

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

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JEAN MARY WILKOWSKI
Vice Consul
Port-of-Spain (1945-1950)

Ambassador Jean Wilkowski entered the Foreign Service in 1944. Her career included assignments in Trinidad, Colombia, Italy, France, Chile, Switzerland, Honduras, and an ambassadorship to Zambia. Ambassador Wilkowski was interviewed by Willis Armstrong in 1989.

Q: *Let's go back to Trinidad now. What did you do in Trinidad and what was it like?*

WILKOWSKI: Well, I was, as they told me, a vice consul in Port- of-Spain, Trinidad, then a British Crown Colony. The office consisted of Consul Claude Hall (there for 7 years) and myself. That was the staff plus 4-5 locals. He told me he hated shipping and all these over-bearing sea captains who come in here and cursed all over the place. "You take them over," he ordered. I was supposed to charm and quiet them, I guess.

They had different problems. The most amusing was the fact that most of them had venereal disease and they had to be cured before they got to the States. So the captain would come in, hem and haw, until I finally asked, "Is it the usual, Captain?" He would say, "Yeah." So I'd sign the seamen off the ship, to send them out to the U.S. Naval Base or hospital for the 2 weeks treatment. Then I'd sign them back on the ship. I also visaed the crew list, mediated union disputes, etc.

Once during a union dispute the Captain refused to do anything until I signed off some of the offending crew so the ship could sail to the U.S. I also did general consular work--citizenship for Americans, visas for Trinidadians. I had fun with that. Once I told some calypso singers going to the U.S. that one of the requirements was they sing for the Consulate before they got their visa to prove that, indeed, they had a profession and were legitimately en route to make recordings. So we used to have these mini-concerts in the Consulate. [Laughter]

In the meantime, poor old Consul Claude Hall was in the back room doing whatever he did--a lot of political work related to the U.S.-UK base agreement with its legal problems. President Roosevelt had exchanged over- age U.S. destroyers--were they 46 or 67 destroyers--for some strategic war- time bases in the Caribbean. We had a big naval base--Macqueryie--on the north coast.

Q: *One of them was Trinidad.*

WILKOWSKI: Yes. Trinidad was one of them. There was also Waller Field in the middle of the island--the longest maintenance line in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Indeed, my brother--a pilot--had stopped there on his way to north Africa and Europe. We also had an Army Docksite shipping base on Trinidad--3-5 major installations in all.

So the Consul did all of the base negotiation with the British Colonial Government and with the U.S. armed forces there in Trinidad. I did all the other consular work alone, some economic reporting. There is a lot of cacao down there, as you know. During the war some American candy companies which had gotten their coconut supplies elsewhere came to Trinidad. I remember the Peter Paul people were looking for coconut for their candy bars. There were also exports of lime juice, and small commercial transactions. Finally, we had much to do with the first major crash of a Pan American Airways Clipper plane, including loss of American lives.

Q: What about oil? Were they exporting oil from Trinidad at that point?

WILKOWSKI: Not as extensively as in later years. It was pretty much a limited British concession. I visited the oil fields, which were down in the south of the island. But oil was a minor thing at that time before the big strikes and exports which came later.

Q: Yes. The fuels didn't really come into production until later.

WILKOWSKI: The oil boom for Trinidad came in the late '60s or early '70s, if I recall.

Q: So your shipping was not tanker shipping. It was just miscellaneous.

WILKOWSKI: No. No tankers but big merchant ships from Africa, but more importantly bauxite transshipment from then British Guiana, and a lot of shipping captains would give me the eye and say, "Why don't you come down to B.G. and see the monkeys." I wasn't too keen on going down there either for monkeys or monkey shines.

Q: You should have gone. It's a fascinating place. I visited there.

WILKOWSKI: No. I had one experience on a ship out of Trinidad bound for New Orleans. I was a work-away and the only woman on board, but I didn't have that experience to guide me. It was just instinct that said, "Better not go down to B.G. as a guest of the captain."

Q: Instinct is always a good guide. [Laughter]

WILKOWSKI: So, at any rate, that's what I did in Trinidad.

**STANLEY D. SCHIFF
Economic/Labor Officer
Port-of-Spain (1955-1956)**

Stanley D. Schiff was born in New Jersey in 1925. He received his Bachelor's degree from Rutgers University in 1948, and his Master's Degree from Columbia University the following year. He served as a First Lieutenant overseas in the US Army from 1943 to 1946. Entering the Foreign Service in 1949, his postings include Baden, Strasbourg, Liverpool, Trinidad, Pakistan, and Brussels. Schiff was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on November 9, 2000.

