwhelming. Babangida fell into it like every one else and pretty soon, he was giving out concessions, and making a personal fortune. Fortunes in Nigeria could also be made by smuggling in wheat and rice as well as through the drug trade. All the earnings from this corruption or illegal trade is sent to banks in other countries. Some of it goes into property purchases. The military was buying up the choice properties in Lagos; it was a scandal. They used Lebanese fronts to buy restaurants and big houses; so the foreign exchange earnings either went off-shore or into real estate.

Look at Babangida today. He put millions of dollars into Obasanjo's presidential campaign and thereby bought back his influence. But Nigeria is run down. I was there in February as part of an election observer team. I saw no progress in nine years.

*Q: One of my colleagues visited the University of Nigeria during your time and said it was a waste of time because it was on strike frequently or shut down otherwise.*

LYMAN: What he told you was absolutely correct. To go the universities was depressing then and is still today. In the 1970s, during the oil boom, Nigeria built 26 universities. Some of them were top flight, in part stemming from the time when the British administered them. American universities also had sister institution relationships with some of the Nigerian universities. These relationships were very important. But two things happened. We closed most of our assistance program because at least on the surface, Nigeria was rich. Then all the relationships dried up, except for a few minor instances. By the time, I arrived in Nigeria, most of the faculties in Nigerian universities had no relationships with the U.S., unlike in the decades before when the connections were very close. Most of the faculty was anti-American; they were resentful and unhappy. In the meantime, oil revenues were decreasing. So the Nigerians had university infrastructure, but no money for books or maintenance or journals or faculty. So these institutions became spawning grounds for unhappiness, strikes, politicalization of the faculty. I had good friends teaching in the universities; I was always amazed that they managed to teach at all.

But rationalizing this university system was impossible because every state had to have its own institution; every ethnic group wanted its own university. So while I was in Nigeria, new ones

were being built – beautiful campuses – even though the older ones could not be sustained. It is a serious problem which I discussed extensively when I was in South Africa. We have to learn how to build relationships outside of the assistance programs. To do that, we have to devise some other kind of support beyond the assistance program. Otherwise, when aid programs are terminated, so are the relationships between an American and a foreign institution. We do not have a structure for middle-income countries. I could see that happening in Nigeria; all the great relationships of the 1960s and 1970s had dried up.

*Q: Did the relationship depend entirely on the availability of government funds? Could the American universities have participated using their own resources?*

LYMAN: Some universities continued their programs for their own academic benefit, but they were a fraction of what they had been. Universities are under pressure to spend for domestic purposes and not international ones. Some of the relationships lingered, but minuscule compared to before our aid program was terminated. We didn't have faculty exchanges; there weren't Nigerians studying in the U.S. to the same degree as before. I used to struggle to keep the Fulbrighters happy because they attended these universities and were very discouraged by the strikes and the continual interruptions of their education. It was a sad story which I am sorry is no better today. The Nigerian students are not getting a very good education in a country of more than 110 million people.

The Midwestern universities consortium continued – Michigan State, Indiana and Ohio State to some extent. They maintained some relationships; they had a numbers of scholars who had an interest in Nigeria and who continued to work with those Nigerian universities with which they had established contacts. This relationship continued and we benefited from that, but it was a smaller enterprise than it had been; it should have been a much larger cooperative enterprise for a country of Nigeria's size.

*Q: How well did the embassy's political reporting work in a country run by the military?*

LYMAN: We had pretty good travel access. It was not perfect, but pretty good. We had a consulate in Kaduna, which was very important because we found that the Nigerian military was less firm in their rule in the north than they were in Lagos. So our consulate had much more informal access to the military elite; we used that frequently. I used to go and see people there in a different atmosphere.

I traveled to all the states and met with a variety of people. Usually, one of our political officers would go first to make the necessary arrangements. I think in general we had pretty good access to a variety of Nigerians. In retrospect, we didn't anticipate sufficiently the problems that Nigeria is now experiencing in the delta – that is where the oil is. We knew there was some unrest because the people who lived there never got any benefit from the oil revenues, while their environment was being destroyed. I think they had some valid complaints. But we didn't focus on that region. We reported a lot on the transition; we reported on the drug trafficking which was a high priority for the political section and the DEA office. We also reported on Christian-Muslim tensions which often broke out in violence, as well as on human rights issues. We had good contact with the human rights groups, who were not happy with the situation. So in general,

we did not have too many difficulties in sending reports on the political situation in Nigeria.

Let me just add further thought on the religious issue in northern Nigeria. We have always been concerned by Muslim fundamentalism. In Nigeria's north, there was a group of traditional Islamic emirs. The challenge to these emirs came from what I would call "radical" Islamists. The emirs were not necessarily Islamic scholars; they were feudal lords. They did not fit the image of a ruler for the "radical" Islamists; in their mind, rulers should be clerics, not feudal lords who happen to be in charge because their fathers and the grandfathers had been rulers. That "radicalism" came from Saudi Arabia, not Libya. The "radicals" had gotten their education and training by Saudis. They wanted Arabic to be the spoken language, not Hausa; clerics should be the rulers, not these feudal descendants. The establishment in the north was very nervous about this challenge.

We did have differences within the embassy between the "optimists" and the "pessimists." We used to discuss the future of Nigeria to a considerable extent. The CIA station was comfortable in Nigeria because their targets in Africa are mostly other embassies. There were a lot of such embassies in Nigeria. There were a lot of countries that used their representation in Nigeria for regional purposes. We had a large presence from the communist countries, which provided a lot of opportunities for the station. CIA had a fairly significant presence. It did not have a completely satisfactory relationships with its Nigerian counterparts because the local security establishments included some very shady characters – they tended to be cruel, repressive and untrustworthy. I had a good relationships with the military intelligence organization, as I mentioned earlier, but I refused to have anything to do with the police establishment which was headed by a guy who later became Abacha's personal security chief. He was a cruel thug, in essence. We wouldn't have any contacts with him. He once arrested an American; I used my military intelligence contacts to get him released.

*Q: What were the Soviets, Libyans, and Cubans up to?*

LYMAN: We were very concerned about the Libyans because, at that time, they had established a fairly strong presence in Benin, which was a neighboring country. We succeeded in getting the Nigerians very concerned about the same thing. We emphasized that Benin being right on Nigeria's border, was an important security issue. The Nigerians recognized the potential subversion problem. Furthermore, the north was greatly concerned by extreme Islamism, which was not home grown. There was some pro-Libyan sentiment in that region; I was criticized sharply by some academics there because they accused us of being too hard on Libya.

The Cuban presence was not an issue. We worried about the communists. Our chancery was right next to the Bulgarian embassy. The Bulgarians were known as some of the most aggressive of the communist bloc. So we worried about the possibility of penetration of the Nigerian intelligence units, as well as their activities against us. The Soviet relationship was beginning to change by the late 1980s and I became rather good friends with the Soviet ambassador. He was very candid about the changes going on in his country, about what impact Afghanistan was having on the Soviet psyche. He said that he himself had been affected by the Afghan situation. When I went to Moscow, I visited with him. So we could feel the change coming, as evidenced by the openness that the Soviets were showing, which the CIA people saw as a great opportunity.

*Q: Did the situation in Chad have an effect on Nigeria?*

LYMAN: Yes. The Nigerians have a large interest in Chad. There were clashes between the two countries over some territory – some islands. The Nigerian had border problems with Chad, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Those borders continue to be flash-points.

*Q: What was your impression of the Nigerian military?*

LYMAN: The military was so deeply involved in domestic politics that it became a decreasing military asset to the country. Politics and money became their thing. Babangida periodically spoke of professionalizing his military – getting them out of politics and corruption. But that never really happened and today, the military is still the most powerful force in the country. During my tour, all the state governors were military officers; they were rotated every few years. They were all making lots of money. Being a governor was also a stepping stone for promotion. A lot of idealistic young officers had come in with Babangida. That coup was essentially fostered by young officers who wanted to “clean up” the system, but one could see that over a period of time, they also became corrupt. People who continued to protest against the system were just pushed aside. The idealism turned into opportunism. It was sad to watch; it may have been inevitable, but it was still quite depressing. I knew a lot of the young people around Babangida. They had been the coup’s instigators; they had ridden in the tanks and uprooted the old order. At the time, they were certain that they would clean the place out. Then little by little, they were either pushed aside or started up the ladder and became governors and the idealism seeped out of them slowly, but surely. Today, they all have money in some off-shore bank. One did go to jail; one went into exile.

This was one of the sad aspects of Nigeria. I used to visit the governors; some were friendly and some were not. I found one matter that always “opened the door.” If a governor was being unresponsive, I would ask whether he had ever studied in the U.S. That changed the entire atmosphere. The governor would begin to talk about his experiences in the U.S. – how warmly he had been received by the Americans during his military training; how some families had taken him in. One governor turned out to have gone to Oklahoma State College and had been the punter on its football team. He asked me for the scores of his ex-team’s games. We don’t appreciate how much the American experience is appreciated by foreigners; in Nigeria, it opened a lot of doors for me in the Nigerian military. I was able to establish good relationships with most of the governors, many of whom later became leaders of their society.

*Q: What about AIDS?*

LYMAN: During my time, AIDS was not a serious problem. In fact, it astounded many people why that disease had not spread to Nigeria. It had nothing to do with the promiscuity of the Nigerians; they were certainly not into abstinence. It only started to spread rapidly in west Africa a little later, although even then Nigeria was not affected as many of its neighbors. For some unknown reason, the Nigerians have been spared in the main. [No longer true today, 2006.]

*Q: Where there any UN issues that arose during your tour?*

LYMAN: Nigeria was chairman of the anti-apartheid committee of the UN. When I first arrived, Joe Garba was the chairman – he was the permanent representative. Joe Garba had been a thorn in the side of the U.S.; as a leader of the anti-apartheid group, he was very critical of the U.S. policies toward South Africa – constructive engagement, reluctance to impose more sanctions, etc. Chet Crocker hated Joe Garba. One of my first acts in Nigeria was to advise Babangida to either tell Garba to tone down his rhetoric or replace him. I might note that now, Garba and I are very good friends. Babangida assured me that he understood our concerns and our South African policies, but of course Garba's rhetoric was very good for Nigeria. Eventually, a year later, Garba was replaced, but for internal political reasons. He was succeeded by Ibrahim Gambari who is still there; he took a much softer approach to our relief.

The other issue concerned Cuba. Nigeria was a member of the Human Rights Commission of the UN; it was investigating human rights abuses in Cuba. We lobbied very hard for Nigeria to take a very tough stand in the final report. We were successful one year, but not the next. Jeb Bush came out for a private visit and while he was there, asked whether he could see Babangida to urge him to stand fast on the Cuban issue. He did that. I might take a minute to expand on his visit. At the time, Jeb Bush was the son of our recently elected president. He was not then, as now, the governor of Florida. He was on the board of directors of an agricultural pump company which I had been very anxious to see in Nigeria and had lobbied the Export-Import Bank hard to approve a loan to it. That is the reason he was in Nigeria. That relationship later became a source of some embarrassment to Bush because his opponents have constantly accused him of using his influence to get Export-Import Bank loans for that company. I have had to talk to reporters about it often. Anyway, Jeb Bush came to Nigeria to be present for the opening of a plant operated by this company. The White House said (at that time) that it did not provide Secret Service protection to members of the Bush family. I was terrified because the plant was right on the Chad border; we had the president's son as a visitor without any protection. So I went to the Nigerians and asked for help to assist our own security people. Lo and behold, when he arrived, Jeb Bush had the biggest security contingent we had ever seen. His motorcade was about forty cars long; our security people were traveling along with their walkie-talkies, but the Nigerian security people were there in force. Jeb said he had never seen anything like it, even when his father traveled.

I had to fly north to meet Bush because I had sent my armored car there for Jeb's use. Then we had to fly back for his meeting with the president. The Nigerian government was very accommodating and said that it would make one of its cars available for the governor and myself. It was a military car. For the first time, Jeb Bush told me that he wanted to talk to the Nigerian president about Cuba, even though he was on a private visit. I said ok, but I noted that he might be taking the president by surprise. I advised him to be careful about that; I also told him that I had raised the UN committee issue with the foreign minister, but that when I visit the president, I never know who will be in attendance – as I noted earlier, quite often the foreign minister was not. So I suggested that in raising the issue, Bush should try to not to hit the president too hard, lest he become embarrassed. So we went to see the president and sure enough, on this occasion, the foreign minister was present, as well as many others. Jeb Bush begins to discuss the issue and Babangida said he knew all about the issue – he said that I had already discussed it with the foreign minister. It was a wonderful meeting, much to my surprise

and I wondered why. Then it struck me; the car had been bugged! The Nigerians knew what was going to be raised and were well prepared. It was a good lesson!

*Q: Talk a little about your relationship with the embassy's consular section.*

LYMAN: I got very good advice from a consular officer who was in our ambassadorial class at FSI. He advised me to stay away from visa issues as far as I could. He suggested that I tell everybody that this was a matter entirely under the jurisdiction of the consular officer. It was the best advice I could have received because in Nigeria, the currency is visas. When my wife and I went to a restaurant, people would approach us with their passports and ask about visas. Every Nigerian I knew called me about his nephew or cousin – who often weren't really related. My best answer was: "You know our system is such that the consul general has the final authority on visas; I don't have that. I can not touch the matter or over-rule him" Most would express skepticism, but I told them that in our crazy system, that was the way it was. I told them that the most I could do for them was to ask the consul general to interview the applicant. It is in fact American law, thank God. We had a consul general who was very sensitive; if he had a border line case, he would ask me whether the applicant was one of our contacts. But if he saw a case that was just not eligible, he would deny the application. I remember one case where a very distinguished Nigerian lied to me about a supposed relative – after a while I learned that your best friends could not be counted on when it came to visa questions. In this case, the Nigerian told me that the applicant was his nephew; it turned out, however, he was not his nephew at all and secondly he had been arrested on a drug charge. When the consul general said the applicant was not admissible, that was the end of the story as far as I was concerned. I never tried to over-rule him. But it was one of our major preoccupations. The Nigerians accused us of having corruption so that some were taken first while the rest of the line of applicants waited for hours. We used to have huge lines, starting at 5 a.m. We used to put secret agents in line just to check to see whether the guards were in fact being paid off to let some get ahead of others. We never found any evidence of corruption, but the accusations kept coming. There were people who were selling information and some probably got paid for "influence" which they didn't have.

We had a morale problem in the consular section. Dealing day in and day out with potential fraud, the consular officers would become very jaded. They began to think that all Nigerians were a bunch of liars. I remember going to see Joan Clark, the assistant secretary for consular affairs, to ask her what I might do about this morale problem. She said that she would tell her young officers that if they were the applicants they might well behave in the same way. What we did was to rotate the young officers so that they would have other experiences besides visa issuance. I would invite them to the residence to have dinner with other Nigerians, whom they were not likely to see in the consular section. We were trying to keep them from being totally jaded.

We had to be very careful about visas because some Nigerians were trying to obtain entrance into the U.S. to smuggle drugs. Others just wanted to leave Nigeria. There was a lot of pressure on all of us; I was constantly called, but the advice I got from my colleague in the ambassadorial course, was just great. I never got involved in the adjudication of a visa. It saved my life! I know ambassadors who didn't follow that practice and regretted it.

*Q: Did you have many American expatriates?*

LYMAN: We had a very large group that they themselves called the “Niger wives.” These were Americans, many African-Americans who were married to Nigerians. They numbered in the thousands. They were not a very happy lot because Nigerian men, when in the U.S., were very different from what they were at home. At home they reverted to traditional attitudes toward women, and allowed their wives to be dominated by their in-laws. We once put on Raisin in the Sun – a play which includes a scene of a Nigerian man wooing an African-American woman. He spins all the yarns – she will be a princess in Nigeria. The Nigerian men in the audience just howled at those lines; they identified with this guy soft-soaping the American woman. They just went crazy over it. Nigerian wives banded together; they established their own association. Some were very unhappy and then had to fight over the custody of their children because the children couldn’t leave Nigeria without their father’s permission. We had some kidnappings; some left and asked our consular officers to look after the children. That was a constant issue.

We had an annual affair which we called “The Fourth of July in February.” Anyone with an American passport could come for some refreshments and games on the grounds of the residence. We had a wonderful fair each February. All the American-Nigerian wives would come. It was a great time. We kept in pretty close contact with these women through the fair and the American School.

From time to time, we did have an American involved in the drug trade. I remember one woman, an African-American, who was jailed because her boyfriend became involved in drugs and then abandoned her. Our consul general became very sympathetic to this case. He used to visit her and bring her some necessities. Our DEA representative had no sympathy for her at all. I should say that both of these officers were African-American. The tension reached such heights that I would not allow the case to be mentioned in a country team meeting. I was faced in this case with totally different views, untainted by any racial considerations. The consul general saw the woman as a human being who was seduced into participating in an illegal activity while DEA saw just one more slimy person who was involved in the drug trade.

*Q: Did you have any high level visits while you were in Nigeria?*

LYMAN: The most senior official who came was Secretary Shultz. He came shortly after I arrived. It was a very successful visit. Babangida seemed to be doing all the right things at the time so that Shultz found a situation which was quite acceptable to us. There was one glitch. The security people brought sniffing dogs. We had one major security problem at the airport. Our security people insisted on putting up barriers to hold the reporters back when the secretary disembarked. I said that that was not done in Nigeria. The security man said that I had a choice: it was either a barrier or if any reporter got near the secretary, he would be knocked down. So I agreed to barriers. The Nigerian chief of protocol, who was under severe pressure anyway, threw a fit. The reporters had a field day; the headlines were about the Americans having taken over the airport.

We had a press conference at the embassy. So the security people had their dogs sniff every reporter. I assumed the dogs must have been trained to detect weapons, but I don’t really know



why security insisted on such precautions. The reporters were outraged; metal detectors were one thing; being sniffed by a dog was on an entirely different level – in Nigeria, that was a real insult. So all the reporting that came out of that conference was about dogs; Shultz' substantive remarks were barely mentioned.

Then we did something even more extraordinary. The dogs had been placed in the three or four different sites that the secretary would be visiting. After his visit, the Department sent a C-130 to pick up the dogs. The Nigerians were incredulous that this huge cargo plane would be sent to pick up the dogs. So that became a major media story too.

In the meantime, the secretary's office wanted to know how the boss' trip was playing. I found it very difficult to find a way to explain that the dogs were attracting more attention than the secretary. Finally, I invited the reporters to my office and asked whether any of them were interested in the substance of the secretary's visit. They looked at me with some amazement and then asked me to talk about that matter. Then they wrote some good stories. Other than the dogs, it was a very good visit. Shultz is a great man; Obie, Shultz's wife, was still alive and was with him then. She was terrific. My wife had not yet joined me at post because she stayed with my daughter who was just finishing high school, but she did come out for the visit.

The one other important visitor was former President Jimmy Carter. They treated him like a sitting head of state.

*Q: Were the Nigerians involved in peace-keeping while you were there?*

LYMAN: Yes. They were involved in a few UN peace keeping operations. That was the source of great pride to the Nigerian military; it was also a great opportunity to train their troops. But at the time, these were only a few operations and none in the immediate area. Just before I arrived, there had been an incident in Chad. We induced the Nigerians to go into Chad as part of an African peace keeping operation. It became a great embarrassment to them because they stood on the road while the rebels went around them and took over the government. The Nigerians thought that we would pay for their participation and we never did. So one of their first experiences with peace keeping left a bad taste in their mouths. But they did become involved in Lebanon and other hot spots in the world.

*Q: Please talk a little about the Nigerian media.*

LYMAN: The Nigerian media is very sensationalist. It is very political. All the newspapers are owned by major political figures. I had good access to the press; it printed a lot of my speeches. Once I gave a speech on US-Nigerian relations and I touched on the wheat import ban. I mentioned Section 301 of the trade act, which called for some retaliatory sanctions against major embargoes. The media picked up this minor point that I had made and accused me of threatening sanctions against Nigeria; it pointed out that we didn't apply sanctions to South Africa, but here was poor Nigeria and we threatened it. My remarks became a major flap. I sent my speech to Babangida and he saw that the press was making a mountain out of a molehill and cut off further media discussion of my comments. He had that kind of influence on the media.

But the press was very sensationalist. We had good USIS programs which worked with the press. But the media was a frustrated group unhappy with a military dictatorship. They had limits on their freedom. At the time, we witnessed the blossoming of news magazines, patterned after Newsweek and Time. One was called Newswatch or something like that. I think the magazines were better than the papers. They did some quality work despite being under pressure from the government; in fact, from time to time, they were closed down. That became a real human rights issue that we worried about. We kept in close touch with them and I spent a lot of time with magazine staff members because their articles were of such good quality. Magazines became very popular.

The only bombing that occurred in Nigeria as far as I know was a letter bomb sent to one of these magazines killing the editor.

One of the daily papers was owned by Chief Abiola. Abiola later became famous because he was reported to have won the presidential election in 1993, which however was annulled by Babangida. Abiola was arrested and died in jail. I knew Abiola well; he was a weird, strange man. He would have made a terrible president, if he had been allowed to take office. He tried to manipulate me and tried to use me in his papers for his own purposes.

*Q: Did the intelligencia play any role in Nigeria?*

LYMAN: Yes, but it, particularly the academics, had become bitter and cynical and negative. There was the Nobel Laureate playwright Wole Soyinka; he was living in Nigeria at the time. He later went into exile when Abacha became president. I knew him fairly well. They were very cynical about Babangida. I was more hopeful and this was one of our major differences. In the end, they were proven right.

We talked a lot about the anguish that the Nigerians feel for their country; it is unique in the world. They were constantly writing and talking about what they should not have to live under military rule – which they had for the past 20 years out of 26. They continually questioned themselves why they suffered through these regimes and what was wrong with themselves that they couldn't return to a permanent democratic system. They really suffered intellectually, all the time. It was their mantra, day in and day out. I thought this self-examination might have been useful up to a point, but the Nigerians carried it too far. They were tearing themselves apart, but never doing anything about it.

*Q: When you left Nigeria in 1989, what future did you see for the country?*

LYMAN: The Nigerians would ask me that all the time. I used to ask them in what time frame. I speculated that the next five years would be very difficult, but that in twenty-five years, the country could be in good shape. Nigeria had an agricultural base; it had more oil and gas than it knew what to do with; it had 26 universities. I thought that Nigeria could be a powerhouse in 25 years, assuming that it followed a sensible path. But it would take time.

I thought that Babangida would be shrewd enough that he would be able to manage a transition to a civilian government. I never understood why he just didn't retire from the military and run

for president as a civilian. He should have, but he didn't for complicated reasons. I asked some of his friends repeatedly why that had not happened; I never got a straight answer – they may not have known. After I left, there was a coup attempt. Many people told me that they thought that it had a major impact on him. He thought he knew his army inside and out; when the coup took place, he was badly shaken; a mortar shell fell right in his bedroom, which was vacant at the time. He withdrew within himself. He always had been in communication with his people; everyone had seen him. Now he moves to Abuja, the new capital in the center of the country, where he was hard to reach and was surrounded by a small coterie; he became out of touch and fearful for his life. He let the economic reforms slip, and corruption became rampant. He tried to pull off a managed election; he thought the northern candidate would win. Instead Abiola won, but the army refused to let him serve. The election was nullified; Babangida lost all influence and then turned the government over to Abacha, who became the worst ruler that Nigeria ever had. Everything went down the drain. It was sad because I think Babangida had the potential to raise his country to much higher standards, but for one reason or another, just went off the tracks.

*Q: You knew Abacha. What did you think of him?*

LYMAN: He was the last person I would have wanted as head of state. He had been the Army chief and then became minister of defense while I was there. His sole interest was money – for himself. He was as corrupt as anybody could be; he let the Nigerian military capacity go down the drain. He was cruel and narrow-minded. I became very despondent when he became president. He was as bad as the pessimists predicted.

**DAVID BLAKEMORE**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Lagos (1987-1990)**

*David Blakemore was born in 1941 in New York State. He graduated from Valparaiso in 1962 and joined the Foreign Service in 1965. He served overseas in Saudi Arabia, India, Korea, Bangladesh and Nigeria, as well as the staff director of the Board of Examiners and Deputy Team Leader in the Inspection Corps in Washington DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in the winter of 1997.*

*Q: After about a year there in '87 you left and did what?*

BLAKEMORE: My deputy in the political-military bureau was a woman by the name of Jennifer Ward, who at the time that I was back on the Korea desk was the DCM in Senegal. I got a call from her one day from Senegal saying, "Ambassador Lyman in Lagos is looking for a DCM and I told him you would do a great job so why don't you make some noise from your end to see about that." This came as quite a shock to me. She and Ambassador Lyman worked together in several different places and had a good relationship. I didn't know what I was going to do next but going to Africa hadn't been one of the things that I thought about.

I was very attracted by the possibility of becoming a DCM. I had a couple of phone calls from Princeton Lyman which went well. Before long he offered me the job. The East Asia bureau did not make any effort to stand in my way. They could see that the DCM position in a large embassy was a good thing for me. It became much more of a problem as a personal decision because my wife at the time was a psychotherapist in private practice who had been following me around the world a lot. Now we had been home long enough that her practice was booming and she didn't want to go. So I trekked off to Nigeria by myself living in a great large colonial house full of servants and me.

*Q: So you were in Nigeria from when to when?*

BLAKEMORE: From '87 to '89. I was supposed to be there three years but after two years I curtailed for personal reasons. A fascinating experience. I had never set foot anywhere in Africa before I went to Lagos. That's a dynamic culture and a fascinating part of the world.

*Q: I assume you were sort of reading up on Nigeria and talking to people on the desk. What were you getting from this? What were you expecting when you got to Nigeria?*

BLAKEMORE: I don't know if I can give you a good answer to that or not. I did reading of two kinds. I read some history and a lot of State Department traffic from the previous few years but also some fiction, some West African fiction to get some kind of sense of the place. Nigeria in general, and Lagos in particular, has a reputation of being a wild place full of flamboyant deal maker people, socially assertive, not a very well organized place. All of that was part of the lore that was conveyed to me before I went and it certainly was true.

One of the things that seems immediately obvious upon living in Nigeria for a month or more, as you look around at not only Nigeria but the neighboring countries in West Africa, is that the European colonial powers have a lot to answer for. It is axiomatic that colonialism was arrogant and wrong. Not to put too fine a point on it, if you are going to have colonialism, the nature of the colonial boundaries that were drawn are really offensive today when countries are trying to make some kind of political sense out of themselves.