Q: Today is January 3, 2001. Stan, 1955: Trinidad. You were there until when?

SCHIFF: From 1955 for not much over a year.

Q: What were you doing in Trinidad?

SCHIFF: I was the economic and labor officer. At that time, the consulate in what was then British Guyana had been closed, so we also had jurisdiction over British Guyana as well as Trinidad.

Q: Trinidad at that point was not independent.

SCHIFF: It was still a colony. It was on the threshold of becoming independent.

Q: How would you describe the situation in Trinidad at the time?

SCHIFF: It made an interesting contrast with British Guyana. That was one of the more noteworthy things. The population, the demographics of both the island and British Guyana, were quite similar. There was a roughly even split between Indians who had come as indentured servants and blacks who were originally slaves. Then there was a small number of Europeans and also Chinese. In that sense, they were both quite similar.

But their development had been different. There had been serious racial tension in British Guyana. There had not been in Trinidad. Not that everything was by any means totally harmonious, but the relations between Indians and Africans was reasonably good.

I suppose the main concerns at that time were really twofold. One was the economic prospects for the island. The other was its political future, whether it would gain its independence. I don't remember exactly when that happened, but it did in the not too distant future.

Q: Was there a leadership developing in Trinidad at the time?

SCHIFF: Yes, there was. A man named Eric Williams became the popular leader. I had an interesting experience meeting him. I remember calling up a local newspaper to ask about getting a subscription. They asked me to identify myself, which I did. Then there was a long pause. Then suddenly I found myself talking to Eric Williams. We made a date to get together for lunch and that began an acquaintanceship with Eric Williams, who was the principal political force on the island.

Q: How did he strike you at the time?

SCHIFF: Intelligent, curious, anxious to develop a good relationship with the U.S.

Q: Later, there was a strained relationship. Eric Williams sort of marched to his own drum. Where was his source of strength?

SCHIFF: Basically in the African community there. Trinidad was somewhat different from the islands in that it had oil. It had a major resource. But the preponderance of the working class was black. How much support he drew from the Indian population I'm not sure. I don't recall that there were at that time particularly prominent Indians in political leadership roles.

Q: I assume they would be more in the mercantile class.

SCHIFF: Yes, they were. They were fairly numerous in the sugar plantations as well. The civil service jobs, the bureaucracy, was predominantly African. Also, in terms of cabinet positions or senior level bureaucrats, those were overwhelmingly African.

Q: Was there a British colonial rule or had it been pretty well turned over to the people of Trinidad?

SCHIFF: There was still a British Governor General there at the time, but it was not long after we left that Trinidad gained its independence. We had become friendly with a very intelligent Chinese who served as Secretary of Labor at that time. This was still under colonial rule. He became the first native Governor General after independence. This was a period of fairly rapid evolution. I can't remember precise dates and how the chronology actually spelled out. But they were already priming themselves for independence.

Q: Did Tobago play much of a role?

SCHIFF: Not at that time, no.

Q: Over in British Guyana, what were you doing?

SCHIFF: I didn't go over often, but I went over there a couple of times in the year that I was in Trinidad. It was interesting because it was so different. They were also going through an evolution there. I remember talking to the head of the British corporate firm which virtually controlled the economic life of British Guyana, who was retiring. I remember being struck in this conversation by the serious resistance this guy had to the desegregation which had been occurring in the area. The idea of socially desegregated clubs, for example, was anathema to him. It was a good thing he was going back to England because he would have been very uncomfortable there. Their situation was somewhat different. This was a period when Cheddie Jagan, a communist, who had been in office and had been thrown out of office by the British, was sort of on the sidelines but nevertheless was a virtual reality. The mayor of Georgetown was

a Chinese at the time. But the political prospects in that period for Trinidad were much better than they were for British Guyana, which had been in trouble because of concern about Jagan.

Q: Jagan was married to an American and was a dentist by training. He was very left- wing.

SCHIFF: Communist. His wife was a communist. You didn't have that kind of thing on Trinidad, that kind of movement.

Q: On Trinidad, did we have a consulate general?

SCHIFF: We had a consulate general and we also had the naval station there, which was a legacy from World War II. It had been reduced in size but it was still a significant presence on the island. Those were the two main offices.

Q: Who was the consul general?

SCHIFF: Walter Jenkins.

Q: How did he operate?

SCHIFF: I don't recall anything distinctive in his style, but a very nice guy who got on well with people. We had held a small dinner at our house to introduce him to Eric Williams because I knew I was going out and I thought it was important that he had established that contact with Williams. I liked Jenkins.