You look at a country like Nigeria, I don't know how many languages are spoken there, 50 or 60 I would imagine. There are three major tribes with one clearly Christian, one clearly Muslim and one divided. They have little use for each other. There is little or no historic reason for close interaction with each other and here they are jammed together in one country. At least two of the three major tribes straddle Nigeria's boundaries, that is they are bigger than Nigeria. You can go well into Benin and find Yoruba speakers and into Niger to find Hausa speakers.

I think that this colonial history gives the area a certain chaotic feel. I often thought and sometimes said privately during my time in Nigeria that I wouldn't want to predict whether it was going to disintegrate eventually along tribal or religious lines because the two tensions were sort of overlaid and very much in evidence all the time in the press and in the politics of the country to the extent that the military government was allowing politics. I found it quite a sad situation and at least Nigeria is large enough to be economically viable if they can figure out some way to deal with each other. Even though much of the oil wealth has been squandered, it

keeps coming in again every year so they have some financial base to operate from.

*Q: What was the government like when you were there?*

BLAKEMORE: It was a reasonably benevolent military dictatorship. One of the ironies of Nigeria is that any Nigerian you talk to in public life will assure you that the natural state of the Nigerian polity is a democracy led by civilians. By the time that I was there in '87 they had more years logged since independence in 1960 under the military than they had under a civilian government. Of course all the years since between 1987 and now are military. Their self image does not fit the reality.

Ibrahim Babangida was head of the government. He was a general from a small tribe, not one of the three big ones, and a Muslim but not a militant one. In that sort of demographic sense, he was a good choice. A sophisticated soft spoken sort of man. Corrupt but not excessively so in the West African context and not any more repressive of dissenting views than was absolutely necessary. That is my impression. I don't think we had any evidence of mistreatment of prisoners. There was some imprisonment without trial but not much. It is always a little weird to talk about relative human rights, human rights are or they aren't. But certainly in comparison with the Abacha government which followed, the Babangida government looks very enlightened for a military dictatorship.

*Q: How did Princeton Lyman operate?*

BLAKEMORE: With charm and grace. He is a delightful man to work for. He is an economist by trade, a Ph.D. in economics. An AID officer originally and therefore much more at home in the world of development economics than your average American career ambassador. He is also very much at home in the political world. An extremely effective contact person with the Nigerian government. He had very, very good access to all sorts of people including the president on a fairly regular basis.

Because of his personality, the morale in the embassy was very good for a West African embassy where there were very real problems and hardships. The weather and crime were major hardships. Crazy, wild traffic and transportation uncertainties. You could never be sure that you are going to be able to get out if you needed to get out for a family emergency at home for example, because the airlines are all overbooked. Health problems were quite significant. No one would voluntarily be admitted to a Nigerian hospital, a westerner, because the sanitary conditions were outrageously bad. Given all of that kind of impetus towards poor morale, it was impressive to me how good the embassy morale was under Lyman's leadership.

*Q: What about dealing with the Nigerian government? Did you have access up and down the line?*

BLAKEMORE: Yes, it varied a great deal from ministry to ministry. We had good access in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of course and good access in the Ministry of Petroleum. In the Ministry of Finance we had fair access. The other ones tended to be fairly closed. I could get to the minister as DCM, but other people in the embassy might have trouble having substantive

contact.

Socially I would like to say something about my Nigerian experience because I found Nigerians extremely friendly at a superficial level, welcoming, friendly. But very, very difficult to develop any more meaningful social relationship with than that. Perhaps it is because of the size of the country and its importance in its region that people didn't have a lot of time or interest in foreigners socially unless there was some specific, usually financial, gain to be made. This made it a more lonely tour than some others I had had.

*Q: Particularly being without your wife. Often the wife is the person who can bring in the interesting people.*

BLAKEMORE: That's true. I was without that asset as well.

*Q: Were there any problems with the neighbors around Nigeria, either Nigeria intruding into their space or some of them intruding into Nigerian space?*

BLAKEMORE: Nothing significant during the time that I was there. There was a little bit of tension, I guess, on the Nigerian Cameroon border partly because it lies in deep jungle and no one is sure exactly where it is. Nothing significant.

*Q: During this period we had this new relationship with the still Soviet Union, a much closer relationship. Did that have any effect on Nigeria?*

BLAKEMORE: It did certainly on the social level between the two embassies. There was a great deal more social interaction. I remember having the Soviet number two to lunch and that sort of thing. We all tried to figure out how to do this. What kind of language we'd use and how much we might say to each other about Nigeria and so on. It was an interesting little experience and it got the ball rolling in that part of the world.

Let me say something about the experience of being a DCM. I know a lot of former colleagues in the Department who have said that they found DCM a terribly difficult job and unrewarding. That was not my experience at all. I enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed the managerial challenge, the ability to help set the tone for the embassy in general and the ability to promote harmonious inter-agency relationships. Of course all of that is made easier by a competent and charming ambassador. It would be much different under somebody else. Under those conditions I found it a terrific job.

*Q: What about the British? Did they have any residual influence there?*

BLAKEMORE: They had a larger embassy than you might expect, larger than any other Europeans. But no, I don't think they did.

*Q: Did the outside world intrude at all on what you were doing there, developments anywhere?*

BLAKEMORE: Yes but in a limited way. Chet Crocker, the Assistant Secretary for African

affairs was trying valiantly to broker some kind of a cease fire in the endless Angolan civil war and he dropped in to Nigeria several times during the course of that effort trying to get the Nigerians to be supportive and to make sure they understood what he was trying to do. So we carried messages to the Nigerian government fairly often on that subject and on any number of African subjects on the good assumption that as the most populous country in the continent what they thought was worth influencing.

*Q: Did we also see, or did the Nigerians see themselves as the preeminent policemen of the African world as far as willingness to dispense their troops to try to act in an international way or not?*

BLAKEMORE: That came later. Their involvement in Liberia for example came after my time. I think they probably would have thought of themselves that way with a certain swagger but it wasn't happening then. Babangida was a cautious man. He didn't have any ambitions beyond Nigeria.

*Q: Was there any problem with the Nigerians going to the United States? I think of a discussion that I had recently with a high school classmate of mine who is a banker in Baltimore. He says as soon as a Nigerian entered a bank anywhere you would lock up the vaults and shut up everything because they were so much better at extracting money illegally from banks through checks, scams, credit cards. Was this a problem for you?*

BLAKEMORE: Yes. The most immediate problem was heroin smuggling though. There was a well established route for Pakistani heroin mostly, Afghan probably too, to come into Lagos and be broken down into smaller packages that could be transported in body cavities particularly. The Nigerian mules would take it to the United States. It was a major source of heroin on the streets of the U.S. There was a two officer DEA office in the embassy. That was a very contentious aspect of the relationship.

As you suggest financial crime was another problem. I can remember seeing a xeroxed copy of an instruction booklet, you might call it, for how to run a credit card scam. It had been circulated among the Nigerian community in the United States in various cities. So yes, unfortunately that was a highly visible aspect of the relationship.

*Q: Did we have any consulates in Nigeria at the time?*

BLAKEMORE: Yes we had a consulate in Kaduna which is in the Hausa Muslim north. It has been there for some time. It is a small consulate, probably four or five officers. All of them junior except the consul general. Not really a significant listening post.

*Q: I was wondering did you find at all within the embassy a breakdown in interests? During the Biafran War we effectively had a civil war within our own mission between our consulate in Ibo country and the embassy. In fact it was one of the more significant clashes that is sort of unrecorded except in our oral history program. I was wondering if you had run across extreme localitis or anything like that?*

BLAKEMORE: No. There was no consulate in Enugu anymore. That would have been more contentious than the one in Kaduna. Periodically every year the cost cutting effort would look at Kaduna and say do we really need this place and the embassy would dutifully muster an argument that it was essential though I'm not sure that I believe that. I don't think you found Americans taking sides in Nigerian politics. There wasn't much Nigerian politics going on at the time.

**NICOLAS ROBERTSON**  
**Cultural Attaché, USIS**  
**Lagos (1988-1991)**

*Mr. Robertson was born and raised in California. He was born in Wilmington, near the heart of the Los Angeles Harbor district. He attended University of California at Santa Cruz. Mr. Robertson first desired to be an academic, but then spent some time working as a chef on a ship. After returning home, he took the Foreign Service written and oral tests and passed. Mr. Robertson subsequently was stationed in South Africa, Barbados, Argentina, Nigeria, Ghana, Venezuela, and worked as the Deputy Director of the Office of African Affairs in at the State Department. Mr. Robertson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*

*Q: Today is the 30th of September, 2009. This is an interview with Nick Robertson and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy and we're starting you off to Nigeria when?*

ROBERTSON: 1988 to '91. This time it was the Babangida government during its endless democratic transition. Issues for the U.S. Government were, well, hoping to keep the democratic transition on track; and, mid-way through my tour, the first Gulf War. For general issues of democratization, building a civil society; any time to be in Nigeria is an exciting time to be in Nigeria. Well, you're sowing a handful of seeds in a very big field and while many of them grow, and are now strong institutions, the country as a whole has continued its slide towards-

*Q: I've talked to others about Nigeria and sort of the, it more than almost any country has suffered from the curse of oil.*

ROBERTSON: It has. It was once upon a time a very serious country. If you look at—it's a terrible, terrible thing to say — their civil war it wasn't the sort of normal chaos that you expect in Nigeria. Both sides were well organized with clear objectives. Some of that has resurfaced in recent years. Of course, the Biafrans during the war built their own refineries from scrap. Now Nigeria has no operating refinery in the formal sector; the government owns four big refineries, all of which are out of commission. The rebels, the people stealing crude in the Niger Delta are now refining it and selling gasoline in Nigeria. It's a very sophisticated criminal band, and it's a society that really knows how to organize itself on the level of an enterprise.

*Q: When you got there, you got there in what year?*

ROBERTSON: 1988.



*Q: Eighty-eight. Who was the president at the time?*

ROBERTSON: Babangida.

*Q: How was he viewed at that time and his government?*

ROBERTSON: Well, everybody hoped that he would continue with his transition program. He had a little democratic transition in mind; he decided that Nigeria would have a two party system, just like the U.S., so he ordered two parties to be created, one a little to the left, one a little to the right. They called him, in Nigeria, “Maradona” because he was always dribbling this way and that way; a little to the left, a little to the right, bringing in his opponents in the government, giving them nice jobs, defusing criticism that way. In fact, if you look at it carefully, Nigeria had a certain proclivity for impunity and he played it out as far as he could. I would say at the end of the Babangida years some sort of moral core of Nigeria had been completely eaten away.

*Q: I’m told it was really a very corrupt society.*

ROBERTSON: Yes.

*Q: Okay. Who was the ambassador when you got there?*

ROBERTSON: Princeton Lyman, a wonderful man.

*Q: And what was your job?*

ROBERTSON: I was the cultural attaché.

*Q: Alright, then let’s talk about what you did.*

ROBERTSON: There were a couple of efforts, one in general the culture and academic world, the normal spheres of a cultural attaché. Nigeria’s a wonderful country. It has a lively art scene. It’s always been big enough to have its own cultural markets, its own publishing, its own movies, its own recording industry. And Nigerians buy Nigerian art, collect Nigerian art. The academic world had produced real excellence. The historians that formed the “Ibadan School”, and the Ibadan publications on history, are brilliant. My son has been a graduate student in African history and looking at my old collection from Ibadan, he wondered, “wow, what happened to these guys? This is brilliant.”

So it was exciting to be in Nigeria because it’s a society of real achievement in literature and the arts and the academic world; governance not so much. At the time I was there Nigeria had some singular successes which I still live off. The Studio Museum in Harlem had a big show of contemporary Nigerian art and the Smithsonian Institution did a film called “Kindred Spirits,” a PBS (Public Broadcasting System) documentary on contemporary Nigerian artists. Contemporary Nigerian art was booming to the extent that in 1990 the fine arts department at

Yaba Tech, a sort of polytechnic college in Lagos, had more applicants than the medical and law schools at the University of Lagos. Obviously I had nothing to do with this success but I still go to Nigeria now because people think I had something to do with that success.

*Q: Well, you know, cultural attaché, you're in a country with a booming culture but what are you supposed to do? You're supposed to sell American culture, aren't you? I mean-*

ROBERTSON: I sold institutional relations, linkage to programs. That (the support for Nigerian artists) was always incidental. That's always confusion about the cultural attaché: everybody in the country you're assigned to thinks you're supposed to be promoting their culture in the United States and many of us do that, either as a sideline or major focus. Like I said, I didn't have anything to do with Nigeria's great success in the plastic arts; they thought I did. In terms of our own culture we could bring Dizzy Gillespie, we could bring - I can't even remember everyone who came. Nigeria had been one of those countries in the '70s that hosted everybody who had any commercial following at all in Nigeria. Alas, they tended not to pay their bills so they were off the concert circuit, and off the TV and film circuit as well.

But culture with a big "C" was an area we didn't focus on but the nature of the job makes you focus on it. I suggested that we should hire a dependent spouse - I don't know what they call them now - and title somebody as the cultural attaché, who would go to all the receptions and cocktail parties and openings, and allow me some time to run a large office with large programs.

Other areas were institutional development, supporting NGOs (non-governmental organizations), supporting civil society organizations. Nigeria had a very strong civil society if you think of religion and of traditional rulers, traditional society; village organizations and all this kind of stuff is very strong. We supported things like the bar associations, citizen organizations, citizen organizations trying to get government agencies to fulfill their responsibilities. We ended up getting from AID a large block of money in 1991 to do a lot of things with the bar association, university NGOs, journalist shootings, stuff like that.

*Q: Let's look at the universities. Somebody I know, Henry Maddox, was-*

ROBERTSON: Oh, yes, he was a Fulbright professor and an American historian.

*Q: He's- We've been working mutually sort of in the foreign affairs field; he's at the University of North Carolina or was. He was saying, he had a very, I won't say- disagreeable or very negative impression of going to Nigeria because the universities, one, they didn't have the facilities but two, they weren't running most of the time; they were on strike. He didn't feel he would be doing anything.*

ROBERTSON: When we got there I thought a simple basic tool any cultural attaché running a Fulbright program would have would be a university calendar and it would be a simple feat to put one together. So the first task I set myself to was absolutely impossible; there was no such thing as a national academic calendar. Universities opened and closed at random; there were staff strikes, student strikes, and strikes from the non-academic staff. Sometimes a state government would get annoyed and close a university for a while. A Ghanaian friend of mine, who later

became a minister in Ghana, was teaching economics in Nigeria for 11 years. One day in Accra we sat down and tried to figure out how much time he had spent in a classroom, and in 11 years he calculated that he had actually taught something like 4.3 years.

*Q: If universities have any value they should be imparting knowledge or whatever and if out of 10 years the students are only getting four years worth of knowledge or whatever it is then they're not doing- and the students should be suffering.*

ROBERTSON: Students were suffering. Families who were paying to send them to school were suffering. And what we saw – and this, I think, is common in Nigeria - some of the universities could sort of keep on track. We focused on a limited number of universities; they were popping up like mushrooms all over the country, state universities, local universities and now private universities. We focused on particular departments and particular universities that still had quality and still showed the possibility of performing a real serious university role. In fact, they had their major national universities, about seven of them, and then they decided that each state should have a national university, and they managed to create 13; then came the state universities when the national government could not expand from the 13 universities to the 19 states. Lagos State University, when I got there, had just graduated its first class, and they got the top scores in the law exam of all the Nigerian universities. So some of these new institutions were quite good, and for awhile they could run them. You didn't have strong student unions, you didn't have strong teacher unions, you didn't have strong non-academic employee unions. And individual departments in universities could function, some universities could function but like everything in Nigeria it was a struggle just to avoid the slide into complete chaos.

*Q: Okay, I'm sure you and your colleagues at the embassy would do this all the time. What was the problem? I mean, why would this group of— from all accounts— extremely bright people who are confidence men which requires fancy footwork of the greatest degree, I mean, but also obviously in literature and arts and all are really- have really superb qualities, why couldn't they get it together?*

ROBERTSON: It's an interesting country. The immediate issue, sort of the big factor affecting all Nigerian public institutions at that time, was of course that they boomed during the oil boom with an exchange rate trick. When I went there in 1982, one naira was \$1.50. Nigerian universities were recruiting from all over the world, and a university professor earned 1,000 naira per month – that's \$18,000 a year in 1980 – plus a house and a car. When I got there in 1988 it was five naira to the dollar officially, and something like 10 to the dollar on the black market. So, people who had international middle class levels of consumption all of a sudden had no money and they weren't being paid regularly anyway. Babangida's was not a very effective government. So you had a short-term breakdown.

When you look at the medium term history of Africa, the last 50, 60 years of independence, I'm struck by the fact that the word they use for government in the three languages I know something about, the Ashanti language, Yoruba and Igbo all refer to government as white man's work, like government is something that's different, it's "not us". It's an external factor. I asked them, did the Alafin of Oyo have *ijoba*, the Yoruba word for government, before the English got here? The Oyo Empire had taxes, security, armed forces, diplomats, roads, police, and public buildings, but

no one says that is *ijoba*.

*Q: Well I would think we Americans have in our DNA and our chromosomes something so that we want to make things work, and this must have been terribly frustrating. I mean here, you know, particularly I mean, you know, these aren't a lazy people, these aren't stupid people...-*

ROBERTSON: ... they're very energetic and misdirected.

*Q: You know, I mean, you must have gone in, rubbed your hands and said now if you only go Point A to Point B to Point C and do this and that, you know, we'll work with you, whatever you want to do but let's get this show on the road. I mean, this-*

ROBERTSON: That's why they sort of liked working with Americans because we come in and say that, which is something they couldn't say, or don't say.

*Q: Well, but, it must have been generation after generation of Americans who went through this and came away either exhausted or had lost their sense of direction too.*

ROBERTSON: You talked to my friend and colleague, Claudia Anyaso, who, of course, has had pretty close to 40 years of this. It's a heartbreaking country. It wasted such potential. It's bad at governance, it's bad at large scale organization, it's decidedly brilliant at small scale organization.

*Q: Like, you know, putting together their own refinery if it's in their interest or something.*

ROBERTSON: While I was there I did a report, a think piece, on the development of the Nigerian university system. One thing that I found really interesting was that the British contributed almost nothing to elementary education during the colonial period; it was almost all-what they call "church schools," which were in fact community based organizations which raised all the money, including the payment for a foreign headmaster.

*Q: Resources generated within the community. That's the American school system in a way. , Our education system over the years been generated by local societies.*

ROBERTSON: Yes. And Nigeria was brilliant at that. They became an English speaking society with a significant educated middle class with their own money, and their own efforts. And when you look at that it's a remarkable achievement. And then they decided to replicate the British residential university, not necessarily the best idea for a poor and large country like that. But the corollary to that is when the government nationalized the church schools the system broke down; then schools belonged to somebody else so the goal is to get your students in, pay no fees, get your children raised at somebody else's expense, which is interesting because it's the same people, the same institution, but you slap a different name on it and it belongs to nobody.

*Q: Yes. Well how about the, I'm sure obviously as cultural attaché you had close ties to the academics. They must have been frustrated, wanted to get the hell out or what?*

ROBERTSON: They did want to get out, and they were very successful at doing so. Actually I'm impressed by the friends I made. Every time I read a letter in the NEH history net from Africa, it is from one of my old friends now in South Africa- the ones who are not here or the UK or Europe are in South Africa. Yes. And unfortunately the most capable of them all left.

You know, the society began raising their children to leave at some point in the 1980s, and by the 1990s it was the norm.

*Q: Well, okay, I mean, was there a point where you said okay, we've got these programs here and what's the point? Why don't we essentially write off Nigeria?*

ROBERTSON: Well, everybody knows the answer to that; because they have oil. They would be a disorderly, isolated country like Yemen, except they have oil, which also generates some of the disorder.

*Q: Yes, but I mean, were you doing anything? I mean, you know, looking- I'm talking about the embassy as a whole but particularly the work you were doing.*

ROBERTSON: Yes, and what we did was to build up institutions and institutions which are still in existence without our money and still doing good work. People who would stay, people who worked hard. I'm thinking of a group in Port Harcourt, one of the citizens' groups, the bar association, which became sort of the legal system, as the formal system got weaker and weaker. The bar association at least had some institutional commitment to keeping the rule of law alive.

I can think of a lot of individuals; business associations, the stock exchange, looking at economic reform and all those aspects of the economy, they pulled off a lot. With all its problems they got a banking sector that performs like a banking sector. They have industrialists; over the years they began to rely less on manufacturing groups that relied less and less on government contracts and protection and more and more on the Nigerian market. I mean, I can show you a whole lot of positive developments in Nigeria, they're just not at the level of governance, they're not national.

*Q: Yes, it sounds like I'm knocking them but I'm basically challenge you because there when you come up against something like this there's a tendency, inertia says well you've got a government so we'll do it and even if the government doesn't produce we keep doing what we do. But did you find that you were able to sort of, I mean you, I'm talking about you and the embassy, develop a Nigerian model for a failing state that we hope we could turn around?*

ROBERTSON: I think what would develop was the notion that Nigerian public institutions that functioned – some public universities, maybe some aspects of the legal system, maybe some local government institutions – were worth continued effort, while the Nigerian government as a whole was not really worth talking to. They couldn't fulfill any commitment. Actually the minister of education was so upset about the way we ran the Fulbright program that he tried to have me expelled from the country.

*Q: Why was that? What was the problem?*

ROBERTSON: Nigeria had had a Fulbright program where we sent them a bunch of people; they paid them and placed them. All of a sudden we were paying and we weren't going to send them to new institutions, we weren't going to send them to non-functioning institutions. We had a list of schools and departments where we would send people, where we thought it was worth the investment of \$40,000 a year. But the National Universities Commission and the Ministry of Education had their own interests and agenda, paying off debts, building up institutions in marginal states and stuff like that. Now, Nigeria keeps creating states, a very good deal for the citizens of the states; it is a disaster for the country. And so they wanted us to send Fulbright professors and give grants to institutions which we thought weren't working or didn't have any track record or anything. And they were very upset when we wouldn't, so the head of the university commission called the minister of education, who called Ambassador Lyman and asked that I be expelled from the country.

*Q: And what happened?*

ROBERTSON: That's when Ambassador Lyman called the PAO, Mr. Bob LaGamma, and said that the Minister wanted me thrown out of the country. The answer to the Minister from the Ambassador and Bob LaGamma was the same: "Tough."

*Q: Yes.*

*Well tell me, let's talk a little bit more about sort of the universities. What was in it for the teachers? I take it that the teachers were striking because essentially they weren't paid. Was that it?*

ROBERTSON: Yes. And what was in it for the teachers? Oddly enough, I asked that very question, why would you stay? I mean, why not go into another business? One guy said because we've got a house and it has a garage which enables my wife to trade. Now, what I wanted to hear was I get a house, which has a big yard, enables me to farm. They hadn't gone quite that far, but obviously the side benefits of academia were becoming more important.

*Q: But I take it, I mean, what was holding a lot of the government together- I mean, holding the country together, were the women running- the market women, was this-?: I've heard about this over the years that it was really, I mean, these are, if you want to talk about real traders this is where-*

ROBERTSON: Yes. Yes, women in Southern Nigeria have run much of the economy, originally an informal economy but now the formal economy too. Far from being family restrictions on it, their husbands think it's great.

As a matter of fact, I remember I was furious because there was this guy, a blind beggar with children, and one day another child has taken its place with the family. I said why is he having children? He can't support them. Why did he just take another wife? One of the drivers explained, "Mr. Nick, you don't understand. It is not that he cannot afford to marry and 'get pickin' (have children). He cannot afford not to marry. He needs more wife to keep him."

*Q: Yes. Well did you see any bright spots or- I'm talking about this time when you were- this period in the late '80s, early '90s, did you see any sort of positive elements in the society? Not within the people but within the society?*

ROBERTSON: I saw a response to economic challenges, which was positive. They sort of weaned themselves off the notion that we'll elect a new government which will then give us money. I saw people generating jobs for themselves. Well, everybody talks about insecurity in Nigeria, crime in Nigeria but Lagos is now a city of 15 million people. There's no police force that does anything recognizably police-like. If somebody mugs me the one thing that will not happen is that the person would be arrested and tried and go to jail for mugging me. Yet I to this day walk around Lagos all by myself without fear of being bothered because it has enough of a social cohesion to maintain a society even without a formal government like that.

*Q: Well okay, let's look at sort of the country effort at the embassy. You're the cultural attaché and if nothing else you're sitting on the middle of a booming culture.*

*I mean, really a lot of fun and all that but what about our political and economic officers? There must have- I mean were they just reporting on disintegration or what were they doing?*

ROBERTSON: I think everybody perceived problems in Nigeria. We still recognized the Nigerian government. The dichotomy just to this day, you recognize the Nigerian government, and hope that it will fulfill some of the commitments it makes on- whether the UN votes or doing something in the Niger Delta. But no one expects very much. I should say that the Nigerian government, as bad as it is in many ways and as much as I detest the government of Sani Abacha, did play a positive role in Liberia. Without any international resources, the Nigerians and the Ghanaians intervened in Liberia in a very positive way. No other regional powers that I know of have actually spent their own money and blood in an effort like that. I mean, the bad side is that they looted a lot in Liberia, okay.

*Q: Well, you know, I've talked to people who served in Lebanon saying when the Israeli came through on this Sharon's invasion of Lebanon, when they came out their tanks were loaded with stuff. You know, I mean, armies loot. Well, but in a way, thinking both of Ghana and of Nigeria, at least from the pictures it seems like they have a pretty well drilled military force that seems to be the one thing that sort of kept them going in a way.*

ROBERTSON: Yes, they could still put troops in Liberia with a goal and with objectives and do it. And they imposed some kind of peace on the country and allowed them to get through an admittedly flawed electoral process. But, I stress, there was no international money, which I thought was, I mean, short-term thinking from the point of view of the UN, that if you behave like a responsible regional power people will pat you on the back. Whereas Kenya made a lot of money from the Somali intervention in '91, '92; the Kenyans' shilling appreciated because the international community went into Somalia and we had to buy all these services from Kenya.

*Q: What- I would have thought that on the military side we would have been pretty supportive of- since that it and Ghana are the two military forces in that whole part of Africa.*

ROBERTSON: I think we cut off Nigeria from some military assistance. For a variety of reasons we wanted professional military and non-governing military in both countries. And sort of got it, eventually.

*Q: Looking at Nigeria again, how about Islam? I was talking to Claudia Anyaso, who said that, you know, there's a tendency to think of, was it the Hausa to the north that's all Islamic and not much more but it's really an awful lot of others, Edo and Yoruba who are Islamic too. I mean, did you find, I mean, particularly on the cultural side, did you find Islam intruded on your bailiwick?*

ROBERTSON: No because I happened to like the Yorba culture and I think it's absolutely lovely to live in a society in which families include different religions. Any respectable family will have Christians, Muslims and animists happily sitting at the same table. I think that's marvelous.

During the Gulf War, at the end of the first week of the ground war, I was invited to be the guest of honor at a Koranic school in Lagos, a slum in Lagos. I didn't clear the invitation with the embassy because I knew that the security people would go bonkers. But the Nigerians couldn't understand why I was concerned. Yes, but you're having a war in Kuwait. Why would that have any effect on Lagos? I told them that in the rest of the world the Muslims are pretty well on an anti-American binge. They said don't worry about it. And actually when I went there it was very charming. You know, this is a big ceremony, there are thousands of people there and it starts late and goes on for hours, like all Nigerian ceremonies. The first speaker said we're glad these children have started school and finished. Yes, everybody applauds. We are glad that our children learned to read the Koran, and everybody shouts "yes" and applauds.. And we know that is important because if they can read the Koran, when they go to paradise they can take in 60 people from their mother's family and 60 from their father's, and everybody applauds wildly and shouts yes, that's why we were sending them to school. That's a lovely version of Islam.

*Q: Yes, well certainly. Well, did you have much activity in, you know, up in Kano and up in the more hostile areas?*

ROBERTSON: This was before Abuja opened, so a USIS office in Kaduna handled all that, and the country was certainly big enough that I didn't feel that I had to go traipsing around covering other parts of the country.

*Q: Well what sort of reports were you getting out of Kaduna?*

ROBERTSON: Well, the U.S. Mission left Kaduna in 1990 after some rioting about the Gulf War. And the north was always prone to sensitive international issues with the U.S. One thing I always thought was important about northern Nigeria is that with the Iranian revolution Iran started sending a whole lot of missions with money to the Sahelians (the countries of Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Northern Nigeria), to northern Nigeria particularly, and the Saudis countered by sending a lot more.

*Q: Iran sent?*



ROBERTSON: Iran sent Shia.

*Q: Shia.*

ROBERTSON: Then the Saudis felt that they had to respond by sending-

*Q: Sunnis.*

ROBERTSON: -Sunnis. And this really changed northern Nigeria. Imams in the '50s, '60s would make their money selling amulets, doing weddings, funerals. Like any other religious leaders or officials, they responded to a local community. By now, I think most functioning mosques have foreign support. And when you see things in northern Nigeria like stoning adulterers, that's not going back to a Hausa past; that's new. They didn't used to do that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROBERTSON: And so it's become a much more sensitive region, much more of a hotbed now than it was in the early '80s. And after we were driven out of Kaduna, I was approached by some of the ball boys at the Lagos Lawn Tennis Club, which was right down the street from my office, and where I spent a lot of time. The ball boys were kind of Lagos street urchins, and their fathers were low level police people, policemen who lived in the barracks, or they were from the families of local street traders. They said, "ah, Mr. Nick, we feel terrible, you've been driven out of Kaduna by these Arab people, they're making it hot for you. We feel very sad. Do you want us to burn down the Iraqi embassy?" They weren't going to do it for free, of course, and they suggested that something like \$1,000 would take care of it. Actually, there is no doubt in mind that for \$1,000 those guys would have burned some building to the ground, but I could not have guaranteed that it would be the Embassy of Iraq. Their arson skills were probably good, but their reading skills weren't too hot.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

*How did the Fulbright system work? We were sending people, Nigerians, to the United States. Did they come back?*

ROBERTSON: Well, we still had enough control over them to make them come back.

*Q: This was on exchange visa, knew they could on a J visa, they couldn't change.*

ROBERTSON: As a matter of fact a well known Nigerian poet got a Fulbright and was offered a job at the host university. They wanted to keep him, and he consulted me. I said no, don't even think about it. Come back here for two years, do your time and then apply for the job. And you can even go back and teach for a quarter if you like but don't ask to change your status. I said two years back in Nigeria will go by like nothing and then you'll be free. If he had tried to change status he would have been in court the rest of his life. He later sent me a note thanking me for that advice. And most of them were smart enough, they weren't- A lot of them did leave

subsequently; none violated their exchange visas. I wouldn't send their whole family.

*Q: Did you come out of this, you and maybe your wife, I mean, was it frustrating? Sort of whither in Nigeria; was this?*

ROBERTSON: In one sense I haven't changed my opinion in the almost 30 years I've been coming and going in Nigeria. It's a marvelous society; it's a rotten government. If you're looking for progress, the progress of the Nigerian nation, you're not going to see anything. If you look a little closer you see a society, even their immigrants and illegal immigrants tend to be okay. Their propensity for fraud, alas, is amazing.

*Q: It really is remarkable. And it's a worldwide thing. I mean, they don't limit themselves.*

ROBERTSON: Oh, they're all over. They're in China, unfortunately. Actually, the genesis of the problem is an interesting topic. We had about 50 to 100,000 Nigerian students here in around '78, 1980. Oil prices were good following the fall of the Shah of Iran. Then around '80, '81 prices dropped and the Nigerian government all of a sudden cut off support for these students. These students were supported by the state governments in Nigeria, and all of a sudden the Central Bank wouldn't give the Nigerian state governments anymore foreign exchange to support their students.. So you had a lot of students left here with no support, and a lot of U.S. universities were calling on USIA to try to figure out how to handle the problem. We – meaning the U.S. Government and private and public universities in the U.S. – had actively recruited these students and all of a sudden there was no money for them. Many institutions, assuming it was just a temporary glitch, ended up advancing credit to them assuming the money would be forthcoming, which it never was. So with all of these students here, suddenly broke, if you trace it, the first thing that happened was credit card fraud, which is easy. You get a credit card, you run up \$500, you say you lost it. Then it shifted into fraud and that was sort of the trigger for the Nigerian involvement in drug dealing, too.

*Q: Yes, and also automobile theft. I understand there's quite a traffic of stolen automobiles going off to other countries from the States.*

ROBERTSON: Yes. That's new, but it has more to do with containerization than Nigerians or anyone else. It used to be the bill of lading for a ship was a negotiable document saying the captain had responsibility for this car, which belonged to this person, and all documents had to be there. Now it's in a container and the documents no longer read this "container said to contain the following automobiles," so no documents are required to get them out. You used to have to drive stolen vehicles out of a country, but now in a container they travel safe from inspection. All of West Africa gets hot vehicles, mostly from Western Europe. In South America a lot of vehicles stolen in the U.S. show up via containers.

Nigerians, as a matter of fact, most African groups, are perfect underground groups. They have family ties that build trust, and a near perfect system of local intelligence to make certain that new recruits are who they say they are. They speak languages that outsiders could not speak or understand. Even by the late 70s they were all over the world and had legitimate trade networks. It was easy for them to go into the underground economy. Easy, but regrettable.

*Q: Well you say that the government was basically impossible to deal with.*

ROBERTSON: You could deal with them but they wouldn't do anything.

*Q: So what could you do, go- make- say please do this and then-*

ROBERTSON: And they would say yes.

*Q: And they'd say yes or whatever; it was and then you go off and make your own arrangements?*

ROBERTSON: Yes. They couldn't or wouldn't fulfill most minimal commitments they made. I remember once a Nigerian artifact went on auction in Switzerland, with an opening bid of \$1 million. Bob LaGamma had a lot of friends in the academic community who notified him of this auction of a stolen artifact. So, we told the Nigerian government through formal channels, hey, they're going to auction off your stolen artifacts. And there was no response, no action. So I sent my secretary to see someone who was an avid art collector who knew the Vice President, and he got a letter from the Vice President ordering action. Still nothing happened, so my secretary went to the Ministry of Culture with the letter, and came back with a bag of naira (the local currency; there were no credit cards then, and the largest denomination note in naira was worth only \$10). Then she dragged somebody from the ministry of culture to the airline and sat him down and paid for his ticket, then she took him to the airport in a USIS vehicle. He came back with this million dollar bronze head in his hand luggage, which has probably been stolen again and resold. But we wanted to reclaim it; we thought that we can't just sit back and watch this. But it meant sending somebody from our office to get cash from the government and buy a ticket and probably have somebody thrown off the plane because it was around Christmas time.

*Q: I imagine that you probably had a very talented staff of Foreign Service nationals because we- one, we paid-*

ROBERTSON: We didn't pay much but we paid, and they got the immigrant visas after 15 years. And yes, we had very talented staff, and I still see them, many of them are still friends, from the drivers and guards to the senior people. It's always a pleasure to see them, because here's a country where all the statistics are bad, all the reports horrible, but every time I go back all my friends, from the embassy guards to the senior people, are doing better, thank you. And their children are doing better, thank you. And yes, we did have very talented people, we attracted very gifted people.

*Q: Okay. You left there when?*

ROBERTSON: Ninety-one.

**LEON WEINTRAUB**

**Nigeria Desk Officer  
Washington, DC (1990-1992)**

*Mr. Weintraub was born and raised in New York City, educated at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and the Universities of Pittsburgh and Wisconsin. After service in Liberia with the Peace Corps he entered government service, first with the Navy Department and then with the State Department Foreign Service. His service in Washington and abroad involved him with a variety of countries and issues including African Affairs, International Organizations, Narcotics and Peace-Keeping operations in Africa. His foreign posts were Bogotá, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Quito and Geneva. Mr. Weintraub was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.*

*Q: Well then, in 1990, you, I guess, ready to go overseas again?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, no, actually not. I lost my mother in 1987 after we got back. My father was not doing well, so we stayed for another assignment. And I became the desk officer for Nigeria in the office of West African affairs. I thought this was an interesting circle to come back to. You know, I had a career pattern that I found interesting: service in Colombia and Ecuador, and then into the human rights bureau for Latin America; service in Israel, and then INR analyst for Israel; service in Nigeria, and then several years later back as a desk officer for Nigeria. Again, for the same reason I found living in Nigeria very exciting -- this is the 800 pound gorilla of West Africa, if you will. So I thoroughly enjoyed the time I had there.

*Q: You were on the desk from what?*

WEINTRAUB: From 1990 to 1992. This was the Babangida regime. It was a military government of Ibrahim Babangida; I'm pretty sure for all the time that I was there. Our ambassador was Lennon Walker. I made a couple of trips out there. There were some elections that were held there that I went to observe for a period. And we had a Babangida visit to the United States. And you know, like always, anything that happens in Nigeria is of interest to the Africa bureau. You know, the Africa bureau has a lot of very small accounts that the White House will never hear about. The word might get out, occasionally, of events in Benin or Togo to interested members of Congress, but many of them know about Nigeria and other big accounts of South Africa, Kenya, and Egypt. Of course, Egypt's in another bureau though. In any case, Nigeria is certainly among the major players. Petroleum, population, the same things that attracted me to serve there and to have this job again were very important for the bureau. This period also was after the civil war started in Liberia. The invasion of Liberia by Charles Taylor and his rebels began in, I think it was Christmas Day of 1999, and this eventually led to a civil war of several years. So I was on the Nigeria desk when this was happening, and we were wondering what to do about it: Should the Nigerians help out with their regional organization of ECOWAS? Should the Organization of African Unity get involved? I remember there was some issue of whether the United States was going to get involved in Liberia. Obviously these things were kind of floating around the office of West African affairs. But I think our assistant secretary was Hank Cohen at the time, a very respected senior diplomat. Apart from the Nigeria account which kept me quite busy, and the events in Liberia, it's hard to remember any one other thing

that comes to mind about my two years as Nigeria Desk Officer.

*Q: Were Nigeria and its rulers completely squandering the oil wealth?*

WEINTRAUB: I think for the most part that was our perspective on that issue. I remember I had a number of discussions with the ambassador of Nigeria in Washington. I was on the desk when the Nigerians had brought in a new ambassador. I remember he was talking to me on one occasion, and he said, he essentially tried to put on the State Department the responsibility to encourage American investors to invest in Nigeria. And I said, you know, with all due respect sir, I think that's your job. My job, with others in the U.S. government, is to advise the American investor about the risks, benefits and liabilities inherent in investing all over the world. For me, specifically, it is to explain what the situation in Nigeria is like. And when we see a climate, an investment climate that is conducive to private investment, and when we see -- if you don't mind my saying so -- Nigerians investing in Nigeria and not taking their money and putting it in banks in London and Switzerland and other places, then we might begin to change our views about investing in Nigeria. But until we find an investment regime that is protective of the private sector, that has adequate laws to protect investments, that has a judicial system that works, that is not typified by favoritism of one kind or another, -- at that point, then we'll encourage American investors. Until then we have to fully exercise our responsibility to alert them. And I don't think things have changed very much over the years. Maybe they've gotten a little better recently, but I haven't heard any great, great success stories coming out of there.

*Q: Did you get at all involved in the widespread rackets that Nigeria's-*

WEINTRAUB: Oh yes.

*Q: doing. In a way they're somewhat like the gypsies except a lot smarter.*

WEINTRAUB: Yes, this is when the scamming letters began to occur, in the early '90s, I think it was. And they were kind of novel and they were kind of interesting and amusing up to a point. You know, you'd get these bizarre letters that --, I'm sure you've seen them, or you received a lot of them.

*Q: Oh, every one you could think of, e-mail.*

WEINTRAUB: Right, e-mail, but that was before e-mail days, of course. So we had to work with -- to convince the Secret Service that this was an issue they had to deal with. Of course, a lot of it was smuggling. And, basically, a lot of it was nonsense-type work, with Americans calling the State Department to ask about these letters. I think we did the best we could to try to get some other bureau or agency, maybe Secret Service or Department of Justice, to handle these inquiries so we could devote our time to foreign policy and not law enforcement. We had these scams, and a fair number of Nigerians in the U.S. were involved in credit card fraud, also in health insurance fraud.

In the case of health insurance, someone would have a health policy, and they'd travel back to Nigeria, while being insured with a policy that allegedly offered coverage while out of the

country. They would then submit some bill for thousands of dollars from a clinic somewhere -- who knows where -- in Nigeria, and the insurance company wouldn't have a clue about this. Sometimes we -- the department and then the embassy -- would get involved in trying to help the insurance company, by finding out, for example, if such a hospital actually existed. And it was just a drain of resources to have to do this law enforcement type work or insurance investigation work. Also a similar scam existed for life insurance. People would take out life insurance policies on someone and then a certain amount of time later the insurance company would get a death certificate with all kinds of stamps and ribbons on it from some district in Nigeria that the person had died. Then the company would hear that the person who had the policy would like to collect. You know, there was just so much fraudulent documentation. So this took a fair amount of time to do.

But the Nigerians -- all told, I mentioned before there's a certain amount of likeableness about them. No matter they were rascals and scheming, and you'd have to put your hands in your pockets when you walked by them. And they were so damned inventive; you wished they would find something legal to do to make money. But they seemed to have much more ingenuity than industriousness. It's interesting that almost all these scams were exclusively run by -- or at least started by -- Nigerians. From what I understand now, particularly in more recent years, a lot of them became involved in drug smuggling. So they seem to have a penchant for making a quick buck and making it in an illegal way.

*Q: I understand too a lot of automobile smuggling, too.*

WEINTRAUB: Could be, could be. I haven't heard that one, particularly. So it was -- we had a good time in the Africa bureau. I think I was very impressed by the Africa bureau in the way it works to satisfy the needs of its people out in the field. It realizes that most embassies are in pretty tough living conditions and they do their best. I think the admin staff, general service staff, and post management officers do a hell of a job under very, very difficult conditions. Trying to get American shipments out of customs, for example, can truly be a nightmare. I mean, the rules are made up, it seems, as they go along. The rules are designed to extract the greatest amount of leverage and the greatest amount of payoff from whoever needs something out of the harbor. You know, the living conditions definitely are tough, but I think the department -- and the people in the Africa bureau in particular -- does a fairly good job of trying to help people living in those conditions.

**NICOLAS ROBERTSON**  
**Office of African Affairs, USIA**  
**Washington, DC (1991-1993)**

*Mr. Robertson was born and raised in California and educated at the University of California. Joining the Foreign Service of the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1978, he served abroad as Public Affairs and Cultural Affairs Officer in South Africa, Barbados, Argentina, Nigeria, Ghana and Venezuela. In his Washington Assignments, Mr. Robertson dealt primarily with West African*

*matters. Mr. Robertson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*

*Q: Okay. You left there when?*

ROBERTSON: Ninety-one.

*Q: Whither?*

ROBERTSON: I came back to Washington to work in the USIA Office of African Affairs again. A big issue for us at that time in USIA in Washington was that we had begun to get a lot of money from AID. AID had gotten funding for a lot of democratization and governance programs, but they didn't have much training or experience at that time. That was sort of our bag; we did a lot of that institutional work with legal institutions, parliaments, political parties, NGOs. And so here I got a series of fun lessons about Washington. I came back to Washington and Bob Gosende was head of USIA/AF. Bob said that we should really try to institutionalize these interagency transfers of funds from AID.

I hadn't really paid much attention in Washington. You know, I was good at analyzing Nigeria, analyzing Argentina but I hadn't really turned an x-ray eye on Washington; Nigerians taught me something about that. And so I came back and one of my big projects for two years was trying to come up with an institutional way to transfer funds from agency to agency. And my conclusion after two years is that we could not put it in writing. The rules are complex, and it's basically the administrators on the spot who make up the rules that you can follow. So we decided to just tell our PAOs to sign anything, nobody's going to jail for this, it's not fraud. It's just get any program money you can, sign anything and then people here do the same thing because there's no institutional way to do this; it's always going to be flying by the seat of your pants.

*Q: So what were they doing with this money?*

ROBERTSON: Well eventually AID ended up giving big contracts to universities and their contractors and their NGOs to do studies of democratization and stuff like that. And the per diem costs for these kinds of contracts were extraordinarily high. The U.S. Government per diem for one day in Lagos was more, much more than the monthly wages of our senior FSNs.

*Q: Was it because they were being charged more or were they just making money out of it?*

ROBERTSON: No, there was no fraud; no one was making illicit money out of it except the Lagos hotels. I remember once during a severe devaluation, Sheraton in Lagos doubled its prices in dollar terms. They said their inputs would double in price. Yes, you bastards, I thought, but your wages costs will be cut in half. And we – the U.S. government – didn't beef about it. I was looking at all this money that would eventually be spent on doing these studies, and thinking that you could fund all the operating costs for legal aid programs or other stuff for years with this kind of money.

*Q: Well you know, one of the things, and particularly on the AID side, that I have the impression that the work done say in Africa, the money is allocated, you might say, but African country ends*

*up by paying the University of- Michigan State University. I mean, they do all these damn studies which is a place where a professor and his grad students go. It's great for our schools but it really- you know, what does the study do? You produce a nice looking study, give it to people who were suffering because, I mean, they were in critical circumstances, doesn't really advance the cause much.*

ROBERTSON: That was my feeling. And a compromise we came up with was what they used to call 116e money, the small grant funds for democratization and human rights work with local organizations. AID transferred something like \$2 million to the Bureau of African Affairs in State and each embassy could give small grants, sort of like the Ambassador's Self-Help Funds. You could give a grant on your own signature of up to \$25,000 or something. And that was money that I thought was well spent.

*Q: You know, I've talked to, oh, a man who was ambassador to Nicaragua, was saying that he could give small grants, you know, not much, sometimes just a couple hundred dollars but maybe through around \$1,000 and gave it almost always to women because the men would drink it, but the women would use it to buy a sewing machine or to get a refrigerator to run a little market store or something. You know, in other words at the lower level and they'd pay it back.*

ROBERTSON: Yes, that was our experience too. Believe it or not a Nigerian NGO showed up at my office and wanted to refund the extra money from a 116e grant because they had cut corners and worked to reduce expenses and had half of it left. I had to tell him that this would not work at all, that the American government did not do things like that, they're going to kill us. Either let's go over your books again and make it balance, or do another program; you can't give it back.

*Q: Yes, turning money back to the government was just, you know, I mean, the problem is, it's not designed to accept money and once you do it probably takes more man hours of accounting's work than the money itself.*

ROBERTSON: Yes, and when I was back in Washington we built up the 116 e, which I still think was the best money the U.S. Government had in this area.

Also with the wave of elections in Africa in the '90s our missions were swamped with requests for election support – from people to monitor elections to equipment and training. Elections are a very expensive business. AID, State and USIA were able to build up an election support fund so that the Embassies wouldn't have to raid all their other programs. That gave us the ability to respond to requests for election support quite quickly. We had been talking for years about how important elections were, so these African governments would say, "So we're going to have an election, a national election in six months or two months; could we have some monitors? Some voting machines?" That's a very short lead time and we were able to come up with a program that allowed us to respond.

*Q: Where did you get the monitors?*

ROBERTSON: Oh National Endowment for Democracy, International Republican Institute,



National Democratic Institute. Then they would make contact with League of Women Voters. We did a lot with the League of Women Voters, other NGOs here and there recruit monitors.

*Q: Well, what was your impression of the aid apparatus?*

ROBERTSON: We didn't have aid in Nigeria when I was there.

*Q: Well how about when you get to Washington?*

ROBERTSON: My Nigerian friends taught me important lessons about this. I was cursing all this money the U.S. Government was spending on consultants or administration for some program. My Nigerians said, "Hey, why do you think these programs are so popular? Why do you think they have a constituency? Use your head! That's not an accident, that's the point." And my Nigerian friends with their x-ray eye for how systems really work, where money changes hands, x-rayed Washington and said quite directly that programs that gave money to Africans would never be popular (and they did not see why they should be, quite honestly). At this time there were already rumors about shutting down USIA, and they told me that AID's approach gave them friends in Washington and will keep them in business, which of course was right.

*Q: Yes. You did this from '91 to when?*

ROBERTSON: Ninety-one to '93.

*Q: As far as allocating money, you saw the well invested money and not so well invested money?*

ROBERTSON: I think one of the things I liked to see that made me happy in Washington during the '90s was this attempt to shift the focus in Africa from aid to business, ending in the African Growth and Opportunity Act. We're talking about a long-term thing but then Washington's not a mid-term to long-term city. And I liked with the wave of elections and multi-party states and all this in Africa that there was a U.S. response which was much broader. I think of Ron Brown in connection with this, the late Ron Brown. Africa is not going to change as result of the World Bank and everything; it's going to change as the result of investment. And I liked that change in Washington, pushing a lot more business activities, not just the standard resource industries.

**BRUCE F. DUNCOMBE**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Lagos/Abuja (1991-1993)**

*Bruce F. Duncombe was born in Brockton, Massachusetts in 1937 and was educated at Amherst College and the University of Minnesota. He entered the Foreign Service in 1979. His career included posts in Abidjan, Cairo, New Delhi, Jakarta and Lagos/Abuja. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

*Q: Well, then, you moved from this country in 1991, and you went to Nigeria.*

DUNCOMBE: That is correct.

*Q: You were in Nigeria from 1991 to when?*

DUNCOMBE: 1993.

*Q: How did you feel about that job?*

DUNCOMBE: I volunteered for it. I essentially was voting with my feet... I am personally convinced that the computers were programmed in such a way that if somebody bids on a job in Nigeria, without any further consultations, they sent out an assignment notice.

*Q: Over the years, initially, there was a great deal of enthusiasm about Nigeria. I'm thinking about in the early 1960s. But, that got dissipated pretty soon. There was the Biafran War, a series of military dictatorships, and then misuse of natural resources, and all that. Was Lagos the capital?*

DUNCOMBE: Yes and no. How is that for a bureaucratic answer?

*Q: It's a great one. You better explain.*

DUNCOMBE: Back in the middle of the 1970s, Nigeria decided to build a new capitol in the center of the country, partly to open up the center of the country, partly to get a capitol that would not be in Yoruba land where Lagos is, or Iboland, where the Biafra Civil War centered, or Hausaland, which is the north. It would be politically in between and, perhaps a unifying force, in a country that has many forces at work for fragmentation. By the time I arrived in 1991, Abuja was up and running, far enough along in its construction that the presidency had relocated there. The foreign ministry was located there. A number of other ministries and the central bank moved there during my tour. So, you have the former political capitol and the economic capitol, Lagos, that is losing its political capitol role to Abuja, that is eight to ten hours away by road, an hour or so by air. It was where the presidency was located. By the time I left, the foreign ministry, the trade ministry, the finance ministry, the central bank, and several others were there. It was a difficult environment in which to carry on your diplomatic work, because depending upon who you needed to see, they might be in Lagos, or they might be in Abuja. Transportation is very difficult in Nigeria. Getting to the airport is a major undertaking in itself in Lagos. Air travel is very chaotic. That is a nice way of describing it. It was very difficult to carry out your work there.

From my viewpoint, as the economic counselor, number three in the embassy, since the ambassador and the DCM had to be in Abuja on many occasions, I was officer in charge in Lagos, and in many respects, had major responsibilities for running the embassy, which essentially did remain in Lagos. We had a liaison office in Abuja. I had a very interesting time, with substantial management responsibilities that transcended what ordinarily would be the responsibilities of the economic counselor, even when the ambassador and DCM were in the

country. The ambassador and the DCM would frequently be in Abuja for purposes of doing what they had to do with the president and foreign minister, and the other ministers, who increasingly were located there.

*Q: Who was the ambassador and the DCM?*

DUNCOMBE: DCM, during my two years there was George Trail. The ambassador the first year was Lannon Walker, and the second year was Bill Swing.

*Q: I know when you move a capitol from a busy place out into the middle of nowhere... We have had Canberra, we have had Brasilia. Even the United States went through this. Washington, DC was sort of a swamp at one point. But, it's very hard to get the democrats to move. How was it working with the Nigerian government?*

DUNCOMBE: They were moving, but not everyone at once. The ministers, as I say, were moving. The Central Bank, for instance, most of the staff remained in Lagos. The governor of the Central Bank and his chief advisors had all moved to Abuja by the time I left.

*Q: How did you work it then? Would you go mainly for a week, and go up and stay at Abuja, and put together your business, and try to do everything at the same time?*

DUNCOMBE: I went to Abuja on several occasions for three or four days at a time. The ambassador and the DCM went much more often because they were the ones that, in many instances, had to have the ministerial contacts. Because a number of the commercial disputes that we had in Nigeria were associated with business scams and that sort of thing, I had a part because the minister of transportation with the attorney general remained in Lagos. I did call on these people, on my own, on many, many occasions, partly because they were Lagos, partly because of the nature of the business disputes that we were working on. It's a difficult environment to operate in when the government is in two different places.