Q: Were you finding that as Trinidad was moving towards independence we were thinking that this was a great idea or was there a certain amount of foot dragging on our part?

SCHIFF: I don't think there was at that time any particular resistance to it. What was ultimately going to affect us was the disposition of the Navy station, and that was not a topic of discussion in my year there.

Q: Part of your assignment was to follow the labor movement. Were there any problems with that?

SCHIFF: Not as far as we were concerned. But there was always a certain amount of restiveness within labor because they were not the most handsomely rewarded people in the population for the kind of work that they did. But still, Trinidad was economically probably the best off or certainly one of the best off in the British Caribbean.

Q: As labor officer, was there any AFL-CIO connection?

SCHIFF: Not with my job.

Q: They didn't have anybody come down?

SCHIFF: Not that I can recall. This was relatively small potatoes compared to Central or South America.

Q: You left there in '55. Where did you go?

SCHIFF: I went to Cornell. This was so that I could appreciate the warmth of the tropical Caribbean. It was for a year of graduate work in economics and to give us an appreciation for how other people live. We had gone from England, where it had been cool and my wife had not been well (she had developed a respiratory problem there and Trinidad was a great place to recuperate from that). Then we were thrust into northern New York and the cold, but at least it was clean cold.

PHILIP A. HABIB
Political Officer
Port-of-Spain (1958-1960)

Ambassador Habib was born and raised in New York and educated at the University of Idaho, the Sorbonne and the University of California at Berkeley. Entering the Foreign Service in 1949 he served in: Ottawa, Canada; Wellington, New Zealand; Port-of-Spain, Trinidad; Seoul, Korea; Saigon, Vietnam and Paris, France. In Washington, Ambassador Habib held the senior positions of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asia, Under Secretary, and Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State. He was also Political Counselor in Saigon and participated in the Vietnam negotiations in Paris in 1967-1968. He served as US Ambassador to Korea from 1971 to 1974. Ambassador Habib was interviewed by Edward Mulcahy in 1984.

HABIB: I was interested in the older civilizations. Well, at any rate, what was happening in the Caribbean, the British had gotten together with the people on the island, and they wanted a political officer there. They set up a new position, a political officer, and sent me as political officer to the Caribbean. I was stationed in Trinidad, but we were responsible for the area at that time.

Q: So you had a roving commission.

HABIB: No, well I roved. Our consular district extended from Antigua to Trinidad. At that point the Federation headquarters were there, and I got very much involved in the policies of the Federation, elections. It was good training reporting on elections. I spent lots of hours running around chewing the fat with politicians. An interesting period. Probably one thing, we got a little bit too deeply involved.

Q: We were in the Caribbean Commission. It used to be we had to deal with them.

HABIB: Frances McReynolds is what I remember.

Q: Yes, I worked with her in IO.

HABIB: Frances knew me very well. She us come down there, or else I'd stop in IO and see her.

Q: That's right. I first began hearing about you from Frances.

HABIB: Yes, Frances McReynolds and I were...she liked me, and she thought I was doing good work, and was very interested in what I was doing. She was interested in the Federation, which I was. I thought the Federation was a great idea and should not be allowed to fail. I think the Federation failed because we didn't support it properly. The British didn't do the right thing, but we didn't do the right thing either. We did absolutely the wrong thing by not supporting it sufficiently. We thought that was behind us, not doing what could have been done to preserve the Federation. In fact, we got caught up in this business. We had naval bases there. The Navy didn't want to give them up, and of course, the local guys wanted us out. We got involved in the famous Chaguaramas naval base in Trinidad. Eric Williams became Prime Minister, and he was dead set against the base and wanted us out. And we began to try to manipulate the situation. And one of my bosses, a wonderful, wonderful man - he had spent some time with CIA, he had a tendency to get involved in political situations, and he got me involved. We were good at it. I knew everybody, as usual. In every post I went to, the first thing I would get to know more about the post and the people than anybody in the embassy, or consulate, or whatever it was. I covered the waterfronts. I knew every politician in Antigua, I still know some of them. Some of them, I knew their fathers before them. I went down to the Caribbean in '79 to take a look and see what could be done, which I did do and made a report, which unfortunately required some money and therefore they didn't do it. Now they're spending 20 times what I recommended to be spent. I saw some of the same guys that I knew back in the old days, or their sons. A son of a man I knew very well in Barbados is the present Prime Minister of Barbados. The son of a man I knew very well in Antigua is the number two man, his father is still around. The son of the man I knew in Jamaica, the first Prime Minister in Jamaica, when I was working on the problems there. The principal leader of St. Lucia, I used to travel around the islands with him while he was showing me the problems of the island in a broken down Ford convertible - the door on my side wouldn't open. I always had to leap over the door to get in - he was the chief minister of St. Lucia. He was showing me what their problems were. He didn't like the British colonialism...this was on the threshold of independence for all these countries, all of whom later became independent individually. And I knew them all. But I got into the business of ethnic politics, black-versus white. It was an interesting period, and I learned a lot about political reporting at the electoral level, because they had elections. And I got to know my way around very well indeed.