*Q: During the time, 1991 to 1993, how did you find the Nigerian economy?*

DUNCOMBE: It's a shambles. Nothing worked. Many people, including a World Bank economist, pointed out that in 1960, Indonesia and Nigeria were in approximately the same stages of economic development. Basically, what happened from 1960 to the early 1990s, is that the Indonesian economy progressed significantly, and the Nigerian economy deteriorated regularly. With the coming of the oil monies, the Nigerian economy just went on a precipitous decline.

*Q: What was the decline or problems?*

DUNCOMBE: They maintained an exchange rate that was way over valued, so that the country started, because of the inappropriate exchange rate, to import food rather than produce it domestically. They destroyed their agricultural base. The Indonesians, meanwhile, because they managed their exchange rate much more sensibly, went from being a food deficit country, to food self-sufficiency. Nigeria went from being food self-sufficient to a significant food deficit

country. They subsidized the price of gasoline, for instance; a gallon of gasoline, during the time I was in Lagos, cost about three cents.

*Q: We're talking about gasoline. In the United States, which was one of the cheaper areas, it was about a dollar, I think, at that time, maybe a little less.*

DUNCOMBE: The early 1990s, I don't know.

*Q: I know, but it gives you an idea.*

DUNCOMBE: But, the absurdity of it is that gasoline in Nigeria retailed for about three cents a gallon. The neighboring CFA countries, franc countries, the price was about \$5.00 a gallon. You can imagine what's going to happen.

*Q: Ah, yes.*

DUNCOMBE: Nigeria, which produces a lot of oil, had a refining capacity of 400,000 barrels a day, but the refineries didn't work. So, they were producing things far less refined product than their domestic needs. Therefore, they had to import refined gasoline at world market prices. They were putting domestic production and imported gasoline into the retail market at heavily subsidized prices. Not surprisingly, it was smuggled out of Nigeria, into the surrounding CFA countries, in such large volumes, for instance, that Cameroon had to close its refinery. There was so much smuggled product coming into Cameroon from Nigeria. I remember being down in the Port Harcourt area one day, and saw two or three miles from one of the refineries, tanker trucks that had picked up refined products for local distribution, loading it onto barges, which I was reliably told was going to be taken to Gabon or Angola.

*Q: What was the government of Nigeria while you were there?*

DUNCOMBE: A military dictatorship. The president was a military man who came to power as a result of a coup, Ibrahim Babingida. He was a fairly benign fellow, as compared with the military man who followed him.

*Q: Was that also a source of impediment to solid markets? I mean, was this a regime that at the top was taking money out, and making wrong decisions, that sort of thing?*

DUNCOMBE: Constantly.

*Q: We talked before, and you said, "Well, at every embassy, an American comes in and asks if he should invest." There must have been an awful lot of body language if anybody came in to ask if they should invest in Nigeria. Or, was it so self-evident that nobody came to look for investments?*

DUNCOMBE: There were two kinds of things. One was the oil companies. Oil companies come because they have to go where the oil is. Aside from that, almost no serious business person came to Nigeria. I knew I was in for an interesting tour when I read in my *London Economist* on

the plane as I was leaving Indonesia, an ad from the Nigerian Central Bank warning foreign businessmen against the business scams being run out of Nigeria.

*Q: That seems to be almost a tribal trait or something. I receive on the Internet, and my colleagues do, but this is in my own e-mail, maybe once a month, something that says, "If you'll help me get twenty-five million dollars out the bank... I need you," because of this or that. It's a scam. People keep falling for this.*

DUNCOMBE: That's right. It happens all the time. You can't imagine the rapacious greed of some people, that will lead them to do, repeatedly, stupid things.

*Q: I was reading about some American doctors who are caught up in this thing. This is within the last month or two.*

DUNCOMBE: Oh, sure.

*Q: They're asking themselves how stupid can they be. Also, what is known as scams is a Spanish prisoner ploy. "Help me get so much money," or help get something out. How involved did you all get in the economic section?*

DUNCOMBE: Constantly.

*Q: Did you have a scam officer?*

DUNCOMBE: It was primarily handled by the commercial attache. In the embassies we call it the 471 program, or 417, I can't remember exactly. This was something that all embassies worked on. It was not just Americans that got hooked into this. The Brits and everybody else were actively concerned with this sort of thing. You can't imagine the number of people who thought a deal was too good to be true, and willingly parted from their money, in pursuit of rapacious greed. They had such serious difficulty that in several instances, the people in our consular section felt it necessary to take dupees who were in deep kimchi with their Nigerian partners, overland to Cotonou in Benin, to fly out of West Africa. It was deemed too dangerous for them, even if they were to get into the sterile area of the airport, to try to fly out.

*Q: I guess it just shows that you can fool some of the people all the time, really. After a while, was the experience such that if somebody came in with this, there really wasn't much to pursue, just get them the hell out?*

DUNCOMBE: That is correct.

*Q: Because I take it, with this going on all the time, there's no particular recourse for recovering funds?*

DUNCOMBE: None whatsoever. If they want to throw more good money after bad, by trying to engage local counsel and pursue it in court, there was no chance whatsoever.

*Q: This must have caused a certain amount of screaming and yelling on the part of these stupid people, coming to you and saying, "You've got to do something," or not? Were most of them pretty calm about it?*

DUNCOMBE: I think they pretty well had realized that they had made a big mistake.

*Q: I had a friend who was a banker in Baltimore. He said that as soon as somebody came in and could be identified as a Nigerian, into the bank, they would practically shut all the windows, and shut the doors, because there were more schemes than you could think of. The Nigerians were a lot faster on their feet, in these schemes, than American bankers.*

DUNCOMBE: I'm not surprised that someone would have told you that. They made an effort, toward the end of my tour there, to try to put in an interim civilian government, and try to turn the economy around a little bit. The chairman of what they call the Transitional Council, Ernest Shonoken, who was a nice man, and I'm sure an honest man, constantly was asking me why American investors were not coming to Nigeria. I said that there were at least two reasons: When Nigerian investors have the confidence to invest in their own country, American and other foreign investors will have the same confidence. In other words, if you establish a good set of property rights, transparent administration, and transparent legal system, so that Nigerians would have the confidence to invest in their economy, than other foreigners would, if they saw opportunities, have that confidence as well. The second point is, for most people who come to the country, their first impression and last impression of the country is the airport. If you have never flown in and out of Lagos and are looking for a bizarre experience, go and try to fly in and out of Lagos International Airport. It is a dump. You are constantly being hit up for bribes. That is the impression anyone coming in would face, a dump. That is a kind way to describe it. It is shabby, it is unclean, ill lighted, and everybody hitting you up for bribes. The same is true as you leave.

*Q: What was his response? He probably put his hands up in despair.*

DUNCOMBE: I don't know if they don't care, or they aren't willing to see it. Before the finance minister moved to Abuja, his office was on the tenth floor of a very run-down government office block in central Lagos. For VIPs like the ambassador, there was an elevator that would take you up to the floor where you could get to the minister's office. It was the same elevator the minister would take to get to his office. When you step off that elevator, right to the right is a men's latrine, where the drains probably stopped working 10 years ago. To get off the elevator and walk down to the minister's office, you have to walk through a pool of piss. His excellency, the minister, does that every time he comes to and leaves his office. The ambassador and his economic counselor, every time we call on the minister, have to walk through this pool of piss. People wonder why foreign investors don't come and do business in that country. It is so self-evident. But, having said that, I had a wonderful time. If you can enjoy the bizarre... Every day you went to the office, you would have no idea what was going to happen, but it was always interesting.

*Q: It sounds like you would be reporting on a failed economy, and at a certain point, what's the point?*

DUNCOMBE: During the time I was in that embassy, I don't think anyone... As you know, embassies are always accused of being client for the host government. I don't think we ever sent a report out of the embassy in Lagos, during the time I was there, that any reader in Washington would accuse us of having caught clientitis.

*Q: In a way, it sounds like if we hadn't, we probably should have almost written the place off.*

DUNCOMBE: We basically have. There was essentially no foreign aid program. There was a very small program. I think there was one AID officer. USIS was fairly active. There is a core of well-educated Nigerians and USIS was trying to maintain some sort of relationships with them. As I recall, on one occasion, for instance, the OES Bureau sent out a cable saying that they would like us to identify a number of Nigerian centers of excellence, that they could be in contact with for working up collaborative programs of a scientific joint endeavor. We, in the embassy looked at this and sort of laughed, and didn't even bother to answer the cable. Three or four months later, we got a follow-up message from OES saying, "Hey, you haven't answered that message. We want to have some Nigerian centers of excellence." I got together USIA, the commercial section, the economic section, the political section, and the rest of the elements of the embassy. We sat down and said, "Can we identify a center of excellence that might be suitable for scientific collaboration?" The answer was that we could not. There is one: The International Institute of Tropic Agriculture, in Ibadan (IITA). It is already very well funded internationally. It had no need for a small grant from an OES collaborative project. The message we sent back to Washington was, aside from IITA, there are no centers of excellence in Nigeria. Twenty years ago, there were good universities. The universities were universally in shambles.

*Q: I knew a Foreign Service officer who got his Ph.D. and went out to Nigeria to one of their supposedly top-rate universities, about the time you are talking about. Somebody was on strike almost the whole time. It was absolutely a worthless exercise.*

DUNCOMBE: Absolutely. The universities are a joke. I remember talking to a professor at one of the universities in the north, Zaria University, and asking him what sort of materials he used for current research. He said that he was lucky to get three month old *Time* magazines. I wandered through the library at the University of Ibadan at one point. I don't think there was a book in the University of Ibadan library that was less than 15 years old. It's a disaster.

*Q: Were there any signs of hope, by the time you left there in 1993?*

DUNCOMBE: I didn't see very many. At the time I left, in July 1993, they had had an election in mid to late June, ostensibly for a civilian government. The wrong candidate was clearly winning, and they canceled the election results. Sometime after that, the military president, Babingida, was replaced by a new military president, Sani Abacha, who from everything I have read in the newspapers, made Babingida look pretty good.

**HELEN WEINLAND**

**Consul General  
Kaduna (1991-1994)**

*Ms. Weinland was born and raised in New York and educated at Mount Holyoke College and Ohio State University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1974, she served in Zurich, Berlin and Prague and at a number of African posts, including Lagos, Nigeria; Kigali, Rwanda as Deputy Chief of Mission and Kaduna, Nigeria, where she served as Consul General. She also served in Washington as Desk Officer for the Philippines, Nigeria and Zimbabwe as well as Officer for United Nations Affairs. Ms. Weinland was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*

*Q: So you left Berlin in the spring of 1991? Whither?*

WEINLAND: Kaduna, Nigeria. I had quite a bit of time back in the States because of course, I wasn't due out until August so I did some training and I took a lot of home leave.

The day after Hurricane Bob in August and the day after Yeltsin's performance on the top of the tank shouting down the coup leaders in Russia, I took off for Lagos. It was very interesting to go back to Lagos after ten years away because the city had grown enormously; the problems that had existed there had gotten worse; traffic and crime and all that. Even worse, the civilian government that I had been so involved in watching come to life and nudging along the way, had been overthrown in 1983 in a military coup. Then there had been a second military coup so by the time I got to Nigeria in 1991, there was a military government led by a gentleman named Ibrahim Babangida. He had announced a couple of years earlier that the country was going to move to civilian rule and that process was underway.

The military leadership had decided to divide up all the elections and space them out very deliberately over a two or three year period. By the time I got there, they had formed two political parties. When they had first lifted the blanket on political activity, something like 200 parties came out of the woodwork. Babangida being a military man and dedicated to order and chain of command had said, "This isn't going to work," and he erased that particular process and said, "Now we are going to create two parties. We, the military, are going to say there will be two parties; one to the left of center and one to the right of center. Now, you all go out and decide which one you are going to be in and get set to contest some elections."

Many people who had been active in the earlier democratic government were banned from political activity, so under those kinds of manipulations, the Nigerians began the series of elections, the first of which were local government elections, roughly comparable, say, to a county election in this country. The local government authorities were in place by the time I arrived in August 1991.

The next big step was going to be state governments for state assemblies and governors. I came in on that act.

I was assigned to Kaduna, where the U.S. has had a consulate (by 1991 a consulate general) from



the time that Nigeria became independent. At that time, in 1960, there had been three regions in the country: north, west and east. Kaduna had been the consulate for the entire northern part of Nigeria which was about two thirds of the land area of the country. Kaduna had been the traditional seat for the British government in the Northern Region when it had been the colonial power. So that's where we had established our consulate.

Kaduna was an interesting town. I think the British had chosen to put their authority there because it was not the seat of any of the traditional emirates throughout the northern part of the country. The emirates were what had come down through history as the seats of powerful Muslim rulers who were roughly described, most of them, as Hausa-Fulani. Most of the emirs were actually Fulani. It's one of these interesting examples where one group of people had conquered another, but the language that was universally spoken in the area was the language of the conquered peoples, the Hausa, and not the conquerors. That's why they are often called Hausa-Fulani but they are actually two distinct groups.

The northern region, and therefore my consular district, included a very large number of smaller tribes than the Hausa-Fulani or the other two big tribes in Nigeria, the Yoruba and Ibo. Some of them were quite big. There were maybe seven or eight million people in some of these tribes like the Tiv, the Nupe, the Kanuri and a few others. And then there were some very small groups: one town might have a chief in it and some thousands of people in that particular group.

Kaduna was on the edge between the very traditional emirates of the far north and these other, much smaller groups that were to the south, in what is called the Middle Belt. That was where the Christian and Muslim met along that fault line. The Hausa-Fulani were almost all Moslem and the other groups were either largely Christian or else still, some of them, animists and traditional Nigerian religion.

Kaduna was also an important military town, because the British had been there, and that was where the British authority had been established. The Nigerian Defense Academy was located there, the Command and Staff College was just north of town, and the headquarters of one of the major army divisions was also based in Kaduna. There was a big military presence. Because of that, a lot of retired military also lived in that area and had built themselves retirement homes and were big businessmen in town.

It was an interesting town to be in. It had a pretty vibrant industrial and commercial center; there was textile manufacturing. Again, because it had been the administrative center of the north, a lot of big banks, insurance companies, and other service sector companies had their headquarters there. And it had one of the two petroleum refineries in Nigeria. That had been located there even though the oil was in the south, so that there would be a regional distribution of that kind of activity. It was a sizeable city and very interesting just in itself.

The consular district was also very interesting. Obviously, one of the things you do when you first get to a place is run around both the city you are in and the country, the area you are in, and meet as many people as you possibly can.

The biggest, traditional city was Kano, about two hours north of Kaduna, close to the border with

Niger. There was an international airport in Kano. Kano still had the traditional mud wall that encircled the old city, had a huge traditional market and a number of traditional Moslem businessmen, some of whom were quite prominent.

Kano had been one of the cities on the traditional trans-Saharan trade route between Egypt and the coastal areas of say, Ghana and Nigeria and further west. Gold from Ghana, salt and other commodities would go in one direction, other goods come in the other. There was a vibrant trade in that part of Nigeria that extended back six or seven centuries.

I was the consul general in Kaduna. We had a fairly substantial responsibility for reporting on political events during this period of democratization and also an increasing interest in Moslem-Christian relations, which could erupt from time to time into extremely violent and nasty bloodshed.

*Q: Were there missionaries in the area?*

WEINLAND: Yes, there were missionaries in Kaduna, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries. When we traveled around there were a number of American missionaries we called on. The Protestants had, in another town in the north in my district, Jos, another sort of melting pot town, a school, the Hillcrest School, which was one of the better schools in all of Nigeria. It served to educate the children of missionaries all across West Africa. So yes, that was a sizeable part of our American population that we had to keep tabs on and have on our warden system, which occasionally we did have to activate. But by this time, the number of expatriate missionaries was much reduced, as the evangelizing work was being carried on by the Nigerian pastors and lay workers who had been trained. It's expensive to station an American missionary overseas, and most denominations had cut back considerably on that side of their work.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?*

WEINLAND: I served under three different ambassadors in the less than three years I was there. When I arrived, the ambassador was Lannon Walker. He left a year later and was replaced by Bill Swing who only served for a year before he was yanked to go to Haiti, I believe. Haiti had heated up at that point and they wanted an experienced person to be there. At that point, we were assigned a political appointee ambassador named Walter Carrington. I served under all three.

*Q: Did the embassy intrude much on you or were you pretty much on your own?*

WEINLAND: I was pretty much on my own. I was able to report without clearance from the embassy, which was a welcome delegation of authority. Our admin was pretty much run from the embassy. We had no B&F (Budget and Fiscal) function; the big admin decisions of staffing patterns and all that were made in Lagos. The embassy was still in Lagos at that time although it was preparing to move to the new capital, Abuja. We had an admin officer but her primary functions were more those of a GSO than an admin counselor would have had. That of course, was an extremely important function for us in a country where things just didn't work as they were supposed to. You had to do work-arounds and be pretty creative in solving some of the problems that came up.

*Q: What were your major functions while you were there, your major interests?*

WEINLAND: Well, first and foremost was the move to democracy. Lannon Walker even before I got there, had worked with USAID to design a program whereby USAID would fund a program of some millions of dollars to support civil society institutions like co-ops, women's groups, a bar association, the development of a free press. I can't remember all the categories but there were about six or seven different categories of civil society institutions for which we were funding travel to and from the United States, all kinds of assistance from private groups like the League of Women Voters and the NDI, the National Democratic Institute, those two institutes. I can't remember if there was a labor union component to it, there may have been. Those kinds of institutions we were trying to bring together in cooperation. That was one of Walker's big initiatives and I think one that ultimately was not very successful.

*Q: What was your assessment of northern feeling about the distribution of oil revenue? I mean was it going into the pockets of people in Lagos or was it getting spread around?*

WEINLAND: Nigeria had a special commission that represented all the parts of the country; it was supposed to develop the formula by which oil revenue was distributed. The government had just created a whole new round of new states, so some oil money was going into the infrastructure to start those states up. Whenever there was a round of creation of new states, something that happened periodically after the Civil War in Nigeria, care was taken to create an equal number north and south.

In Nigeria, people perpetually feel they are not getting their fair share. Among other things the oil revenue distribution formula was supposed to provide a special amount for the peoples in the Niger delta where a lot of the oil was being pumped; they were suffering from serious environmental degradation. The oil companies, of course, were supposed to be ameliorating that and providing certain social services like clinics and schools as part of the royalty deals they had made with the Nigerian government. Of course, in the delta area, in the south, they never felt it was enough and they may have been right. In the north they felt that they had always been gypped compared to the areas in the east and the south. That was always a matter of tension.

I arrived at a time of high activity -- the gubernatorial elections, the implementation of the democratization project. We were just reestablishing a Peace Corps back in Nigeria. There had been a very unfortunate incident years and years before when some Peace Corps Volunteer had written a post card critical of Nigeria.

*Q: That goes back to the earliest days of the Peace Corps.*

WEINLAND: In the '60s, yes. We had pulled all the Peace Corps out of the east during the Biafra secession and then that thing happened, so we hadn't had a Peace Corps there for years. Peace Corps had begun to build up staff and they had an office in Kaduna. That's where the country Peace Corps director was located; he was not at the embassy. The first class of volunteers, I think there were 12 or perhaps 20, a relatively small number, arrived relatively early on in my time in Kaduna.

*Q: How did they fit in?*

WEINLAND: Some of them did very, very well. It was a typical Peace Corps thing. Some of them did very well, stayed their entire tour, and were quite effective in their areas and in their projects. A couple of them were helpful in the ambassador's special self-help program. I don't know if you are familiar with that program, but ambassadors are given a certain amount of money in the budget every year that can be doled out in small amounts, like \$1,000 here, a couple thousand there for projects that are proposed from the local people. There's generally a committee in the embassy that decides who should get the grants; often the committee will say, "This year we are going to concentrate on water projects or educational infrastructures." Some of the Peace Corps volunteers were active in getting organizations in their communities to apply for funds, and they helped see the applications through to approval.

I do know that at least twice I went to projects that were being initiated; one was the digging of a well in an area where people had been depending on surface wells, so we paid for cement and other materials and some of the labor to have an actual dug well, part of a guinea worm eradication project that the Peace Corps Volunteer in that area was supporting. That was a great celebration. There was dancing in the town's square and circling the well and a little play was performed to talk about why it is important to have clean water. It was really fun.

Another was a women's sewing co-op in Kano.

*Q: What about the Sahel? I know there is often drought in that area? It comes and goes. What was the situation then?*

WEINLAND: I was not there during a period of particular drought; I think the rains were pretty good during the time I was there. Of course, the people in the north are dry weather farmers. The World Bank had, I think maybe during the time or a little earlier than when I had been in Lagos, funded a number of irrigation projects in the north so some agriculture was irrigated. It is an area where a lot of cotton is grown, not a crop that is particularly kind to the soil. The distribution of fertilizers and the availability of farm machinery is always a problem in areas where the farmers are often very poor and depend on co-op marketing and the like.

The north is a heavily agricultural area; they grow a lot of sorghum and millet, and a certain amount of wheat and cotton. There is sugar cultivation in the northeast where was at least one big sugar mill.

In the plateau area in the center of the country, which is higher and more temperate than the surrounding area, they have fairly rich soils and they grow a lot of potatoes and other vegetables. Toward the middle belt of Nigeria, the farmers grew a lot of yams but these are not a food that's heavily consumed in the far north where they tend to eat more like North Africans, more sorghum and millet. Those were the two big grain crops in the north.

*Q: I think of that area up there as being Hausa-Fulani, men on their horses and wonderful costumes like turbans and all that. It's Islamic there, mainly isn't it?*

WEINLAND: Mostly, once you get north of Kaduna. But of course that traditional culture only comes out on the big Moslem holidays, and largely for the benefit of tourists.

*Q: How did that play out? There's Islamic and Islamic. In your time, what was the situation?*

WEINLAND: Most Nigerian Muslims are Sunni and most of them are fairly moderate, or at least in those days were fairly moderate in their practices but many, quite devout. There was a more radical leader, Maitatsine. In the time I had been in Lagos, he whipped up a group of followers who began to raise a lot of havoc. There were serious riots in some of the northern cities until the police and sometimes the army got a handle on it. It was a pretty bloody operation and Maitatsine was, himself, killed during that time. I think his followers had been relatively quiet for most of the time when I got to Kaduna.

But not too long after I arrived, I arrived in August.

*Q: August of?*

WEINLAND: 1991. Maybe a couple of months later there was a terrible riot in Kano, a large city; it has maybe five million inhabitants. The traditional center of town is very Muslim, that's where the market is, that's where the central mosque is and the walls encircle that. There was a very large area outside the walls, which in northern cities is called the *sabon gari*, the place where strangers live. In Kano, that was largely Ibo traders. What would happen would be some incident in that market, and then people would begin to burn and loot and go on rampages and it really was pretty terrible. The religious element would get mixed in, sooner or later.

I am trying to think; there was a riot in 1991 and then there were bad riots during the time when I happened to be on R&R in 1992 or 1993. The 1991 riot in Kano was sparked off by the presence in the city of an evangelical preacher of German origin who had gone to Kano to lead a revival meeting. His loudspeaker cars and posters and other advertising were spread in the traditional city. There was terrible resentment, and a feeling of "You can do whatever you want outside the walls but don't come in where we are and start telling us there is going to be this Christian revival meeting." So the whole place went up in flames. I think there were probably a couple of thousand people killed, and a lot of non-Muslim establishments were burned down, like the movie theater, hotels and restaurants and places like that were all torched and burned down. There was a regular corridor of destruction outside the traditional city.

The first report we had came from a couple of consulate groups that happened to be in Kano when the trouble started; the commercial office driver was caught in a roadblock that he managed to evade, and another car was in the middle of the city, and had to take a roundabout journey through back roads to get out of town. They reported to us that the violence was building. We had the warden system that connected all American citizens in case of emergency. The British did as well, and the first detailed news we had of what was going on was a relay from a British citizen in Kano. Bonke was, I think, a German citizen by origin, but may have been based somewhere in the U.S. I got a call about midnight from the State Department saying that Pat Robertson's organization had telephoned the State Department to say that a group of

American evangelical proselytizers was being “held hostage” in Kano and they were worried about their safety.

I was going up to Kano in any case the next day because our defense attaché plane was coming in from the far northeast carrying our DCM. I had already been scheduled to go up and meet him and bring him down to Kaduna for continued travel. I said to these people in the State Department, “I am going up there and I will go out to the airport and see what is going on.”

I went to Kano and my driver talked to some people on the edge of town and they said, “Don’t go through this way”, the most direct way to get to the airport “because there is still a lot of trouble and unrest.” So we went all the way around the city and got to the airport. As I was walking into the airport building toward the office of the airport commandant (it was a joint air force-civilian airport so the commandant was an air force officer), there were all these people in big easy chairs along the hallway. I asked, “Are you American citizens?” They all said, “Yes.” I said, “What’s going on?” They said, “Well, we were brought here from our hotel because things were really getting pretty hot downtown and, as we speak, the commandant is arranging for us to get on flights down to Lagos so we can leave.” Bonke had already been boarded on a flight to get him out of the center of trouble.

I got into the commandant’s office. Here I am on my consular horse protecting my American citizens, and I said, “Hello, I’m Helen Weinland. What’s going on?” The whole situation was already totally resolved. He had gotten all these people onto early flights down to Lagos. They were waiting for the flights to load up and take off. They had been given comfortable accommodation in all these great big plush chairs, not the most comfortable things, but they were not sleeping on bare cement floor. The leader of the group was effusive in his thanks to me for having come to “rescue” them. He wrote me a lovely letter when they got home saying I had been so helpful, so I was not loathe to take the credit for having solved this problem.

*Q: Were we sort of monitoring Islam up in that area?*

WEINLAND: Definitely.

*Q: How does one monitor Islam? How did you monitor it?*

WEINLAND: That’s a difficult question. Well, you would just talk to people and say, “What’s going on in this part of the country? What kinds of things are being preached at Friday mosque?” And you would just watch the crowds going to Friday mosque, who seemed to be very peaceable. When one of these kinds of events erupted, I would go to various people who were friendly to us and just say, “What happened? Why is this going on?” and “Who is behind this kind of thing?” One of the things you would say is, “Are people being trained in the Sudan and Iran? Are there influences from those places coming in?”

As far as we could tell at that time, some people were going to Sudan or other places, perhaps Libya, for education. Some of the imams and mullahs were trained in those places but most of the Muslims I knew were leaders, the elites, not the hoi polloi, and they were either quite relaxed in their practices or were devout but not in any politically radical way. It was just built into their

way of life and was a natural thing. We would report on that so far as we could.

*Q: Were there Islamic madrassas that the Saudis had been promoting around or not?*

WEINLAND: There was certainly Saudi money supporting Islamic activities in Nigeria. I believe the major mosque in the new capital, Abuja, was built with a lot of Saudi money. But so far as any centers of radical preaching or education were concerned, I don't think at that time that was a major influence. But the followers of the Maitatsine, so far as they continued to have a presence in Nigeria, had the potential to make trouble; I think the Nigerian police kept a fairly close eye on them.

*Q: Could you call on the various imams, pay calls and talk to them?*

WEINLAND: Not too easily. I did call on one of the major ones in Kaduna. I was trying to meet leaders of most of denominations so I met the Catholic archbishop there and in Jos and some other places. I met the Anglican. We had a political/protocol FSN who was himself Muslim, and I asked him to set up a meeting for me with one of the leading imams in Kaduna which he did. We had a quite cordial chat sitting on a mat in a courtyard outside an office building. You can't come right out and say, "Well, hey, are you planning any trouble? What are your sermons all about?" He did not refuse to see me. Somebody of that kind would not for example, shake my hand. You know they were traditional in that sense. I was always very careful in Kaduna and in the north to be quite modestly dressed with my hemline was well down my calves and my shoulders and upper arms were always covered.

*Q: Where were our other consular posts in Nigeria?*

WEINLAND: We were the only one by then. At the time of independence there had been one in each of the three regions so there had been one in Ibadan and one in Enugu. The one in Enugu was closed at the time of the Biafra War and never reopened. The one in Ibadan closed about a year after my familiarization trip in '78, because a new highway put it very close to Lagos in driving time.

*Q: That was the Yoruba one, wasn't it?*

WEINLAND: It would be more accurate to say it was the one in the Western Region.

*Q: Did you find yourself sort of the Hausa representative at the country team meeting or not or did that play any role?*

WEINLAND: Well, I hesitate to confess this on tape but I don't think I went to the embassy more than two or three times. I never went down purely for country team meetings. I went to them if they were being held while I was there. It was a ten-hour plus drive and it was maybe an hour or hour and a half by air. The airlines had been denationalized and they were scary as hell, I have to say. I was not all that eager to entrust my being to either the roads or the air. Fairly often people from the embassy came to me, particularly the first year I was there, as the DCM was a personal friend.

*Q: Who was that?*

WEINLAND: That was George Trail. He had been the consul in Kaduna so he had a lot of friends still in town. He and his wife often came up and stayed with me so we would chat at that point about anything that was going on. Obviously, George also had a good feel for what was going on in the north, so the country team hardly needed me to interpret the northern events. After George left post, and other changes in personnel occurred, I would say the embassy lacked people who understood how different things were in the north. I kept pleading with a couple of key people to come to the north for a genuine familiarization visit, but they never did. Our reporting was occasionally at odds because of that; I certainly had a better understanding for the southern areas, thanks to my posting in Lagos, than they had about the north.

When George Trail was replaced, he was replaced by a person I would rather not name but whom I regarded as not a person who really had his fingers on the pulse. He was an admin officer by background, and therefore trusted his political officer, who was also not a particularly savvy guy in my book. I would get these messages saying, "You should really come down," and I would say, "Yes, when I have time" or whatever and I didn't go. We kept saying to the political officer, "you should come up here and see this for yourself" because his major and nearly only contact was his Ibo girlfriend and her family and friends. By the time I left, in my view, a great deal of the reporting from the embassy was not very accurate about what was going on. I'm sure some of that opinion is colored by the traditional embassy-consulate rivalry, but it was more serious than it should have been.

There was a huge political blowup in the middle of the time I was there. The Yoruba became extremely angry, so there was a lot of unrest in the south in the Yoruba area.

Nothing was going on in the north, and yet the embassy imposed on the entire country a regime of voluntary departure and drawdown of embassy staff. We said, "Ain't no problem up here. We can just truck along. Why do we have to send all the spouses and children out?" But we did not win that battle.

*Q: So what was happening down there?*

WEINLAND: You mean the political stuff?

*Q: Yes.*

WEINLAND: We had the gubernatorial elections, and the next step was the national elections. They first elected the national assembly and that went off without much problem. That would have been in the winter of 1991 to '92.

Then the next thing was the presidential election. There were the two parties. The system for nominating, again this lovely chain of command, army-dominated kind of system, was to have meetings at the local government authority level that would send a certain number of representatives to the state level and on up. Being as intelligent as Nigerians are, a number of



potential candidates began to realize that if they spread enough money around in the initial stages, they could manipulate who rose to the top. So not only were candidates trying to put themselves at the top of the ballot, but there was also a certain amount of manipulation to get a weaker candidate nominated on the other side. It was, I would say, a fifty percent corrupt process that took place as the nominating conventions moved through this whole process.

The election was scheduled for mid-June by which time we had two candidates. We had a man named M.K.O. Abiola who was Moslem Yoruba from the south, a big wealthy businessman, running from the left-of-center party and then we had Bashir Tofa from the north, a wealthy Moslem Hausa, running from the right-of-center party. Nobody had ever even heard of him, certainly not in the political context. I mean all the other potential candidates had been knocked out in the manipulation at the lower level.

But Babangida, who was still president, was a past master at manipulation and being all things to all men. Both candidates actually thought that he supported them. Babangida was a Muslim, and although his name is actually Hausa, he came from the middle belt area. He was not from the far north so he was kind of in between and he was an army man and the army was relatively de-regionalized and de-tribalized.

As we came down the stretch toward the election, one of the Ibo people who felt it was the Ibos' turn to have one of the big national jobs brought a lawsuit to contest the nomination process in which he had lost out. The lawsuit was going through the court system at the very time that the campaigning and everything was going on. There was a decision announced very close to the election, then an appeal that went to the Supreme Court, and the decision by the Supreme Court was announced two or three days before the election. The election was scheduled for Saturday, and I think the decision was on Wednesday or Thursday.

The day after the decision was announced I had a telephone call from the embassy and they said, "We need your clearance on a press statement." It was from the new political counselor -- the deputy chief of mission was still George Trail as I recall. The political counselor and the public affairs officer, who was close to departure and had been in the country quite a while, called and said, "We need to have your clearance on a statement the embassy wants to issue about this Supreme Court decision." The decision was going to throw a major wrench in the election if enforced. The statement read something like, "The U.S. government finds it" and then some word like unacceptable or completely unfortunate, you know a very strong reaction to this whole thing. I listened to it and I thought, "That's not very good." I asked the two of them, "Has the ambassador seen that?" It would have still been Swing and they answered "Oh, yes." Well, there I am, the consul general, and the ambassador has cleared this thing, and I thought, "Well, who am I to tell the ambassador he shouldn't clear this thing. If that's how he wants to play this, then that's how he is going to play it." So I said, "Well, I think it is strong."

So they issued it and all hell broke loose. The PAO read it to the press. I mean, he called up the press to read it; it wasn't like somebody coming in and saying, "What does the U.S. government think about this?" So it was Friday and we were all, all of us all across the country, supposed to go out to certain places and observe the elections and see what was going on. A big delegation had come in from the European community to do the same. There were a lot of election

observers around. So one of the officers at the consulate was going to go out to Jos and observe there, and the political officer was going to go around Kaduna, and I said, "Well, I will go to Kano," and so I went to Kano. I checked into my hotel and Friday night the phone rang about 10 o'clock at night. It was the embassy, and they say to me, "The American embassy has been forbidden to do any election observance. Don't go to any of the polls and they are declaring persona non grata the PAO." So he was given 48 hours to get out of the country.

I said, "Ah, well, that's interesting". The ambassador indeed had not seen the statement that was issued. I sat in the hotel all day until we were allowed to move around town and then I went over to some friends' house for dinner. The woman who was in Jos went ahead and observed because there wasn't any way to get hold of her.

The election took place on a Saturday. They began to count the votes. About two days later, it was clear that Abiola, the Yoruba guy from the south, was going to win and they stopped the counting and declared the election invalid. It was announced that Babangida would stay in power for the time being and they would figure out what to do. That's when the Yoruba in the south began to demonstrate and riot, because Abiola was Yoruba and was from Abeokuta, which is quite close to Lagos. The Yoruba felt they had been cheated of a chance to have their man in the top job, a particularly bitter pill because they believed something similar had happened before in 1983. So we Americans had to go into voluntary departure, given the threat of violence in the south.

It was a nasty time. There was an interval when Babangida stayed in power. Through the summer he was trying to manipulate the already existing national assembly, which had been elected previous to the presidential election, to vote him an extension of his powers. He said he would leave the army but would remain president of the country and he would stay in power. Some of the stories I got about the amount of money that was sloshing around in the halls of the parliament and in the hotels where they were all living, in Abuja by this time -- I mean there were trunk loads of cash that were passing back and forth.

It didn't work; the assembly voted him down and said that he would have to leave as scheduled.

They put together an interim, caretaker government, headed by a Yoruba businessman named Ernest Shonekan with a largely civilian, technocrat cabinet. That was the government that was in power when the new ambassador came. Bill Swing left shortly after the aborted election.

The new ambassador arrived, maybe in September. He came up to Kaduna not too long after he arrived for familiarization visits and courtesy calls. So we took him around Kaduna to meet as many people as we could find who were willing to meet with us. There was sort of this weird limbo feeling just then. Then we went to Kano. I had arranged a dinner with a number of commercial and industrial leaders from Kano in a Chinese restaurant there; there were maybe eight or ten of us at dinner. We came out of the restaurant and got in the car. I was sitting in the shotgun seat because the ambassador and I can't remember who had come up from Lagos with him were in the back. I had a driver, Adamu, who was one of the most even-tempered, lovely men you can imagine. We were stopped by a soldier on the street and Adamu seemed to be very agitated. I said to him, "What's wrong? What's going on?" He said, "I just heard on the radio

that Abacha,” who was the chief of staff of the defense forces “has created a coup and so we no longer have Mr. Shonekan as the president”. But Abacha who was a most malignant character had taken over. That was the end of civilian government for the time being.

It was interesting when my driver said that. I was sitting in the front. We had had some inkling that this might happen; it wasn’t totally out of the blue. From the back seat I heard, ”Oh, shit.” So that was the first comment of the United States on the events of that evening.

*Q: Had Ambassador Swing, did you ever find out his role or reaction to this statement put out just before the election? It certainly didn’t help matters.*

WEINLAND: Well, he was furious inside the embassy, you know.

*Q: He’d been lied to.*

WEINLAND: Yes. He hadn’t been lied to, just not referred to when the statement was ready or about the process of putting it out.

*Q: You had been lied to.*

WEINLAND: I had been lied to. I told him that. I said I would not have cleared it had I not been told that he had cleared it. He said, “Well, I never saw it in that form.” He’d seen an earlier form, but not that final form that went out.

Yes, he was furious. I don’t know that any heads rolled but I also don’t know what various efficiency reports said later on.

Swing is an incredibly nice man, unlike a couple of other ambassadors I worked under. I worked for guys who were real princes and I worked for guys who were utterly the other way. He was a very decent person and I don’t believe that he is the sort of person who would have taken a personal vendetta against anyone.

*Q: Well, but of course this is professionally . . . This isn’t a vendetta thing. This is extremely bad professional conduct.*

WEINLAND: The PAO went on to London so he certainly didn’t suffer.

*Q: After the coup, how long were you there?*

WEINLAND: That would have been in about October of ’93 and I left in March of ’94. So I had about six more months.

*Q: Had this move to Abuja been in the works?*

WEINLAND: Oh, yes, it was in the works. That was one of the things that was going on the whole time I was there. We were negotiating for property, plans were drawn up for housing in

the embassy, and there was a lot of difficult and occasionally bad decision making. It was just a morass, and then the security people would come and look over whatever we were planning to lease as an embassy building until we could build one and that wasn't right; all that was just a constant drum beat.

*Q: Did you realize you were sort of under the sword?*

WEINLAND: Yes. It was clear that we would close the consulate general in Kaduna when that move happened, since the two towns were quite close. We were under considerable pressure from the Nigerian government to get our embassy up there, and the other embassies were too. And just as we had had in Berlin, I had a whole stable of mostly wonderful FSNs. They were terribly worried that all the people from Lagos were going to grab all the jobs. In fact, as it worked out, a considerable number, I would say a large majority, of FSNs in Lagos were in no hurry whatsoever to move to the north, where from their point of view, there would be dragons. So most of the FSNs in Kaduna who wanted to were able to bid successfully on the new jobs in Abuja. Some of them were put off by the high cost and tight market for housing in Abuja, and others by lack of schooling for their kids and other considerations.

Of course, there was still going to be a considerable consulate general in Lagos which there is until this day. All the visa functions were kept in Lagos until I think, last year. The commercial section stayed in Lagos and stays there till this day so there were still going to be plenty of FSN jobs in Lagos.

*Q: So how did it work for you?*

WEINLAND: I should have had a three year assignment that would have ended in August of '94. We had a Foreign Service inspection that came out, probably in the spring of '93, and they were tasked, as all inspection teams are, with reducing the number of positions. They came to Kaduna. I had a secretary; my greatest failure in the Foreign Service was not being able to find a management style that worked with her. She was often reduced to tears, you could never quite find out why or if there was anything you could do to soothe her. I mean, I am not a shouter so it wasn't that I was shouting. I was just completely baffled by this woman, and I think we baffled each other.

As I understand it, when the inspectors said to her, "Tell us what you do," her answer was, "Pretty much, nothing," which of course, was extremely helpful in protecting that position. We were in a situation where our communicator was leaving post as was the secretary and we had a married couple who were paneled to come in, one as the secretary, one as the communicator. Because of the voluntary departure and everything, their arrival was delayed. Then they abolished the secretarial position and we had to do with a TDY communicator because they couldn't assign anybody.

Every time I was given a chance to contest this decision, I said, "You cannot have a post in a country like this, in a place like this, without having an American secretary" and they said, "Well, you can hire somebody locally from the local population." I said, "There is no local population of American citizens." The missionary wives were not allowed to work at the

embassy. There was one person, the wife of the Peace Corps director; she came for a couple of months. She was absolutely hopeless. She couldn't do anything and she just wanted to sit around and talk all day, which then distracted the political officer or whomever else she was talking to. She went home on leave and didn't come back to work. So I was the person who, when there was a call from the front desk that someone was there to see me, had to go out to bring the person back to my office. The optics of it were pretty bad, and it was also cumbersome. My 20 year anniversary in the Foreign Service was coming due in March. I started thinking of my house in Maine, which I had already bought, and I thought of the garden I wanted to put in, and I simply said, "I think I will retire at the end of March. There really isn't much more to accomplish here except closing the place down and that's really an admin function and not anything that particularly requires me to be here." So I flew out on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, 1994.

**TIBOR PETER NAGY, JR.**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Lagos/Abuja (1993-1995)**

*Ambassador Nagy was born in Hungary and came to the United States as Political Refugee in 1957, settling in the Washington, D.C. area. After graduating from Texas Tech University, he entered the Foreign Service in 1978. During his career he served in Lusaka, Victoria (Seychelles), Addis Ababa, Lomé, Yaoundé and Lagos, as well as in the State Department in Washington.. From 1996 to 1999 he served as US Ambassador to Guinea-Conakry and to Ethiopia from 1999 to 2002. Ambassador Nagy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.*

NAGY: So I really was not comfortable about going on to serve under another -- another president, so Jack Bryant called me and said, "Hey Tibor, would you be interested in going and being deputy chief of mission in Lagos, Nigeria because there is a political appointee going out there." And so I talked to my family, we looked, and I said yes, we'll go to Lagos. And so that was -- that was the next adventure was leaving Cameroon in '93 and going back to Texas for a little bit of home leave and then coming back to West Africa and starting out as DCM Lagos. The messiest -- if I thought Cameroon had been a mess I did not know what I was talking about, because Nigeria in '93 was an even bigger mess.

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NAGY: Yes. And he -- and just fundamentally he was just a tremendously, tremendously nice guy. And you know, and I got to Nigeria -- Bill Swing was still there, and Bill Swing was there. It had been on the eve of the election having been held by Babangida and Babangida then basically not following through and allowing the election victor to take over the presidency, so -- and the American Embassy basically forced through pressure Babangida to leave power and Babangida handed over the presidency to a -- to a nonentity. And the embassy also kicked -- I mean the Nigerian Government kicked two people out of the country. They were holding up visas. It took me forever to get a visa and the Black Caucus was urging the White House to not send Walter out as a protest against the Nigerian Government. We had authorized departure so a

great deal of the embassy, especially of the dependents, family members were in the States. It was a heck of a time to be walking into an embassy.

*Q: Well, of course Nigeria being this -- one of the largest -- it is the -- about the largest country in Africa or?*

NAGY: 140 million people, yep.

*Q: Yeah. So did you go as sort of -- were you almost an instant chargé or?*

NAGY: Well, I went there -- I went there initially I became Bill Swing's deputy and Bill Swing was on his way to Haiti, but there was a certain amount of uncertainty as to whether or not he should leave because whether or not they were going to let Walter come out. But they decided that yeah, he needed to go ahead and go, so he left and I was there as chargé for quite a long period of time during the most turbulent and problematic period because of the Congressional Black Caucus was telling Walter not to come out, so I had no idea if I'd be getting an ambassador or not. The political tension was off the scale. Lagos was ungovernable at the best of times, but it had become totally violent because the hoodlums were using the political uncertainty to rob and rape and pillage. And you know, we -- we were not sure of how in the heck to deal with this government, which was not a government. So eventually they let Walter come out, but it was a -- it was a horrendous situation. And we had a very large embassy at Lagos and we were in the process of moving our embassy to the new city of Abuja. So we also had an operation in Abuja, we had a very small operation in the northern city of Kaduna, and we had basically a public affairs -- American public affairs office in Ibadan.

*Q: Well, how did we view the, the government of Nigeria or what passed for the government?*

NAGY: Well, we didn't. We -- we tried to have as little contact as possible because we considered them illegitimate and of course then they proceeded to become even more illegitimate when the -- the caretaker was overthrown by a military triumvate and the rightful winner of the election, Chief Abiola was running around telling everybody that his, you know, mandate had been stolen from him. And he was causing rioting, demonstrations, violence, economic boycotts. And of course then you have Nigeria the eternal mess: no electricity, no water, high degree of crime, no infrastructure, corruption, kleptocracy. I mean it was a perfect storm of hell on earth.

*Q: Did the army play a role?*

NAGY: The army played a big role because the army -- Walter arrived a couple of weeks later while he's on an upcountry trip. The chief of the armed forces telephoned the acting president and tells him to vacate the presidential offices in Abuja because they were coming up to take over. So there was a coup by telephone.

*Q: Other than the takeover of the government, did the army play any -- did it sort of settle things down?*

NAGY: Well, yes and no. No because there was an instant uproar when they took over and there

was a lot of, of isolated incidents of violence. But they finally did put the lid on. But for us, I mean we were now dealing with a doubly illegitimate government. It was -- Walter was seen as a -- even more so than Frances in Cameroon, Walter was seen as the enemy.

*Q: Well, I mean here you are first place you're chargé and then DCM, I mean was there anybody you could deal with?*

NAGY: When things were really important we actually dealt with the head of state, General Abacha. But the -- now we had an even bigger problem than that because Walter was not seen by the State Department as a professional diplomat. Walter was seen as a -- it was -- it was -- it was hugely difficult for Walter because Washington saw him as soft on the Nigerians and the Nigerians saw him as, as this, as this hardcore democrat who was there to lean on them and to try to pressure them to get out of power. So both, both United States and the Nigerian regime saw Walter as an enemy. I mean I would get calls from the State Department saying, you know, you got to get your ambassador to be tougher, you got to get your -- and Walter was doing the absolute -- Walter -- Walter was not doing anything that I would not have done. And Washington was -- had very unrealistic expectations of what the American ambassador could do with his Nigerian regime, and, and the State Department was getting unbelievable pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus to do something about Nigeria. Yet, at the same time, the oil companies were extremely happy with the Nigerian regime. So the oil companies were pressuring their Congress people to take it easy on the Nigerians.

*Q: Did you have any either unofficial contact with the State Department where you can say hey, cut it out fellas, he's doing all he can? Or was anybody listening to you?*

NAGY: Well, I tried. The problem was the office director, Peter Chaveas. He went on to be ambassador in I think Sierra Leone. Peter was the head of the office. Peter had been in Nigeria on an earlier tour and, and the folks in the Clinton White House at the NSC (National Security Council) -- I mean they were just -- they had the -- they had the view toward Nigeria kind of like Susan Rice has today about Sudan. I mean it was -- it was beyond -- it was emotional. It was not -- it was -- it was not just intellectual or, or strategic. In their gut they detested the Nigerian regime of Sani Abacha. So, so, so there was no reasonableness on either side.

*Q: You keep mentioning the Black Caucus. Was there any sort of driving force there? Or sometimes it's a staff member or --*

NAGY: Yeah. There was -- but there was -- but there were also a couple of the congressman, like Congressman Payne. On the other hand, there was William Jefferson from Louisiana who had lots of contributions from the oil company.

*Q: Yeah, which later got him in a lot of trouble.*

NAGY: So there was a real spastic kind of policy. It was not a unified policy towards Nigeria. And then within the staff also in Lagos I had the same flip. I had the Department of Commerce people, you know, who were very happy to deal with the regime or the Foreign Agricultural Service. Then I had the, you know, people on the human rights side. Then of course I had the

Drug Enforcement people had to cooperate with the Nigerian law enforcement, and other various agencies. So it was -- it was an extremely complicated arrangement and there was not -- no unanimity of U.S. policy, U.S. Government policy, and yet Walter managed it I think brilliantly, but he never received the credit that he should have.

*Q: Well, all of us who in the United States have dealt with sort of the over the internet, the confidence men and the basic criminality of the Nigerian in the United States and out, you know, it seems to be almost innate. Did that cause problems for you?*

NAGY: Oh, yeah. I mean with Nigeria, I used to kid with my political counselor, Robert Downey that a week in Nigeria was like a full tour anywhere else. It was just unbelievable the stuff that came up, whether it was 419 (the section of Nigerian law dealing with scams) people, you know, being arrested by the Nigerian security service; U.S. businesspeople showing up and being delivered to the embassy, you know, naked after having been scammed, you know, through these schemes and being left on the side of the road. It was just unbelievable. It was one thing after another. There was -- we were always uncovering visa scams, you know, within the consular section or our security guards selling visa application forms to the crowd. It was just unbelievable.

*Q: Well, I take it you felt that at least for the political stand we were taking that you weren't getting for it with the State Department, that --*

NAGY: The interesting thing was, I got credit for it being the career guy, and I was a runner up for Deputy Chief of Mission for the Year. On the other hand -- and the White House, the NSC and the State Department really appreciated the reporting we did. But they really did not appreciate Walter, you know, which was really an anomaly.

*Q: Well, you know, had Walter brought with him any residue of, I don't know, dislikes or anything like that from his work before or --*

NAGY: No! As a matter of fact, within a couple of weeks Walter had hooked up with a local Nigerian woman, a doctor, and they ended up getting married, and they're still married.

*Q: I mean did --*

NAGY: Again, Walter was quite popular among the Nigerian elite. He had a million friends, you know, among the Nigerian intellectual classes. And you know, Nigeria's one of those African countries where there is a very highly developed indigenous business, cultural, intellectual elite. You know, Nigeria had world-class universities until they ran them into the ground. So I mean as a -- I don't want to be facetious, but it is a real country in any sense of the world, unlike say, Togo, you know, Mali, or Chad.

*Q: I've heard people who went out to the university as a visiting scholar and said it was, you know, it really was very sad because the student -- I mean they're just, they were always on strike or something.*



NAGY: Oh yeah. No. They had phenomenal university structure. They had a wonderful research institute, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture there in Ibadan where they were doing world-class research. But as the corruption, as the political instability went on and to, you know, followed through all these institutions just lost out. But the -- but there is left behind a tremendously educated class of people, very, you know, well to do, and tremendously intellectual. So it was easy for us to engage. And they were the class of people with huge wealth, whether it was through corruption or trading, or oil, or whatever, they were the -- or drugs -- they were there.

*Q: As DCM, you're responsible for the safety. What about the safety of the staff?*

NAGY: Well, we had many security advisory committee meetings.

*Q: Yeah, but anyway.*

NAGY: But anyway, yeah, we had lots and lots of meetings, lots of meetings. And you know, there were many different views within the, within the council and I had to kind of, you know, enforce discipline. But we had crises on every side because there was no electricity, there was no water, the houses were falling apart, the school was always an issue, crime was always an issue. Lagos airport was the only major international airport in the world that was deemed unsafe. You couldn't travel throughout the country properly without facing armed robbers, you couldn't live in your house without facing armed robbers. Personal security was terrible. You couldn't buy stuff. The government hated us. The climate was terrible. Very, very unhealthful conditions all around. I'd never seen an embassy with negative synergy until I got there. You know, morale was consistently awful because you couldn't get people to be posted there and the people we did get posted there were invariably two grades lower than the position required. And yet, it was a very large embassy. It was a huge consular workload. You know, the consular officers were under siege -- I mean everybody in that mission was constantly under siege. And then you add to that the political uncertainties and the -- and the instability and it was just -- it was unending agony.

*Q: Well, were we able to make the U.S. any headway on trying to bring about order and democracy at all?*

NAGY: Not at all. That only happened after I left and Abacha was poisoned by two prostitutes and Abiola suffered a heart attack when in the company of Pickering and Susan Rice.

*Q: Yeah, yeah, I interviewed Tom and talked about, you know, having the chief of state die on you during a visit, trying to get the hell out of there.*

NAGY: Exactly, so. But no, Nigeria's been a holy mess. It will always be a holy mess. It's just unbelievable. It is -- unless someone experiences it, it is -- you cannot adequately articulate the difficulties of, of working and living there.

*Q: Well, how long were you there?*

NAGY: Two years.

*Q: I mean did you feel that --*

NAGY: Walter wanted me to stay for a third, but my -- the school was no longer -- you know my kids finished 10th grade there and there was no 11th or 12th grade at the school. So we went on - - we went on back to Washington to take the senior seminar.

*Q: Did you see any light at the end of the tunnel while you were there?*

NAGY: None whatsoever.