Q: Always to allow yourself an out in case the election didn't go the way you thought it would. Well, the British never succeeded anywhere in getting an independent federation.

HABIB: Even if the federation could have been supported it has held together. The trouble is Jamaicans had been dominated.

Q: Well Jamaica is still not in the current association with those British islands.

HABIB: Of course, Guyana didn't even join the federation. They always talk about it. The Federation was still there when I left, but it faded not long after, it broke up.

Q: Who was your Consul General?

HABIB: Walter Orebaugh. He and I are still very close friends, in fact I played golf with him a couple of months ago in Florida where he retired. He was a man who had an extraordinary career in the Foreign Service. He had been consul in Nice when the war broke out. He was captured and interned by the Germans, and he escaped from a German prisoner of war camp, and he spent the rest of the war leading partisan groups behind the lines. In fact, he got the Medal of Freedom for it. He later became Consul General in Florence, and somewhere on the Mexican border. He ran the Italian and the western European desk in CIA.

Q: When they were getting organized.

HABIB: But he knew everybody. He had led partisan groups, and he knew everybody.

Q: I think Pete Hart was telling me this story one time. I don't think I ever met him.

HABIB: He's writing a book about it. He asked me to write the forward. I've read some of the chapters. He's still writing it. He's retired, we see each other even to this day. He has a place not far from the place where I have a place in Florida. He likes to come down to the place where I have. So he goes and uses my apartment. I have this small apartment down in Naples, Florida, and he goes down and spends the weekend there. It's there anytime he wants it, he just calls up the person I have to keep it clean. He was a good boss, and we became exceptionally good friends.

But in any event, he left and I had an interesting experience, I won't tell you his name, I had a Consul General who turned out to be an alcoholic. I remember one time I was waiting to meet his plane, and when he got off, all of a sudden his wife ran up, she knew what was wrong. He had to be dried out, anyhow she kept him at home for a couple of weeks. I ran the god damn office and didn't tell anybody. I don't know what you should do in those circumstances. Should you report it to the Department that the man is non compos mentis, and he's out. Or do you just do your job. So I decided, what the hell, he'd stay home while he was drying out, but it would take weeks. And I was running the office, sending all the reports in, everything that had to be done. Go up and see him while he was drying out. The funny thing was before this experience, he kind of resented me because I knew everybody, and I knew everything that was going on. He was new and didn't know anybody, and he kind of resented me. But after I had covered up for him, from then on there was nothing I could do wrong. He decided somehow or another that I had made him, and I had. Hell, all I had to do was send a message to Washington telling them the truth.

Q: I never had a problem with a chief, I've had alcoholics under me.

HABIB: A very difficult problem to work with, especially when he was under the influence. He would get awful mad. I would fluff it off. A very interesting experience. But I decided I'd just ran the place and I ran the whole god damn place.

Q: Were you second rank in the office?

HABIB: I was an FSO-4. After Wristonization they knocked us back. I had been promoted to 4, then I went back to 5. They [promoted us] very rapidly. When I joined the Service we went from 6 to 5, and I went from 6 to 5 in the first year. Then I went from 5 to 4, and then I got knocked back to 5.

Q: I was one of 16 lucky FSO-4s at that time and stayed in 4. We were on the list.

HABIB: What had happened to me interesting enough, was that...you remember the McCarthy period when they took all that time to give everybody another full field check.

Q: And we went two years without any...

HABIB: That's right, and I lost a promotion. I was on that promotion list, I know it. But I was young and made up for it. One of the guys that worked for me there, a consular officer, later on was with me in Vietnam, and Paris, and I had the pleasure to meet with him and made him an ambassador. A lot of my boys became ambassadors.

Q: That's great.