*Q: What does this do to you? You know, we're an optimistic group. Americans and Foreign Service officers like to be with winners and --*

NAGY: You go with small victories and small achievements. I mean we were in the process of transferring our embassy from Lagos to Abuja so you get the best housing you can in Abuja and you look for a great office building and you make your people, you know, as comfortable as possible, you give them the kind of support, you try to get them professional, you know, professional recognition, you get them good onward assignments, given them awards, you get them promoted, and you try to make sure that they get out of there as whole as possible.

*Q: Well, how did you work getting out of there if the airport's not safe?*

NAGY: Well, some people insisted on flying into Cotonou (Benin) and driving from there, so you know, otherwise you take a chance. And as a matter of fact, we did lose a plane -- regularly Nigerian planes went down. And one that went into the lagoon I think we lost the husband of our commissary manager.

*Q: Ooh.*

NAGY: I mean I had a member of Congress come out there, J.C. Watts, a Republican from Oklahoma, and we were driving in from the airport and there had been -- there was a dead body on the road, which had been there for a number of days that the cars obviously had, you know, just all driven over, so totally smushed. And J.C. could not believe it. And he said, "How do you people manage to live in a place like this?"

And I said, "Congressman, that is how we live in Nigeria. That's just how it is." And he was absolutely shocked.

**CLAUDIA ANYASO**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Abuja (1993-1997)**

*Ms. Anyaso was born and raised in North Carolina and was educated at Morgan State University and American University. She joined the State Department in 1968, where she specialized in Education and Cultural Affairs, with particular regard to African countries. She had several tours in Washington as well as abroad. Her foreign assignments include Lagos, Abuja, Port-au-Prince and Niamey, where she served primarily as Cultural and Public Affairs Officer. Ms. Anyaso was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*

ANYASO: I went back to Washington. You know how the Foreign Service deals with us they don't want us to stay out too long without coming back to headquarters because of well culture shock and cultural adaptation issues. So I went back to Washington and I worked in the Africa office. We were still USIA at the time so I worked in the Africa office. I was the desk officer for wait a minute, oh dear, you know when you get older you forget things...

When I left Niger I did not go back to Washington. When I left Niger I went back to Nigeria because my husband and I had this arrangement there I would choose a post and then he would have an opportunity. Well his turn came and I went back to Nigeria and from 1993-1997 I was in Abuja, which was the new capital, a pretty tough assignment. It was the time of a very brutal Nigerian dictator, Sani Abacha so I was starting up the USIS office in Abuja during this awful time when many of my contacts were being harassed, were being followed by the State security people and were being arrested so this was not a very happy time for Nigerians or for people who were serving in the country. Although I must say people kept their sense of humor, life went on, I had good relations with the educators and the media and we still continued programs.

The one restriction I had because we did not want to be too close to this particular regime so even though I set up the office in Abuja my supervisor who was Tom Hull who was down in Lagos said, "You will have nothing to do with the regime, you will concentrate on the Eastern part of the country." So I spent a lot of my time driving from Abuja to what used to be the old Ibo Biafra part of the country. So I went to Warri, I went to Enugu; I went to Port Harcourt and places like that trying to establish our relations. So that was what was going on with me in that particular time period. I believe at this point Walter Carrington was our ambassador in Nigeria and he had a very tough road to hoe because there were a lot of human rights violations. There was a very influential opposition group in the country called NADEKO. He aligned himself with NADEKO and, I think, his life was pretty much in jeopardy from the Abacha regime. I set up the office, I got a building, I staffed it up from '93-'97 and then I left in '97.

*Q: You were there...*

ANYASO: Four years.

*Q: In Nigeria?*

ANYASO: In Nigeria in Abuja.

*Q: What was Abuja like? This was a new capital wasn't it?*

ANYASO: Yeah, the infrastructure wasn't there; the housing had been built as a city for very rich people. There was no housing for the middle stratum, the professionals or even the support staff so people were living in hovels. Many people were living in their offices sleeping on their desks. There was one restaurant but there wasn't very much there and so it caused all of us who were there some of the ministry people and the expat community to be very close because we were all experiencing the same thing.

*Q: You were told okay so you're the USIA representative in this capital and you were told not to have any contact with the government. How the hell did you work that?*

ANYASO: Well as I said I spent a lot of time in the east but also I meant there was the University of Abuja. They were private organizations I could work with, women's associations. I could work with, youth organizations. For example, the former president of the country after the civil war was Yakubu Gowon; he had set up a youth center and we could work with them. I should step back, his whole career after the civil war was to bring unity to the country so he had set up the national youth service corp., which was like a domestic Vista that we have here in this country so people could give service. The ringer was that their service would be outside of their home areas. If they were from the East they would have to serve in the West; if they were from the West they would serve in the North, the North would serve in the South; so he started those kinds of things. At the high school level they instituted some federal high schools, which also brought kids from different ethnic groups together. He was very smart, is, he's still living, person and he was absolutely dedicated to doing this. So he started this center to continue his work of reunification.

*Q: How was he able to operate with this new government, which you say was brutal?*

ANYASO: It was brutal and very greedy and very corrupt; I guess that's the beauty of Nigeria in a way. You could have this very brutal dictator and the state security officers everywhere spying on you but they would allow things to go on, life to go on, and so Gowon went on. I do remember inviting our ambassador to Abuja, was it Abuja? No, I was also working in Kaduna; I was everywhere. Kaduna was one of the larger; it used to be the old capital of northern Nigeria so we were having an American studies conference. The government didn't like that and so even though we had organized this conference in Kaduna and the ambassador had come up all of a sudden we were surrounded by these goons and they stopped the conference ambassador or not. We had participants from Ghana; I think Zimbabwe and some other places. They were saying no we are not going to let them stop us we are going to go on. The Nigerians having lived with this kind of thing and knowing how things worked very quietly got up and left, got their bags and departed. There was always even though life went on they would also bring down their fist from time to time; that wasn't the only program I had cancelled.

I was also working in neutral areas like the environment and we had invited a team from Clark University in Atlanta to come out for this workshop and be our experts at this workshop. Well some of the state security people also visited us and sat in on the workshop; now they didn't cancel it really but they kept a very close eye on what we were doing and I was never so offended in my life as when this state security person came over and asked me for per diem. I said, "You weren't invited and you are not getting any per diem." We did give him lunch but I

wasn't going to pay his expenses to spy on us.

*Q: When you went to see the Ibo area that was at one point called Biafra I mean this had been several decades after the war how did you find things? Were the Ibo fairly well integrated or was there a sort of the Ibo's will rise again feeling or not?*

ANYASO: I think that like most of the Nigerians that I know think that the Ibo were eternally optimistic; they felt that they would come back. Now they had been invited back into the government. These ethnic problems are very interesting to watch; they had saturated the education ministry that was their religion almost and so the Northerners and the Westerners tried to get them out of their positions and that wasn't good but they didn't kick them out entirely. They still worked in the ministry but not in the leadership positions. When I went to the east they felt that they were marginalized over there; they felt that the government was not giving them support. Their infrastructure the roads were bad, there was one trunk line for telecommunications to the East and telephones never worked; so they felt neglected. When I was over there in a place like Enugu, which had been a hub of the East, was pretty quiet. I had taken a professor of business over there for a program and we went around to the university. The University of Nigeria had a professional school in Enugu and then we talked to some of the private business people over there; there was no business. Surveyors weren't having any business it was just awful for them. So when I left Nigeria at that point somebody asked me what did Sani Abacha contribute to the country and I said, "Well he actually contributed to an innovation called the Sani Abacha Stove which were these tin cans one on top of the other and they had sort of put coals in the bottom, they cut out a little door and then you would put things in the top to warm them up usually sawdust because people couldn't afford firewood at that point; it was difficult. When I left Nigeria in '97 and went back to Washington to be a desk officer I think Sani Abacha mysteriously died a month later. The stories around were that he had overdosed on Viagra or something like that but I don't believe many people mourned his passing.

*Q: You came back n '97?*

ANYASO: Yes.

**LEONARD H. ROBINSON, JR**  
**Private Law Practice**  
**Washington, DC (1994-1997)**

*Leonard Robinson was born in 1943 in Winston-Salem, NC and was educated at Ohio State. He served with the Peace Corps in India and worked with ADF in 1990s. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003*

ROBINSON: After Bush lost the election, we all had to leave. I was a political appointee. I joined a law firm. I had a strong intuition in August of 1992 that Bush was going to lose the election. I tried to make some moves to create some options for my future including the option of being a boring wonder and staying at State Department. As I said, after the 1994 election, all

political appointees had to leave their jobs. I was in the senior executive service corps. I had two significant offers, both from law firms. I decided to go with Washington and Christian, because I had known the senior partner of this law firm for 20 some years. I had known his sister as well who along with her husband and my first wife lived in India in the late 1960s when both of us were Peace Corps professionals. Her husband was a Peace Corps director in the state of Andhra Pradesh, and I was the Peace Corps director in southern India. So my relationship with the Washington family had been a long standing one. So I joined his law firm.

*Q: How long were you with the law firm?*

ROBINSON: It turned out that it was not one of my better decisions in terms of professional career. The law firm turned out to be run by a couple of guys who I would characterize as dishonest in a sophisticated way. One of the matters in which I was involved had to do with a narcotics interdiction program in Nigeria. When I was in the State Department, during the Bush I administration, I had a number of portfolios, such as West Africa, central Africa, democracy, terrorism, the Peace Corps and narcotics. We were very concerned about drug trafficking in Africa during that time, particularly through Nigeria which had become a major distribution point for illicit drugs to Europe and to the United States. In fact, at one point in time, based on a briefing I had with the customs department, I knew that a considerable amount of narcotics came primarily through the John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. I knew for a fact that 63.5% of all of the shipments originating in Africa were from Nigeria. So in 1994, I think it was, the government of Nigeria contacted our law firm and asked them if we would help them devise a narcotics interdiction program that included the vetting of their Nigerian narcotics control force, including everybody involved in law enforcement and border patrols. They wanted to have them vetted. They wanted to have them polygraphed to ascertain whether they were "clean." At the time, Abacha was the Nigerian head of state.

Knowing what was going on with narcotics trafficking in Nigeria prior to Abacha, during the Babangida regime, I thought this was something we needed to do. It was my recommendation that we look at the Nigerian request very seriously. But before we agreed to take on this contract, I went out to a number of agencies to meet with former colleagues of mine including the intelligence officer for Africa at the CIA and asked him and others whether the Abacha regime had made any attempt to clamp down on what senior officials including ministers in the Babangida regime had doing with drug trafficking. I was told that the U.S. government was aware of the fact that the Nigerians had come to us asking to help them with their drug interdiction program. They said, "We encourage you to do this because there is a window of opportunity here. We see Abacha trying to clamp down on drug trafficking; so there is a window of opportunity here to strengthen the program." My law firm did enter into an agreement with the government of Nigeria which included writing legislation, drafting and adopting policies to tighten the interdiction laws on drug trafficking and to be sure there was no corruption within the ranks of the enforcement agencies. We helped to set up a polygraphing and vetting system for all of their enforcement personnel. In fact, once all these actions had taken place, we even wrote the speech that Abacha gave on national television one night announcing the new drug laws and the new interdiction procedures and policies.

The law firm had serious cash flow problems. In 1997 I decided to leave that firm to start my

own international consulting firm called LHR International Group Inc. I also accepted a position on the faculty of the University of Massachusetts in Boston. I was hired by the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs at U. Mass as a visiting fellow and as a professor of African studies and U.S. foreign policy. That is what happened between roughly late 1993 to early to January 1997.

*Q: How did this new venture work out?*

ROBINSON: I really thought that I could sell my considerable experience, using my vast contacts in Africa. I was the honorary consul for the island nation of Sao Tome and Principe. I had been a deputy assistant secretary of state twice as well as the president of the African Development Foundation. I naively assumed I could translate that background into a fairly viable international consulting business specializing in advice and counsel and analysis on foreign policy issues as they applied to various countries particularly Africa and in Southeast Asia -- since I started my international career in India. I knew a lot about India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc. But when you are trying to develop a business and you have been out of the orbit of the region that you want to do business with for a substantial period of time, it was a different sort of environment than the one to which I had been accustomed. So it was difficult. I did get some contracts in Zimbabwe and Sao Tome and Principe and Togo and some other countries. But it was difficult. It was okay because I was also teaching at the University of Massachusetts in Boston which gave me a great deal of professional satisfaction. Both my parents were college professors so I knew I could teach. It was in my blood. The only problem was flying back and forth between Boston and Washington; it got to be very monotonous. But that inconvenience was offset by the fact that I was teaching.

**LAWRENCE COHEN**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Lagos (2000-2002)**

*Mr. Cohen was born and raised in Pennsylvania and was educated at Dickinson College, and the Universities of Pennsylvania, Tel Aviv, Chicago and Northwestern. Entering the Foreign Service in 1980, he served variously as Economic, Political and Political/Military Officer at posts in Mexico, Honduras, India, Hungary, Nigeria and Brazil. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington Mr. Cohen dealt with Foreign Assistance and Environmental and Scientific matters. His last post was in Afghanistan, where he had two assignments with Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Mr. Cohen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.*

*Q: Did you feel that anybody in Economic Bureau was making the scientific calculation?*

COHEN: Even though science and technology often is performed within or under the econ section at post, it is generally treated as an embassy step child or orphan. A science officer at post performs a distinctly different role than economic officers. I am not sure this is well

recognized by some State Department leadership. Unfortunately, many economic officers view science and technology as beneath the attention of the econ office. Science and technology issues would be better served if S&T officers continued doing science work over a number of tours. With the mid-1990s demise of the science cone, this is no longer feasible. In my view, science expertise is not being well developed in the Foreign Service.

If the State Department wants a cadre of officers skilled in environment, science, and technology issues, it should encourage a focus on science and allow promotion opportunities not reliant on economic experience. Without a science cone, the incentive for most economic cone officers to do science work is weak. When up for promotion, economic-coned science officers do not easily compete on a level playing field with officers coming out of economic jobs. Today, science officers can be disadvantaged by being thrown into competition for promotion with economic officers.

Just prior to the end of this assignment, I remarried in June 2000. My wife and I knew we would be going overseas. It was unclear where we would go. I wound up becoming economic counselor in Nigeria. When I mentioned this assignment to my fiancé, it appeared she would divorce me before we even got married!

*Q: Could you give a quick background on your wife?*

COHEN: I met Marla in early 1997. At the time she worked in the civil service doing Pakistan/Afghanistan economic issues. We each had two children almost exactly the same ages. The two girls, Rebecca and Abigail, were just two month apart in age. The boys, Andrew and David, were sixteen months apart.

The assignment to Nigeria was daunting. It required me to jump into a new and different region, into Africa, although Marla has been a Peace Corps volunteer in Botswana in the 1980s. We married on June 11, 2000 and left for Africa in early September. The economic counselor was based in the embassy. However, one week after we arrived in Lagos, the embassy was formally transferred to Abuja where, for some time, the smaller portion of the U.S. mission had been located. The larger part of the mission including all the administrative support services and a number of the key positions remained in Lagos. Lagos is Nigeria's commercial capital. My new job quickly developed a split personality.

There are many Foreign Service Officers who during their careers have traipsed through Lagos. Quite a few served their time as economic officers. Lagos would turn out to be one of my best jobs in the worst surroundings.

*Q: You were there from 2000 until when?*

COHEN: We served there from September 2000 to June 2002. One may say that until you have been to Africa, you have not had a real Foreign Service experience. And unless you have been to Nigeria, you really have not had your African experience. And until you have been to Lagos, you have not quite been to Nigeria. Ultimately, Lagos is one of those posts that really can affect those who served there.



*Q: Tell me why.*

COHEN: When we think “Foreign Service,” Africa frequently comes to mind. Its Third World developing country cultures are so different from our own. Nigeria is the engine for West Africa and a very important country for us, for its petroleum production. Its culture and business sector – and its criminal elements -- dominate much of Africa. One quarter of Africa’s population reside in Nigeria. The country displays many of the schisms seen elsewhere. It is divided by religion, Christians and Muslims; by regional and ethnic identity, North-South and East-West divisions. Large ethnic groups, the Ibo, the Hausa and the Yoruba dominate smaller tribal cultures. Its people speak multiple languages. Nigeria is very much a divided/ united country. Lagos is in some ways very cosmopolitan and very influential. In other ways, it is the personification of the “heart of darkness.”

Nigerians are extremely bright, outgoing, cultured and socially enjoyable. They can also be conniving, even Machiavellian. Some of the world’s premiere criminal gangs are Nigerian. Nigerians essentially invented Internet fraud. In Nigeria it is called 4-1-9. This refers to the statute in the country’s legal code which relates to the crime of advanced fee fraud. That is what the Internet fraud is all about. The typical solicitation reaches out to the unsuspecting target. It offers the possibility of fantastic riches, millions of dollars, in exchange for the assistance of the victim who hands over his bank account information.

From the day we landed until we departed post two years later, my wife and I locked up credit cards and other valuables in our office safes. We assumed any kind of electronic transaction in the country would be swiped. Without doubt Nigeria is a very dangerous place, although the security posture was not as high as say contemporary Afghanistan or Iraq. Mobility is extremely limited in Lagos; expatriates are restricted to two relatively small islands, Ikoyi and Victoria Island. Travel to the airport required an armored vehicle with armed escort. The trip to Murtala Mohammad International Airport was like a race in a Mad Max movie.

*Q: Was this because of thievery or terrorism?*

COHEN: Terrorism, no. Criminal behavior: carjackings, theft, mayhem, certainly. Nigeria at that time was not a terrorism-ridden place. This was out-and-out crime conducted with no ideological bent. The trip between the Ikoyi/Victoria Island and the airport on the north side of mainland Lagos was nerve-racking and revealing. I suspect driving techniques so prevalent now in Iraq and Afghanistan were perfected in places like Lagos.

Pardon the cliché, Lagos is a teeming city, Africa’s largest, densely populated with incredible, unspeakable poverty. It has suffered from decades of notorious corruption. When we arrived in 2000, the country had only recently emerged from a long dark dictatorship. The last dictator, Sani Abacha, died in June 1998. Semi-democratic elections -- I will not say democratic but pseudo-democratic – were held in May 1999. A former army general and military ruler during the 1970s, Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba, was overwhelmingly elected president. I use the word democracy with small letters.

With Obasanjo's rise as a democratically-elected president, hopes for Nigeria were high in Washington. For over a quarter century, the USG possessed a very jaundiced view of Nigeria. The U.S.-Nigerian relationship had been particularly rocky during the tenure of Sani Abacha (1993-1998.) Now, times had changed. The USAID program was beefed up. I believe it reached an annual level of \$100 million during our tenure there. President Clinton visited Nigeria a week or two before we arrived. His visit was warmly received by the Nigerian people.

*Q: You spoke about having to be surrounded by armed guards.*

COHEN: Marla and I were married in June. In September, we transferred to Nigeria – not a place you would take anyone for a honeymoon! In fact, quite the opposite! From our perspective, the redeeming feature about Lagos was the American International School (AIS) which had a very positive reputation. Accredited classes at the school went through eighth grade. Our eldest at the time was in eighth grade. Our first year, we placed three children in the school. We were satisfied with the caliber of the education and the extracurricular activities. AIS provided a cocoon-like atmosphere for the kids. Frankly, if the international school is good, you can put up with a lot of crap on the outside. Many posts may seem like a nice place to live, but if the school is inferior, morale suffers. I would take the superior school and the inferior lifestyle, rather than vice versa.

The American International School of Lagos (AIS) was outstanding, in large measure because of the support of the foreign oil companies. Nigeria is Sub-Saharan Africa's leading oil producer and a very important supplier for the United States. International oil companies in Nigeria included Exxon and Mobil -- soon to be merged -- Chevron, Texaco, and, of course, Shell. The oil companies contributed generously to the school. Many teachers generally came from a particular school district in the Pacific Northwest. They possessed a high esprit de corps, important in an international school.

Outside of AIS and home, there was not much of a life for the children. Everything revolved around AIS. For parents, Lagos was a different matter. We had to deal with the city. Lagos is notorious for its awful traffic. I have been to Rome, Cairo, Mexico City, and I have seen bad traffic. But I challenge any place on the planet, except for perhaps Bangkok, to compare with a Lagos "go slow." A car could sit in the same spot for hours. The infrastructure had not improved in a quarter of a century.

*Q: Despite the tremendous amount of oil revenue.*

COHEN: Despite the billions that had been delivered to the government.

You know the adage about for want of a nail a shoe was lost, etc. In Lagos, I noticed one pothole, on the Victoria Island (VI) side, at the entryway ramp to the bridge between Ikoyi and Victoria Islands. It was a noteworthy pothole, maybe the size of a desk, and a foot deep. Cars slowed to a crawl to navigate it. That one pothole tied up traffic on the entire island. On VI, a small island with limited pavement, traffic patterns depended on that bridge. It caused a ripple effect. Because every car had to crawl through this one pothole, traffic elsewhere on the island came to a halt.

I described Nigeria as a land of extremely low hanging fruit. In AID parlance that means a small investment in the right things can have a large out-sized return. In Lagos and in Nigeria generally, proper infrastructure investment of minimal cost provided an almost infinite return on the investment. Think about the pothole. What kind of investment does it take to properly fill a pothole? And yet, fixing the pothole sped up commerce throughout Victoria Island. Most of the city's important companies and banks had their headquarters on VI. All the consulates and embassies were located there. For a minimal effort there was a big return. On the other hand, if infrastructure investment was performed poorly, good money was just thrown after bad. Corruption and ineptitude were so endemic. Things just did not get done.

I will give another example. When we arrived in Nigeria, I really did not understand how people existed in this culture. It just struck me as almost impossible for a typical Nigerian to live or get ahead. In the summer 2001, our section had a summer intern. I asked the intern to work with the economic section's FSN, Uzo Okafor, to conduct a field study. We came up with study parameters and questionnaires. The intern and the FSN went to various markets in Lagos to ask basic socio-economic questions of the local people. "How much do you earn, how much do you spend and on what, where do you live?" They were general questions.

We received questionnaires from surveys conducted at eight different markets throughout the city. Then we crunched the numbers. The results were most revealing. Many people -- not a small percentage -- claimed they spent more than they earned. Across the board, Lagos citizens affirmed they spent more than their income. Nigeria is not a country where consumers can run up credit card debt. So how did people live in this environment?

One consistent expense cited, which perhaps should not have been a surprise, was protection payoffs at the neighborhood level. Loan sharking was another high cost item.

We collected this data. The intern cared little about finishing the project and departed without investing any more effort in it. I took the myriad of information and compiled a report. The effort took at least a month. As you know, in the State Department, cables that are too long tend not to be read. A six-eight paragraph effort is about the right length in order to catch people's attention in the State Department. Well, I whittled this cable down to 42 paragraphs! It was a major think piece. I suspect no one else, neither the Consul General nor the DCM, was really excited about sending it out. But all the hard work had been done. For some reason, the Ambassador thought the intern wrote the damn thing. Finally, the cable was sent.

I doubt even the Nigeria desk cared much about it. Perhaps some analyst buried in the bureaucracy read it in its entirety. However, I received a kudos cable nonetheless. It came from Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. He said he "read it with great interest" and praised it for being "thoughtful and thought-provoking." He also commented that we provided a summer intern with a meaningful and useful project. It just goes to show that occasionally a lot of effort into a think piece cable does pay.

*Q: It sounds like there was no functioning government.*

COHEN: No, there was not. The federal government had moved to Abuja. Not surprisingly, Abuja became the center of attention and infrastructure construction. Lagos had infrastructure constructed 30, 40 years previously. That infrastructure was collapsing and there was no money going back in.

Second, the government did not provide services such as water, electricity, and sewage. If you wanted electricity, you got a generator. If you wanted water you had a well drilled or water delivered by tanker truck. As diplomats, we were fortunate. The Consulate provided a power generator and we received water and sewer service from trucks. Scores of Nigerian personnel supported us. The General Services office, the GSO, maintained and refueled the generators, managed the trucks and water tankers, and did everything else. There must have been thirty or more Nigerians behind each Foreign Service Officer just to maintain a certain standard of living.

*Q: As an economic counselor you are supposed to send in economic reports. I assume that the economic statistics were a will o' the wisp or something.*

COHEN: I had one serious challenge. I was based in Lagos; the embassy was located in Abuja with most Nigerian government offices. All the ministries were in Abuja, including the Central Bank. There were branch offices in Lagos, but the action was up north. Since most of the traditional government-to-government economic work was in Abuja, the two person economic section in Abuja covered much of that. Lagos was the country's commercial center and banking hub, not only of Nigeria but of West Africa. We collaborated with the Nigerian Stock Exchange, conferred with leaders of Nigeria's commercial sector, its banks, academics, think tanks such as the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), and the oil sector. Our primary national interest with Nigeria concerns oil. Lagos and Abuja were really two completely different missions.

*Q: Were all revenues going to Switzerland?*

COHEN: During the Abacha dictatorship, any money that flowed into Nigeria was quickly rotated out, including into Swiss bank accounts. With the arrival of "democracy" it was hoped that the country's income would be employed better. Under a democratic system, many believed the worst aspects of this massive corruption could be weeded out. Prior to assuming office, President Obasanjo had been a senior member of Transparency International. Some resources, although not much, were being properly spent. That pothole I mentioned was filled. There were many other potholes that required attention. Gradually, some infrastructure needs were being addressed.

However, when a bit of oil revenue entered the system, all of the key players from around the country, especially the governors of the thirty-six or so states, demanded their share. Revenue was divided between the central government and the states. I was never quite up-to-date how many states Nigeria has. The number kept increasing. I think there were 36. Each state had a governor, a bureaucracy, patronage, etc. All the politicians had their own scams and priorities. Substantial tension existed between the central government and the states over how to divide up the oil revenue.

I will add another ingredient to the complexity. Oil comes primarily from one region of the

country, the coastal area of the Niger Delta in southern Nigeria. It is a region of intense poverty among ethnically diverse peoples amidst the oil wells and pipelines. Gas flaring lit the night sky. The local inhabitants felt entitled, deservedly, to a portion of this revenue being taken from their home region. They were embittered. Many conducted sabotage against the oil infrastructure. They figured why waste time negotiating with the government, a hopeless case. Instead, they made life miserable for the oil companies, an easier target. Oil workers suffered intimidation and kidnapping. Many were held hostage. Oil flows were disrupted. Locals tapped into pipelines, stole the crude oil and floated it out to barges. This was called 'bunkering.' From barges, the crude was transported to larger ships off-shore.

For the major oil companies with operations in Nigeria such as Shell, Chevron, Mobil (later-Exxon-Mobil), and Texaco, the country was an important source for crude, despite the difficulties. From West Africa, oil tanker reached the U.S. market more quickly and at less cost than from the Middle East. Nigerian oil came from the country's coastal region or from offshore platforms. A company with most or all of its production offshore avoided many, although not all, of the hassles simply because of the distance from land. The farther offshore the platform, the safer it was from attack by kidnappers who sought ransom from the companies. In a sense, the rougher the water, the safer the platform.

Nigeria produced over two million barrels of oil a day. Over the course of a year, that translates into a lot of revenue and profits, particularly when global oil prices are high. The oil companies are accustomed to operating in difficult political and security environments. Nigeria is not unique. However, the *degree* of difficulty gave the companies plenty of heartburn. In very few places, perhaps Aceh in Indonesia, did oil workers run such security risks. Where else did the locals tap into pipelines to extract the crude? Someone lights a match and 700 people get incinerated.

The consulate and the embassy engaged constantly with the oil companies and other oil sector authorities. We reported to Washington on the overall health of the oil sector. Nathan Flook, the junior officer in our section focused on energy issues. He and I traveled to the Niger Delta region and the offshore oil platforms.

I visited an oil flow pumping station operated by Chevron in the middle of the Niger Delta – in the middle of nowhere! An American supervised many Nigerians. He was on station for 28 days, then had four weeks off to travel back to the U.S. Twenty-eight days on, 28 days off. He was the lone ex-pat. His life hung by a thread every day! If his workers were pissed at him, or upset with anything, they could kill him. The workers came from local "minority" ethnic groups: Itsekiris, Urhobos, Ijaws, Ibibios, Ogonis, Kalabaris, Efiks, Ikwerres, and Ilajes. There were never-ending rivalries and demands for corporate concessions. Strikes occurred for no logical reason. These pumping stations were essential to moving crude from the wells to the coast. In one report I described his job at the flow station as the world's most dangerous job! I cannot think of anything more dangerous than running a pump station in the middle of the Niger Delta.

*Q: Were we seeing at the time any movement to nationalize the oil?*

COHEN: Oil in Nigeria is already nationalized. It is owned by the government. The Nigerian

National Petroleum Company (NNPC), created in 1977, managed the government's interest in the petroleum sector. The NNPC was not capable of sustaining crude oil production. If the Nigerian Government was incapable of preventing a highway from collapsing, how can it maintain and expand complicated oil sector infrastructure? NNPC took the rent, the crude oil royalties off the top. Even the most corrupt or jaded government officials comprehended that kicking out the multinational oil companies would kill the golden goose.

*Q: Well, as you noted before, Nigerians are among some of the smartest people on earth. But I take it they were not training to be petroleum engineers.*

COHEN: Some Nigerians held high positions within the multinational oil companies. The government insisted Nigerian citizens be placed in the upper corporate structure. However, for the most part their power and responsibilities were limited. Would corporate headquarters in Houston or London place much confidence with Nigerians in sensitive positions in Lagos? Doubtful. While Nigerians were employed throughout the companies, particularly at the staff level, and Nigerian engineers were common, at the highest managerial levels most Nigerians were figureheads. Among senior management, the politics became very thick. Would someone's brother-in-law, perhaps a complete incompetent, be placed in a position where he might damage operations or corporate reputation? Companies sought to marginalize incompetency. On display in the oil sector in Lagos were the tensions between company management and government. Perhaps the Nigerian leadership realized that it was best for ex-pats to run the companies. The divisions within Nigerian society, if allowed to seep further into the companies, could paralyze management and accentuate national tensions already existent.

*Q: You speak about divisions in Nigerian society. The Hausa who are Islamic are in the north and the Ibos and Yorubas are in the south. How did this play out in the economy?*

COHEN: I was more familiar with Ibos and Yoruba than with Hausa. I refer again to Cohen's first law. Embassies and consulates reflect the cultures in which they are located. What is the culture of Lagos? It is primarily, although not exclusively, Yoruba with some Ibo and a bit less Hausa. The Yoruba core culture is Christian and animist, more intellectual, somewhat commercial. Ibos were very trade and business-oriented. They seemed to dominate Nigerian commerce. The Hausa had little reputation for entrepreneurship. The embassy and consulate seemed to reflect this schism perfectly.

*Q: At this point Lagos was the consulate?*

COHEN: Lagos became the consulate general in September 2000. Abuja, located in the center of the country, retains more Hausa influence. I sensed the embassy culture seemed more bent towards Hausa, especially since many FSNs were from Hausa-dominated northern Nigeria. Embassies, as you well know, often develop *clientitis*. At the consulate in Lagos, a Yoruba-dominated region, we unconsciously were sympathetic to Yoruba positions vis a vis other groups. Being familiar with many Hausa, one might become sympathetic to or at least aware of Hausa perspectives. Of course, the opposite could occur with close proximity. Pity the Ibo who do not have a consulate in their southeastern Nigeria region. I do not claim. In my experience, officials tend to perceive issues as reflected from the people with whom they deal on a day-to-

day basis.

*Q: Was there much payoff going on?*

COHEN: Absolutely. But in Nigeria there was never enough money to satisfy everybody. That would have been impossible. Under the dictatorship of Sani Abacha, the scope of corruption was beyond imagination. From 1999, under President Obasanjo, corruption had been reined in compared to the Sani Abacha regime. But graft was still enormous and it went very high up in the governmental hierarchy. Transparency International (TI), the international anti-corruption NGO founded in the 1990s, usually rated Nigeria at the very bottom or close to the bottom of its corruption index every year.

We in the west usually perceive corruption as an individual's peccadillo. However, in my experience, most corruption is institutional. It is structural. Accusing a particular person of being corrupt misses the point. The *system* is often corrupt. For one to survive and even thrive, corrupt practices must be employed to some extent. Salaries are inadequate. Rent seeking opportunities are too tempting. Families, clans, and tribes must be provided for. I do not know if President Obasanjo was especially corrupt; in fact, he was one of the founding members of TI. However, his vice president, Atiku Abubakar, suffered from a reputation of corruption. Many Nigerian governors led very lavish lifestyles. Patronage was widespread. To survive and rule in a place like Nigeria, within a very corrupt system, leaders had to manage their environment.

I found Nigerians personally likeable. By African standards, many are articulate, sharp, witty, and sophisticated. I enjoyed most of the people with whom I worked and my contacts in the business and the banking community.

On the other hand, Nigeria possesses a well-deserved reputation for conniving and criminal enterprise. If some of the Nigeria's more criminal mentality could be channeled into productive areas, the country would be one of Africa's shining lights. Given the squalor and the dog-eat-dog behavior, the bitter social divisions, the flagrant corruption, I do not see how this could happen. It really is a sad commentary on the country.

*Q: If you are sitting in Lagos or Abuja and you have a billion dollars in Swiss bank accounts, what does this mean for you? Does this do anything?*

COHEN: I cannot answer that question. When it comes to corruption, I cannot rationalize behavior. Nigeria's corruption should be viewed as systematic, not individual. Decades of dictatorship - when I say dictatorship I acknowledge the country's military rule has been both relatively benign and viciously malignant - have poisoned any sense of civic service that may have existed. Nigeria's last military ruler, Sani Abacha, was the most malignant. He accelerated Nigeria's economic and social freefall. But I assume Abacha suckled at the nipples of his predecessors in order to reach his unique super corrupt reputation. I have no idea why the theft of \$100 million is insufficient to a man like Abacha. Why do these individuals feel they must move out one or even two more digits in their scale of corruption? The cost, of course, to Nigeria's vast population is just enormous. Think of the billions in oil revenue which has disappeared, has been squandered. Look at Nigeria's natural resources, the capability of its people, and one might hope

things could be turned around.

I visited the University of Ibadan. Ibadan, Nigeria's third largest city is about two hours north of Lagos. Founded in 1948, the University of Ibadan was one of Africa's premier universities, if not the best at one time. When I visited the campus, the place was a shambles. Dictators, particularly megalomaniacs like Abacha, do not take kindly to free-thinking universities. He persecuted students and professors alike. The building infrastructure was almost completely collapsed. Students did not possess textbooks, classrooms did not have windows, and the dormitories did not have beds. In my view, just installing windows, placing beds in the dorms, providing textbooks to the students were insufficient measures. In Nigeria, the broken infrastructure and the scarcity of textbooks were symptoms of the greater problem. What was required was a mental turnaround. The fatalistic thinking of the administrators, faculty and students depressed me. They had been beaten down. They had sunk this low, there was no way to reverse the rot.

*Q: Was conservative Islam taking over in places?*

COHEN: Yes. Nigeria's north is predominantly Muslim. In northern states such as Katsina and Zamfara, the political leadership perceived leverage and advantage in advocating Sharia Law, the most traditional Sunni interpretation of the Koran. Under Sharia code, religious precepts for judicial process and punishment would be applied instead of civil law process. Islamic courts and judges arbitrated cases instead of civil courts and civil judges. In a Sharia system, accused adulterers, particularly women, could be punished by death. Women were more at risk than men since the burden of proof on females was usually impossible to overcome. Rape became adultery. Accusations against rapists were easy to challenge. Whether innocent or not, the accused, if female, had no chance. Theft might dictate amputation of the hand, a very Wahabi-Saudi type of justice. Southern Nigerians were appalled, not simply because most were Christian. Sharia law is severe, rigorous, and oppressive and generally lacks humanitarian considerations. A juridical crisis was emerging in Nigeria between political figures in the north seeking the imposition of Sharia Law and Nigeria's mainstream. Most within the federal government, I suspect, preferred to keep a lid on Sharia. They feared the genies that might emerge from the bottle. Islamic fundamentalism was a new phenomenon in the region. However, the GON failed to develop any coherent strategy to limit or reverse the spread of the Sharia movement.

In the south, Sharia could never make serious inroads. Muslims were a minority in the south. Even religious Muslims recognized that Sharia was a northern issue. But the issue divided even more deeply a nation suffering from profound rifts. Throughout Nigeria's central heartland such as Plateau state, Christian and Muslim populations were closely balanced. In these areas Sunni Muslims lived tensely and nervously with animists and Christians. Religious and ethnic strife was easily sparked. When the lid came off, usually over some insignificant incident, hundreds might be slaughtered. It was pretty gruesome.

*Q: What about Nigeria's military? Were they dominated by any particular group?*

COHEN: I cannot tell you much about the military. In Lagos I did not associate with them. I never dealt with the Ministry of Defense.



But I can remark on the role played by the military in the region. President Obasanjo sought to expand Nigeria's regional leadership. While governed by military dictators, Nigeria did not exercise much African leadership. But with Nigeria's democratically-elected government, Africans welcomed greater Nigerian leadership. Under ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), President Obasanjo sent a contingent of Nigerian troops to Sierra Leone as peacekeepers. This was pretty remarkable. A couple of years earlier, Nigeria would never have been invited to provide peacekeepers. Now Nigeria was taking a lead role. Unfortunately, many Nigerian soldiers sent to Sierra Leone contracted HIV. The incidence of HIV within the Nigerian military rose rapidly because of these deployments.

As long as I am on the topic of HIV, Nigerians pretty much deny that the country has an HIV problem. It's true that percentage wise, the incidence of HIV was much lower than in high incidence countries such as South Africa or Botswana. However, Nigeria's population is many times greater. Incidence may be lower but the sheer quantity of people was high. HIV-AIDS was becoming a major problem.

*Q: Was HIV having an impact on the society?*

COHEN: Not yet. I do not know what has happened since I departed Nigeria in 2002. Compared to HIV incidence rates in East or South Africa where HIV has devastated entire classes of the population, Nigeria had not reached that stage -- yet. In Nigeria death can be so endemic that even an HIV epidemic may not be immediately noticed. Except for the military, HIV did not yet seem to affect those narrow population segments as elsewhere.

*Q: One of the most important foreign relations overseas is between a consulate and an embassy. How did things work between the two?*

COHEN: Generally with difficulty, occasionally with crisis, and every once in a while with camaraderie. The relationship was stressed for a multitude of reasons. Start with a large embassy in the country's largest city, Lagos. A small liaison office is located in the new capital, Abuja. Because of the sour bilateral relations during the Abacha years, the liaison office was intentionally kept small and insignificant. The USG did not want to offer any legitimacy to that dictatorship by having an embassy in the capital. So we kept a very small office in Abuja. Obasanjo becomes Nigeria's elected president. Our bilateral ties warm up. President Clinton decides to relocate the embassy to show our support for the new government. Many embassies have already made the move to the capital. It is the right decision.

However, the embassy infrastructure was in Lagos: the experienced FSN staff, the office space, the warehouse, etc. It could not be relocated quickly. To shoehorn so much into the small premises of the liaison office in a short timeframe was impossible. The new embassy required office space, enhanced security, and support mechanisms such as a functioning general services office, a budget and fiscal section, and a credible motor pool. The existing infrastructure was inadequate. The Lagos consulate still had to provide these services which are usually managed out of an embassy.

In Abuja, the staff developed a jaded attitude towards the consulate. "They keep the best

furniture for themselves.” “They have nice offices down there while we are squeezed into tiny offices.” That sort of thing. I sensed that many in Abuja developed a real chip on their shoulder towards the consulate. It was unjustified, if not ridiculous. Despite the hardships in Abuja, living conditions there were better than Lagos. Resources were pouring into Abuja. Again, I attributed much of the bitterness to Cohen’s first law: embassies and consulates reflect the cultures in which they are located. Northerners thumbed their noses at southerners, and visa versa. The stress lines remained deep between the embassy and the consulate. Ambassador Howard Jeter did nothing to resolve things. In fact, he made them much worse.

I found the relationship particularly difficult since my position, by all rights, should have been in Abuja. The public diplomacy counselor also sat in Lagos as did the senior consular officer and the senior management officer. The core of the political section was in Abuja. The head of USAID transferred to Abuja in early 2001. The legal attaché and the Foreign Commercial Service office remained in Lagos. While some senior staff worked in Lagos, others, including the Ambassador, resided in Abuja. There were two economic officers assigned to Abuja. How was I to manage them when they are ten feet away from the DCM? I supervised my staff in Lagos, but dealing with Abuja was another matter. Given the accessibility to embassy leadership, Abuja staff could easily bad mouth the consulate. That is what happened. As I noted, this was worsened by the mediocre ambassador, Howard Jeter, and the insensitive DCM, Tim Andrews.

In earlier years Nigeria had a string of good ambassadors. During the mid 1990s, Ambassador Walter Carrington took on Abacha. He made it very clear that the USG opposed Abacha’s horrible human rights behavior. This got him into hot water with the Nigerian Government which created friction. However, Carrington was well loved by the Nigerians. Then, there was Ambassador William Twaddell. I arrived after his tenure, but he was also a popular ambassador. During his tenure, morale in the mission, reportedly, was high. When he arrived in country, Ambassador Jeter moved directly to the embassy in Abuja. He immediately seemed to fall into an Abuja mentality which did not do the consulate in Lagos any good.

Jeter aggravated tensions between Lagos and Abuja by his decision to retain the principal officer’s residence in Lagos as his own. The residence in Lagos was a beautiful property, probably the most valuable piece of residential property in Lagos. It was acres large right on the lagoon, a perfect place for receptions and social events. When the embassy moved to Abuja, the ambassador was expected to take up residence there. Sure enough, when Jeter arrived in country, he moved into the Abuja Hilton, the most respectable hotel in the city. (That’s not saying much.) Throughout Jeter’s tenure, he occupied a suite of rooms at the Hilton at great cost to the U.S. taxpayer. An entire wing of one floor was sealed off. Properties occupied by senior staff would have been perfectly adequate on a temporary basis for an ambassador. Yet, Jeter never moved into a permanent Abuja residence. No property was good enough, he said. Since the hotel was considered temporary quarters, he justified keeping the ambassadorial residence in Lagos. Because Jeter rarely appeared in Lagos, perhaps once every four months for a couple of days, the residence was vacant perhaps 95 percent of the time.

Under Ambassadors Twaddell and Carrington, Embassy staff had long enjoyed access to the property, particularly the volleyball court and swimming pool. The community had been welcome. Consul General Nancy Serpa, the former DCM, lived in a perfectly acceptable but

smaller residence. Her successor, Robyn Hinson-Jones, should have moved into the former ambassadorial residence. But Jeter kept the property off limits – and vacant. This caused deep resentment, especially among the FSNs. It's not like Lagos had alternative green grass, volleyball and tennis courts, and swimming pools. Many perceived making the property off limits to both American and FSN communities as a terribly vindictive act. The Lagos community had always been treated as one big family. Now an imperial ambassador refused to share the property which was not even being utilized. He worsened the deep divide between the embassy and the consulate.

In early 2002 a State Department inspection team came to Nigeria. It reviewed the situation. The team recommended (ordered) the ambassador to relinquish the property. He eventually did. However, Jeter delayed his formal handover of the property to the consul general by a few months. The bitterness although lessened, persisted. Too bad an ambassador let his ego get the better of him to the detriment of the mission.

*Q: I was wondering whether you could say something about internet fraud.*

COHEN: When I began my job, sitting on my desk were cases from people who had been suckered by internet or “advanced fee fraud.” In Nigeria, this type of crime is known as 4-1-9. Nigerian crime syndicates were talented perpetrators of this type of fraud.

*Q: I have not gotten one of those emails in a couple of years now.*

COHEN: Most of the fraud occurred in the mid to late 1990s before people wised up to the various schemes. Some correspondence went through the mail. In fact, so much went through the mail that the criminal gangs made counterfeit Nigerian stamps to cut costs. Then, the internet became popular. Criminals went online. Targeted persons (pigeons?) who followed the instructions on a variety of get rich schemes handed over important personal financial information. When I arrived in Lagos, folks who lost tens of thousands of dollars were seeking recourse. A few still refused to believe they had been suckered. It was a hopeless challenge. Still, some believed the embassy could assist. People actually thought that they could get their money back. They submitted documentation to us. “I do not understand,” they might say. “I was told this was full proof!” Yeah, full proof for the criminal. A stranger offers you 30 percent of \$30 million for assistance in getting money out of Nigeria. What fool would hand over bank account information to such an individual? Fortunately for me, by this time most 4-1-9 cases were being forwarded to our Legal Attaché, the resident FBI agent, or our Secret Service agent. Both Secret Service and FBI had active offices in Lagos.

*Q: Did you get any feel about the Washington view of Nigeria?*

COHEN: At the end of the Clinton Administration in 2000, relations between Nigeria and the United States were cordial. The principled position taken by Ambassador Carrington during the 1990s against Sani Abacha endeared him to the Nigerian masses. During the Abacha regime, sanctions applied against Nigeria included an embarrassing condemnation of airport security at Murtala Mohammad Airport in Lagos. From 1992 until 2000, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) posted signs at airports throughout the U.S. advising travelers that

Murtala Mohammad Airport in Lagos did not meet minimum ICAO standards. When travelers transited U.S. airports, signs were everywhere cautioning about travel to Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos, Nigeria. I wonder what most Americans going through St. Louis or Denver thought about the warning. Direct flights between the two countries were suspended in 1993. It was true that Lagos airport was exceedingly dangerous from an aviation and security perspective.

After Nigeria's 1999 elections, the United States demonstrated, in a very palpable way, support for the Nigerian people. And so President Clinton, the embodiment of U.S. opposition to Abacha, enjoyed widespread popularity. In the summer of 2000, he traveled to Nigeria. In Abuja, the road between the airport and the main highway was renamed "Bill Clinton Way." Okay, getting a street named after you is one thing. However, to have the main road from the airport renamed? U.S. assistance to Nigeria rose to over \$100 million. In May 2000, Clinton signed into law the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which offered incentives for African countries to expand trade with the U.S. It was clear that Clinton was well regarded. At the end of his administration, bilateral relations were very good

Initially, the Bush Administration did not focus much on Nigeria – or on Africa for that matter. Africa was viewed as less important geopolitically. Nigeria's oil was important, of course. But other aspects of the relationship were not perceived as critical. While foreign assistance levels remained high, the political relationship lacked magnetism. I cannot say it deteriorated. But it was not flourishing. Then, after 9/11, U.S. attention faltered even more.

On November 7, 2000, I attended the Public Diplomacy Section-hosted election night in Lagos. Every embassy and consulate should host such an event during the U.S. presidential elections. By the way, when an event is held in Lagos and runs late, you cannot just hop in your car and go home. Security dictates something more, an up-armored vehicle or escort. Remember Lagos is about five hours ahead of the U.S. east coast. During the evening a straw poll was taken among the Nigerians for the two candidates, Gore and Bush. The event was large, a couple of hundred invited guests. Bush received, maybe, five or six votes. That says much as to the Nigerian frame of mind. They were very pro Clinton and wanted Vice President Gore to win.

In the U.S. Congress, a number of congressmen had formed a Nigeria support group, or caucus. I believe it was headed by Congressman William Jefferson from New Orleans -- no relation, of course, to William Jefferson Clinton. He visited Nigeria fairly often. Later, Jefferson got caught up in a scandal.

*Q: I do not know where the case stands but he has been accused of having lots of unreported business.*

COHEN: Steering business to Nigeria, etc.

Another congressman I met there was John Lewis from Georgia. I was very impressed with him.

*Q: Was there an African American-Nigerian connection?*

COHEN: Certainly, it was not as noteworthy as elsewhere in Africa. Ghana had a pretty strong

connection. We visited Ghana in late 2000 and toured the former slave forts along Cape Coast. I saw nothing like that in Nigeria. I believe there is a stronger ethnic link between Nigerian groups, particularly the Yoruba, and Brazil. Many Afro-Brazilians are descended from the Yoruba. Some actually still speak a Yoruba dialect in Brazil.

Perhaps Nigeria's rigid dictatorships were a factor. Except for oil workers, Americans did not travel to Nigeria. I mentioned the FAA alert regarding Lagos airport. In 2000 links were just being reestablished. No direct air routes existed between the United States and Nigeria. Travelers from the U.S. transited Europe on Air France, KLM, British Airway, or Lufthansa. The USG encouraged U.S. carriers to consider the establishment of non-stop flights to Nigeria. Nigeria's own national carrier, Nigerian Airways, was the biggest joke around. To say it had fallen on hard times was an understatement. Perhaps one airworthy plane was left in their fleet. Nigerian Airlines' workforce, meanwhile, contained something like 5,000 employees.

*Q: Was there concern about an AID program? Here is a country that is earning billions of dollars and yet we have an AID program.*

COHEN: True. The U.S. does not have USAID foreign aid programs in many oil exporting nations, particularly members of OPEC! But if you look at Nigeria's low per capita income, its devastating poverty, Nigeria clearly qualifies as a low income country deserving of assistance.

*Q: You said a quarter of the population of Africa is in Nigeria. You look at the map of Nigeria and it does not seem that big.*

COHEN: Nigeria is densely populated. There are more people in Nigeria than there are in all the other countries of West Africa combined. Teeming cities containing millions of people are scattered throughout Nigeria. Just like China, many Nigerian cities not well known have populations in the millions -- Ibadan, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Kano, Kaduna, Enugu, Benin City, in addition to Lagos. Nigeria is very urbanized by African standards.

Let me say a few words about Nigeria's neighbors. Next door to Nigeria's west is Benin. Benin's official capital is Porto Novo, but Cotonou is the real capital. Benin is a sliver, a little finger of a country. It is part of francophone Africa, the former French West Africa. Nigeria was a former English colony. Despite the ethnic similarities, Benin possessed an entirely different culture. We viewed Benin as a vacation destination.

Ironically, the people posted in the embassy in Cotonou viewed their assignment as a hardship. In fact, USG officials stationed in Cotonou received extra money for extending a third year in a hardship post. The program was called Special Needs Differential (SND). The SND program money was not available to us in Nigeria. Yet, we viewed Benin as kind of a vacation spot. None of the embassy folks in Cotonou, I am certain, would have freely switched assignments with us!

The same applied to Togo, one country over from Benin. We ate at restaurants in Lome, Togo's capital. We stayed in a nice hotel. What a shock! The country seemed civilized, despite being dominated for more than three decades but one-man rule. Beyond Togo is Ghana. Compared to Lagos, Accra was Disneyland.

Marla and I traveled to South Africa. I won't even try to compare that country with Nigeria. In Johannesburg, we waited to board the SAA flight back to Lagos. We confronted a mob scene at the gate. What was going on here? Apparently, Nigerians were such professional crooks that some actually were attempting to board the aircraft using counterfeit airline tickets. A passenger would get on the plane and find someone sitting in his seat. South Africans could not stop talking about Nigerians. Many attributed South Africa's crime wave to the influx of Nigerians into the country.

*Q: I had a prep school classmate who became president of a bank in Baltimore. He said that as soon as anybody could identify a Nigerian at a teller window, everybody would shut their windows. They treated this very cautiously because every trick known might be used against the bank.*

COHEN: An official from the Federal Aviation Administration in Washington visited Nigeria frequently. Kevin knew Africa and he knew Nigeria well enough never to use credit cards in country. Always carry enough cash to pay for your hotel, etc. Kevin needed a last minute change in plane tickets. He was at the Sheraton Hotel near the airport. (Do not mistake it for any Sheraton in America!) He had to purchase a new ticket on Lufthansa and did not have enough cash. The only way Kevin could buy this ticket was to use his credit card. He figured it was the Sheraton Hotel and he was flying immediately into Frankfurt. When he got to Frankfurt, he planned to contact the credit card company in order to assure there would be no unexpected expenses. Kevin arrived in Frankfurt and called up the credit card company. Sure enough, in the few hours Kevin had been in the air, it had already been hit for a few thousand dollars.

The criminals were smarter than any of us could ever be. You have to admire them. It takes quite a bit to con the system. And Nigerians are the ultimate risk takers. The worldwide reputation of Nigerian criminals is well deserved.

*Q: 9/11. The attack on the World Trade Center. How did that hit you?*

COHEN: We were five or six hours ahead. It was already mid-afternoon when we got the news. We watched events on CNN at the consulate. I spoke earlier about being in India during the Gulf War. Many Indian citizens were stuck in the Persian Gulf. There was a lot of personal engagement. But in Nigeria there was little we could do, directly or indirectly, as a result of 9/11. We were not on the frontlines, so we felt a bit isolated and helpless. The post soon received a string of requests from Washington to look at issues that we never really looked at before. One of the areas would be terrorist financing, money channeled through Nigerian banks. Nigeria was a logical money-laundering location because of the weakness of the banking system and lack of controls.

The U.S. prepared to take on the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. I received an unusual request. About a month after 9/11, I was asked if I could provide information about caves in Afghanistan. They knew that I was a caver. Since the Soviet invasion in 1979, cavers had avoided Afghanistan. The caving literature from thirty years earlier was sparse. I did make one suggestion. To find caves in a barren landscape is relatively easy with high tech gear. Fly on

dark, cold nights and use infrared sensors. Warm spots in the middle of the mountains may mean caves. Caves retain heat in the winter and they remain cool in the summer. A cave of a certain size will keep a constant temperature throughout the year; the average temperature of that area. If it is below freezing on a dark night, you should be able to pick up those warm spots. During the heat of summer, the reverse is true. You can pick out cool spots that might be caves. That was my contribution to the war on terror.

*Q: Alright. You left there is 2002?*

COHEN: Let me just finish up with Nigeria. As far as doing economic work, Nigeria was quite rewarding. I felt I made a difference. For living conditions, Lagos was awful, in some ways even worse than my subsequent experiences in Afghanistan. My wife will never set food in Nigeria again. I do not blame her. The week that I left, my Nigerian contacts threw farewell parties for me that were just unbelievable. I had been there less than two years and developed wonderful professional relationships. So although I could not wait to get out of the country, I left with a heavy heart from all these relationships.

*Q: I would like to ask you, as you left there and particularly coming from the economic perspective, whither Nigeria?*

COHEN: Just before my departure, I wrote a cable to Washington, addressing that very topic, whither Nigeria. There are certain things all officers should consider before departing post. One is good briefing material for your successor. Officers should also consider doing wrap up cables for Washington about their experiences, observations, etc, without censorship by the front office or embassy. I do not remember the details of what I said. I tried to portray some positive things about Nigeria but cautioned that we should be careful in how we use eye wash when we look at this country.

*Q: Did you feel that the embassy was trying to make Nigeria look better than you saw it?*

COHEN: That was part of Ambassador Jeter's problem. And, in my view, it is not uncommon among chiefs of mission. I will talk about this a bit when we get to Brazil. Perhaps some ambassadors feel they must make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Unfortunately, sometimes it works against USG interests to put a positive gloss or spin on something where honesty and realism are required. If there is corruption, do not try to hide it. If there is malfeasance in the electoral system, don't gloss over it or belittle it. Nigeria has had serious problems for a long time. There is no need to gloss over these things. The Clinton Administration, even with a positive bilateral relationship, was under few illusions about Nigeria. During my tenure it was difficult to fathom exactly where the Bush Administration came down since it expended little energy on Nigeria on a bilateral basis. My reporting was read. People in the Department appreciated it. We stuck to a reporting plan. I achieved what I set out to do. But I still possess a jaundiced attitude about our embassy. We labored in Lagos under difficult conditions yet received almost no recognition. Before I left, I nominated a number of outstanding young officers for awards, only one of whom worked with me in my section. Two officers worked in the consular section. As a section chief, I could nominate officers working in other sections. If I had not done that, I doubt these officers would have been recognized for their hard work as vice

consuls in Lagos.

**LEON WEINTRAUB**  
**Deputy Director, West African Affairs**  
**Washington (2000-2002)**

*Mr. Weintraub was born and raised in New York City, educated at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and the Universities of Pittsburgh and Wisconsin. After service in Liberia with the Peace Corps he entered government service, first with the Navy Department and then with the State Department Foreign Service. His service in Washington and abroad involved him with a variety of countries and issues including African Affairs, International Organizations, Narcotics and Peace-Keeping operations in Africa. His foreign posts were Bogotá, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Quito and Geneva. Mr. Weintraub was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.*

*Q: Today is the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, 2005. And we're at the year 2000 and you're off to AF/W.*

WEINTRAUB: Correct.

*Q: What did West Africa consist of?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, basically it includes the countries from the west coast on the Atlantic starting from the country of Mauritania through Senegal and further along the coast, then Mali all the way through that sweep of West Africa up to Niger and Nigeria. Above it is North Africa which is part of the NEA Bureau, the Near East Bureau, and then east of it, Chad and Cameroon are considered part of Central Africa (AF/C) for our internal geographical purposes.

*Q: Well, you were in AF/W from when to when?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, earlier I first had served at the embassy in Lagos from 1982 to 1984. Then I had been a country desk officer for Nigeria from '90 to '92 so now this was a little bit of a homecoming eight years later to come back as the deputy office director.

*Q: Who was the assistant secretary for African affairs when you got there?*

WEINTRAUB: When I got there it was kind of near the end of the Clinton, second Clinton administration. The assistant secretary at that time was Susan Rice, and she was replaced after the next presidential election in 2000 by Walter Kansteiner.

*Q: Alright. Well, in the first place, how did you find the African bureau? Had it changed? New administration coming in, was there much impact there or not?*

WEINTRAUB: Well no, I don't think so. I think, to be quite frank, the way I would interpret it,



most of the issues in the Africa bureau, particularly in AF/W and AF/C as well, I think there are few issues that rise to the attention of the secretary, much less the White House. So I think for the most part the African specialists, and that includes a political appointee if there is one as the assistant secretary of African affairs, can fairly much chart the course as they see fit, as long as obviously it stays within well defined parameters established by the president and the secretary. But there's just -- I think it's just so rare that any issues in the region do rise to the highest levels that -- so I think as a matter of fact I don't think I saw that much difference in AF/W, how Nigeria was handled in the year 2000 as it was when I was a desk officer eight years earlier. That country is always the 800 pound gorilla in the region, so to speak. It's got the population, it's got the land, it's got the petroleum wealth, and it far outweighs the influence of any of the countries or most of the countries in the region put together, as a matter of fact. So that was unchanged also.

*Q: How long were you there?*

WEINTRAUB: I was there for two years.

*Q: Two years.*

WEINTRAUB: It was a two year Washington tour.

*Q: What- well, let's talk about Nigeria first. What was the situation there and what were our concerns?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, since the time I had served as a desk officer and again more recently, Nigeria had once again made a transition from military rule to civilian rule. The Babangida government was in power when I was there as a desk officer but now it was following the elections of '99, and the current leader of Nigeria was, and still is, President Obasanjo. He had been recently elected, so Nigeria was then as now under a democratically elected government. If anything, though, corruption and the scams had gotten worse, the allegations of drug smuggling had gotten worse. At the same time, we were heavily involved with Nigeria and other members of the regional or I should say the sub-regional organization known as ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, E-C-O-W-A-S.

We were very eager for the Nigerian military, with others in ECOWAS, to play a stabilizing role in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Liberian civil war had somehow ground itself down, ground itself to a halt. The country was not stable by any means, but for the most part there was a government headed by Mr. Taylor, following a contested election-

*Q: This is Charles Taylor.*

WEINTRAUB: Right. This is Charles Taylor. We had serious problems with the elections, but he was the president. At the same time, now there was a new undercurrent of rebels advancing in the country and Sierra Leone was in awful shape, terrible shape. The so-called RUF, R-U-F, Revolutionary United Front -- these were the people who had a reputation for hacking off the arms, limbs, legs, feet of children, of opponents in Sierra Leone, many of the fighters being so-

called “child soldiers,” probably under the influence of drugs. Who knows what they were involved in in order to get their resources to purchase arms, whether it was smuggling of drugs, or smuggling of diamonds, but Sierra Leone was in awful shape, terrible shape; Liberia was not much better. There was a government in place in Sierra Leone, but under challenge by a revolutionary movement and we were trying to get the Ghanaians, the Nigerians, Senegalese, perhaps Malians, to get their troops trained to serve under a peacekeeping force in the region. So we were very heavily involved in a military way.

As a result, in AF/W, we had something we had not had earlier, something I didn’t remember from when I was a desk officer. We had a military adviser in the bureau, a U.S. military officer assigned to State Department as a liaison because we had a lot of military training programs, military “supply and equip” or “train and equip” programs in a number of countries in the region. So we were heavily involved with Nigeria. We were building training facilities in Nigeria, not bases for our military personnel, but for Nigerian and perhaps other ECOWAS forces. Most of the training was done by contractors, which typically meant the use of retired officers out of the military for a few years. This was a big effort; we were spending a lot of money, and it was subject to all the typical hassles of working with the Nigerians in that region -- making sure our supplies were getting out of customs, that the subcontractors in Nigeria were performing the work up to specs, that the land to be used for training facilities had been appropriately acquired from village authorities or tribal governments or local governments. And as I probably mentioned earlier, things in Nigeria are never easy. There’s always a suspicion someone’s always taking you. There’s always a suspicion that there’s a lot of money moving around in ways that we didn’t want it to be moving. It’s hard to put your finger on these thoughts or suspicions, but given that environment it’s tough.

*Q: Well were you seeing, I mean, Nigeria did have this oil wealth that was coming.*

WEINTRAUB: And it still does.

*Q: Did you see much affect on the infrastructure for the people of Nigeria?*

WEINTRAUB: Surprisingly much less than one would have thought. The conventional wisdom about Nigeria -- the corruption, and the public works that should have been done with all the petroleum wealth -- the conventional wisdom about Nigeria often compared it to another country in similar conditions, Indonesia, also a member of OPEC, another major oil producer. Indonesia is also very heavily populated and also pretty much regarded as rife with corruption. And I had heard from some people that the major difference was that in Indonesia, due to a variety of corrupt practices, prices were maybe inflated by 50 or 60 percent on all public work projects for bridges and roads and public communications facilities; the price was inflated but the work got done. It got done but it got done in a corrupt manner at absurd prices and a lot of people skimmed off the top. In Nigeria, by contrast, the prices were similarly inflated but the work just never got done. Projects were started, the contractors were advanced the money, maybe they worked for a month or two and then suddenly you couldn’t find them anymore. And this was typically the story of how I saw a lot of the petroleum wealth evaporating; either that or just going out of the country. When I had been an officer at the embassy in Lagos in the middle ‘80s and there was a coup, for the first eight months or so after the coup the biggest thing was to find

all the money in the Swiss and the London bank accounts that the previous politicians had smuggled away there. So one did not hear a great many success stories about Lagos finally having a good road system, or a drinking water system, or a sewer system, or electrical grid, or whatever it was. The stories just went on and on much as they have gone on before.

*Q: Well had they moved the capital yet?*

WEINTRAUB: Yes, shortly before I came to AF/W, the capital -- this was a very long-term project -- finally had moved from Lagos on the coast, the original colonial capital, to Abuja, roughly in the central location of the country. The Nigerians had built a new and "artificial" capital much as a Brasilia was built, and much as Washington, D.C., in fact, was originally built. But even as an embassy officer in Lagos in the middle '80s, this already was a plan underway, but it had taken 15 years, perhaps, until it came to fruition. The embassy where I had served had become the consulate in Lagos. It was still a large installation, still a large facility, because in fact the greatest share of the commercial life of the country was still there. As for Abuja, at first the embassy sent people up for long weekends and then gradually more and more people stayed for longer periods of time. It took a while for schools to be built. It took a while for housing to be built. But, yes, at this time Abuja was becoming a capital in fact as well as in name.

*Q: Was there any move to almost say the corruption is so bad in Nigeria on these projects that we're going almost to write it off and say what's the point?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, one important thing to recall is that Nigeria had the manpower, had the military strength, and they had earlier helped out at the height of the Liberian civil war. At the same time, however, their troops also left that country a little bit under a cloud, amidst allegations of stealing everything that wasn't nailed down, of abusing people in Liberia when they came as peacekeepers in that country's civil war. So everybody was aware this was the bargain you got. But the Nigerians, a country of over 100 million people -- there's no doubt about it -- had the numbers of troops that were required. They certainly were not the most disciplined of military forces, not the best trained, not the best equipped -- so when we sent them into Sierra Leone, we had to equip and train these people. When combined with others from Ghana, from Senegal, this was the force that was used, although at a certain time the British eventually sent their own force into Sierra Leone when we were there.

There had been various incidents of UN peacekeepers being kidnapped and held by the rebels and at one point some of those abducted were British and the British figured they'd had enough of this. So they sent their own troops into Sierra Leone, not under a UN mandate, not under an OAU mandate, not under an ECOWAS mandate, but their own troops under orders from London, and they got their fellows out. But they had a restricted kind of mandate, of course, and they were not to engage in broader peacekeeping efforts. But yes, there was- everybody knew what the Nigerians were, what the situation was like -- but, you know, these were the resources that we had available. Obviously there was never any consideration of the U.S. sending in our own troops. As it is after much pleading and cajoling with the Pentagon, I think we were able to get I don't think any more than a half dozen, active duty troops in as advisors in the Sierra Leone ministry of defense, helping them to put together some improved planning and operational procedures. But we weren't going to put in the kind of manpower that was really needed, and

nobody else was either. I don't think the Nigerians were overly eager to do it either, but they recognized that the instability was only going to get worse in the region. They assumed a certain amount of responsibility, but they also had no doubt that it was to be handled by the U.S. in terms of a financial assistance package that would include training and other material that we handed out. In those terms, things worked out well for them. But it was always a challenge, always a challenge to work with the Nigerians.

*Q: But now, when you were there, how were, well in the first place, in peacekeeping troops, how about the Ghanaian troops and the troops from Ghana and from Senegal, because I think of those two as having quite respectable military.*

WEINTRAUB: Yes, I believe they were somewhat better prepared than the Nigerians, more disciplined and more trained, but still we had to equip them, and from what I understand they performed somewhat better on the job. But they were considerably smaller in quantity than the Nigerians and it was always nice to hear, always nice to hear that some of the ECOWAS troop contingents were doing well. As a matter of fact, I'm just reading a book that Canadian General Romeo Dallaire wrote about his experience as head of the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda in 1994 and he had very high regard for Ghanaian peacekeeping troops that were there. His book kind of slams some of the others -- I think the Bangladeshis don't come out too well, but he had high regard for the Ghanaian troops in Rwanda. So I think that, yes, I think that they did well. I know in setting up the training program for West African troops, which we had also set up in Senegal, in Mali, and in Niger, the Nigerians always had more problems: Which was the land to be used for the training facility? What was the United States going to do and pay for? What was the Nigerian contribution going to be? You know, there was always debate on what was the U.S. going to provide and what was the local government going to provide. And these negotiations started as force agreements, negotiations on what the host government would provide, and they were always much more involved and protracted with the Nigerians. I remember the negotiations with the Senegalese and the Ghanaians were always wrapped up earlier than the ones with the Nigerians.

*Q: How did we view the president of Nigeria at the time you were there?*

WEINTRAUB: Well, I guess there were two schools of thought. One view was that he was no different than any other. He said the right words but he lived off corruption as much as anyone else. And the other view saw him, in fact, as someone who -- given serious constraints on how much he could do -- nevertheless was sincerely a committed individual who wanted to bring about democratization and clean government to Nigeria, at least by Nigerian standards. This was the man who had earlier assumed the power of military leader of Nigeria in the '70s after one of the other military leaders was assassinated, Murtala Mohammad. And in the late '70s he voluntarily stepped down. I mean, this was after Nigeria had had a military government for over a decade. In the late '70s he voluntarily stepped down, and there was an election in '79. He retired to his farm in order to be a chicken farmer. And said okay, I'm out of politics now. This was something practically unheard of anywhere in the third world where there had been a military coup.

Well, that second republic lasted from 1979 to 1983. Another military government took over on

December 31, 1983, following elections in August that year that were heavily criticized for being unfair if not downright fraudulent. That military regime, in one form or another, lasted to the late 1990s. Its various leaders – both the military leaders themselves and the former elected officials who worked with them during that period -- were seen by many as so tainted by allegations of corruption that nobody could trust them or wanted to trust them. Obasanjo, by contrast, during his time out of office, the '80s and '90s, had gathered a reputation as somewhat of an elder statesman, one of the few African leaders who stepped down -- even though he in fact had been a military leader, nevertheless he stepped down voluntarily. So he had gathered about himself an aura of the elder statesman. He had served on a number of committees for the United Nations, been an envoy or two for the secretary general of the United Nations. He had been invited to attend meetings with Jimmy Carter, and other NGOs. He had a persona as one of the wise men of the continent and the elder statesman, as I said. So he had a nice, kind of a clean reputation going into those elections in 1999. So I kind saw him as operating in a tough environment but he himself wanted to do the right thing; given the environment of Nigeria he was the best of the lot, he was the best that we could hope for the future of Nigeria.

**CLAUDIA ANYASO**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Abuja (2002-2006)**

*Ms. Anyaso was born and raised in North Carolina and was educated at Morgan State University and American University. She joined the State Department in 1968, where she specialized in Education and Cultural Affairs, with particular regard to African countries. She had several tours in Washington as well as abroad. Her foreign assignments include Lagos, Abuja, Port-au-Prince and Niamey, where she served primarily as Cultural and Public Affairs Officer. Ms. Anyaso was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*

*Q: Well then after this time with the Joint Chiefs at the Pentagon where did you go?*

ANYASO: Now what did I tell you I get to choose my assignment and then my husband gets to choose his and so a funny thing happened to me. I was sitting in a meeting at the National Security Council; I was still working for the Pentagon and I happened to sit next to my colleague from the State Department who was working on public diplomacy. He said to me, "How would you like to go back to Nigeria?" This was Nick Robertson and I said, "Nick, I think I've done my bit for Nigeria. I don't see how it could help my career to go back there a third time." He said, "Why don't you think about it." So I mentioned it to my husband and he said, "Yes, that sounds like a great idea." I said, "I don't see how this is going to help my career." He said, "Why don't you give it a try, it's going back to Abuja, you'll see those things you helped to get started and blah, blah, blah." Well, I ended up going back to Nigeria this time as the country PAO which was the highest ranking PD position; I was in charge of Abuja and Lagos, our branch in Lagos and I was the spokesperson for the embassy. Actually it did help my career. I think I was promoted to OC out of that job and a little later on to MC but it definitely didn't hurt which was my concern at the time.

But I've always enjoyed Nigeria I just sort of threw myself into it, had a much bigger staff, we had more space. The building I had acquired during my previous tour there was being utilized. We had a great information officer, Peggy McKean. She was a part of a tandem her husband was the military attaché and she was our information officer; actually she wasn't a PDA officer. She was a political officer but because of his assignment she applied for the information job there. I had a wonderful indefatigable woman who was the CAO...

*Q: Cultural affairs officer.*

ANYASO: Cultural affairs officer Dehab Gabreab who is an Eritrean by birth and we were busy, busy, busy. Of course, I had a magnificent and well trained Nigerian staff, Hausa speaking; Sani Mohammed was our senior information specialist. Sani was working on a Hausa language magazine, which we were going to be using for our Muslim outreach. After 9/11 everybody no matter what cone you were in was working on Muslim outreach. Counter terrorism some people called it we called it Muslim outreach. So we worked pretty hard to try to make sure that at least half of our exchangees were Muslims. We had our magazine Magama, which not only had articles about the United States and things like that; I remember one cover, it's a beautiful magazine, we talked about the Iraq war and we had these women in these black chadors on there crying and that kind of thing. We didn't shy away from what was going on but it was a classy magazine and, in fact, it was the only Hausa language magazine in the country in the north and they began using it in the universities, in their classes, because it was so good. Therefore our message was amplified.

*Q: Were we feeling that the Muslims in Nigeria were identifying with the forces that we were opposed to al Qaeda and others in Iraq and all?*

ANYASO: Because of the religion and they felt a fellowship with their Muslim brothers there was always the possibility that they could be recruited especially the young men by al Qaeda. There was some activity, not a lot, but there was some activity, which indicated that some people were involved. I believe in one of the arrests I think it was in Islamabad they picked up some al Qaeda people and one was a Nigerian so there was always that possibility and so we were very careful. We also closed our consulate in Lagos at one point because of a threat situation so yes, there was that. There was a lot of disinformation out there; there would be stories about Abu Ghraib...

*Q: This is the scandal about how the Iraqi prisoners were mistreated by our military prison keepers.*

ANYASO: Exactly. There was Abu Ghraib, there was the Danish cartoons which a lot of Muslims did not like; they thought it offended Mohammad. Whenever there was anything like that the temperature in Northern Nigeria would just go up so we would have to work very hard making demarches explaining, especially for us in the PD part of the embassy. I would go over and talk to the editor of the newspaper, the Daily Trust newspaper, which was, I think it was funded by the Iranians or Saudis but anyway I would go over with my talking points and explain to them how we saw the situation. Then there was a rumor that in Iraq some of our military

people had flushed the Koran down the toilet; that's always a good one. So you go over and lay out the facts as you see them and I think we had a good relationship with them but I couldn't say that they were good supporters of the United States but at least they listened. You could calm things down and actually they would publish some of the materials that I would give them. For example on the Koran story I had some materials that had been prepared in Washington that they had sent out to all the posts and they published it on the front page. So I couldn't have asked for more.

*Q: You've been away for a while what was the situation sort of political in Nigeria at this point? You were there from when to when?*

ANYASO: All right this time I was there from 2002 to 2006, my usual four years. But this time there was a reason to extend for a fourth year and that was because we finished the new embassy and I had been in all kinds of situations in Nigeria and Lagos, Abuja starting up we call those the grungy little villas that we were working out of. You could smell the mildew and here we had thanks to General Williams who was in the office of overseas buildings who built these embassies. We had a brand new embassy in Nigeria and I couldn't see leaving the country without at least serving in that new edifice so I extended for a year so that I could serve in the new embassy and it was great. Absolutely wonderful but it was a fortress and its problems of access for our particular audience.

*Q: What was the government like at that time?*

ANYASO: Whenever you go to Nigeria it's never simple. The last military dictator was Babangida, no Abacha was after Babangida but the fact that Babangida had annulled an election one of the freest and fairest in Nigeria's history on June 12<sup>th</sup> he had annulled it, thrown it out, the western part of the country where the Yoruba are politically strong are still upset. They were upset from Babangida through Abacha they were still upset. So at this point Obasanjo had been elected who had been imprisoned under Sani Abacha and I believe Tom Pickering who was an Undersecretary of State and Susan Rice who was the Assistant Secretary for Africa had been in Nigeria when Abiola died. Now Abiola was a candidate who had won this free and fair election; it had been annulled and he was thrown in prison. He was a Yoruba. So we had these American officials visiting him to make sure he was okay and he died.

*Q: I have Tom talking about that. He said it was a rather tricky situation.*

ANYASO: Unbelievable that here they were. The steward had gone out for tea, brought tea, drank tea and the man just falls out, he just collapses. Anyway, so this is the background to my return to Nigeria and Obasanjo has now been out of prison. In my previous incarnation, I had done a press conference for former President Carter who liked Obasanjo who was in prison at the time and pleaded with Sani Abacha to release him. So I believe at least Abacha went half way; he didn't release him entirely but he put him under house arrest.

Anyway, this is a man with an interesting political history so now he is out and he's won this election. People are happy, hopeful that things will get better and being Nigeria things just seemed to get more complicated. He's a folksy kind of guy, liked to be looked upon, as a father

figure, papa, and he would have these weekly radio interviews and maybe even a talk show from time to time and talk to the public. Now he didn't like the media, he didn't like them questioning what he was doing but he would do this anyway because somebody told him it was a good idea. He allowed, well they allowed him more political space. At this point there was a legislature again after Abacha had cancelled it, abolished it, now there was a new national assembly that had been elected. He wanted to control it but they had a speaker and they were functioning. He had a vice president, it's interesting he is a military man he's not a democrat so he still wanted to dictate things and do things his way. He did not get along with his vice president and at one point when that vice president was running although it is a long story but anyway he seemed to try but there were things that were not good. For example, in terms of the budget, universities were used to getting quarterly stipends from the government to keep them running; he put them on a month to month basis and they were always late in getting paid so the universities had to go out to the commercial banks, borrow money to keep going; it was just horrendous.

Abacha had reformed the banks and set up an economic dream team. They called it the dream team; Nigerians love the US and they love all of our popular culture so they knew about the Los Angeles Lakers and Magic Johnson and all those people out there on the Lakers who had a dream.

*Q: These are basketball teams.*

ANYASO: That's right and so dream team is what they call their economic reform team. They had a woman who was the Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; they had the administrator for Abuja who was on that team and they all seemed to be doing the right thing, more transparency and things like that. HIV aids was getting attention under him; he was one of the first people to go out and get his blood tested to see if he had the virus. It was on TV and we were working through AID on this whole problem and that was a success. The polio situation when I first returned to the country the Rotarians, the International Rotary Club was trying to stamp out polio in the world; global campaign I think they called it polio plus and they were down to just a few cases in Pakistan and a few cases in Nigeria. So Kano was the epicenter for the program, there was this one village outside...

*Q: Up in Hausa country.*

ANYASO: Up in Hausa country very conservative Hausa country and there was this village outside the city of Kano, which is where they have this wild poliovirus. Obasanjo had appointed a woman to be in charge of this polio situation in health; she was not an expert she was a friend of his wife, this was still going on. This is conservative Hausa Fulani country and Islamic and this woman was Christian; she would go around with this cross on, this very large cross, and would make the people she was trying to work with very upset so we were having a few set backs in terms of this polio campaign. The World Health Organization was involved, we were involved, the Japanese were involved, and lots of donors were involved in trying to stamp it out.

Lo and behold it becomes political. The minister of health in Kano, the state minister of health decides that there is a conspiracy that this vaccine has something in it which is going to sterilize Muslims and he didn't trust any of us. So the U.S. AID director and I were on this team we were



trying to figure out how do we handle this; if it is a Muslim thing we have to get the Sultan of Sokoto involved and we did, he came out and he supported the vaccinations. They still didn't listen, the Nigerian government sent a team of people to Indonesia to test the vaccine and come back with a report. But anyway this whole thing had just sort of gone off the tracks. The upshot was that there were more infections now occurring in Nigeria, which lead to more infectious in eight other African countries; so instead of finally putting an end to this awful disease because of Nigeria it spread again and it's still going on. I think he was trying to do the right thing on that.

Now there is a difficulty as we stand for rule of law, we support constitutional arrangements; Obasanjo decided he wanted to have a third term. Now I won't mention Michael Bloomberg having a third term but at this point a third term was not something that the U.S. government wanted to support so our State Department was very firm that we would fight all efforts of Obasanjo to have a third term. He was bribing people in the legislature to vote for changing the constitution so that he could have a third term. Luckily once it was exposed they did not support it so he was not very happy with the United States over this. He had set up a fraud committee, which at first had done great things, but now it was being used politically against his enemies so it was a very interesting time again in Nigeria.

*End of reader*