HABIB: When I was in Trinidad I had the biggest political section that was ever put together--not Trinidad, when I was in Saigon in the '60s. I had this huge political section, and a lot of those guys have become ambassadors. And then when I was Assistant Secretary in Washington the guys I had working for me when I was Deputy Assistant Secretary, a lot of those guys became ambassadors--Bob Miller, Jim Rosenthal, Tom Corkland, John Burton. Dick Smyser who is not an ambassador, but is Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees. John Negrofonte, Honduras, these guys were all my boys. I took them all with me, most of them were with me in Paris. Dick Holbrooke was one of my guys I took to Paris. A political appointee but when I took him he was an FSO. A lot of those guys were first class. They did good work, and I picked them, you know, spotted them. And then later on, of course, when I was in Washington, I spotted a lot of guys. But even at that time I was spotting good guys. Just like Sam Berger did for me. Well, anyway, Trinidad was a good post from that standpoint.

Q: Your first solid political work.

HABIB: Also the first post where I had some [authority]. Despite a small embassy because of what we were doing.

Q: From a family point of view...

HABIB: It was very comfortable. We had a nice little...not a fancy house, but a comfortable house. That was the first time that we ever really had a house, with servants. We had a housekeeper-nurse in New Zealand. But this time we had a cook and a maid, and houseboy who also doubled as a driver and gardener. He was an Indian and the other two were black. But I was in Trinidad in '79 on a mission to look the place over. Some of the people in the consulate still remembered me. Lo and behold here comes my old gardener and driver driving up to see me. He heard that I was there. He was now prosperous, an East Indian gentleman.

Q: Saved enough money to go into business for himself.

HABIB: When I left I got him a job with somebody else in the Trinidad government. He was a very bright boy. My wife taught him a lot of things, she taught him an awful lot of things, and he remembered me very well. She would teach him how to cook western style. Most servants if you take the trouble to teach them our ways of doing things, was appreciate.

Q: And don't cry at them the first time they slip up.

HABIB: In all the years I was in the Foreign Service, we only fired one servant.

JOHN O. GRIMES
Political/Labor Officer
Port-of-Spain (1968-1970)

Mr. Grimes was born and raised in Alabama and educated at Notre Dame University. After service in the United States Marine Corp he joined the State Department and served as Diplomatic Courier until being commissioned as a Foreign Service Officer in 1962. A specialist in Labor Affairs, Mr. Grimes served in Glasgow, Valetta, Port of Spain, Kinshasa, Brussels, Tunis and Paris (twice). He had several tours of duty in Washington, DC and a year of Labor Studies at Harvard University Mr. Grimes was interviewed by James F. Shea and Don Kienzle in 1996.

Kienzle: Then after Harvard, you were assigned to Trinidad?

GRIMES: I was assigned to Trinidad, yeah, that was my first post. There was no political reporting officer there, so my job was partly political and partly labor.

Kienzle: This would have been from 1968-1970.

GRIMES: Right. That was kind of an interesting time down that way because Black Power had kind of swept down to the islands of the Caribbean, and it was an active movement in Trinidad. There was always the fear of conflict between the Indian community and the black community. That was an interesting place to be because you saw two races, neither of them white, and you saw their interaction with each other.

Shea: You were in Port of Spain.

GRIMES: Port of Spain, right. That was interesting.

Shea: Who was your Ambassador?

GRIMES: Symington, Fife Symington.

Shea: How did he regard the position of Labor Attaché?

GRIMES: He wasn't a pro, you know. He was a political appointee. All he wanted to see was that things were covered, so he didn't focus too much on whether you were a labor officer or a political officer, or what you were. He just wanted the job done. He was very much a gentleman, very generous and helpful to me in the things I was trying to do. I was trying to stay in touch with the Black Power movement. There was a group there called the Tapia Group, so-called intellectuals. Really they almost succeeded in staging a coup. A pitiful little thing, it is almost opéra bouffe but at the time it was kind of serious. The government could have been knocked off if we hadn't gotten some material down there to them. The army revolted; the police remained loyal. But they got mortars and stuff down there to them and they were able to contain the army which didn't amount to too much.

Kienzle: This was in Trinidad.

GRIMES: Not in Port of Spain proper, but in Trinidad.

Shea: What year was that, John?

GRIMES: That would have been about '69. We had a little prior official information on this. But because my office was on the ground floor, I often was passed a lot of people that reception didn't know what to do with. I was glad in a way because I got an Army -- he wasn't a deserter -- but he was an active Army person, a walk-in who wanted to tell us about a coup that was being planned in the Army. It turned out to be true. We were able to confirm it through our contacts with that Tapia House, the intellectual Black Power wave; we were able to meet some people who were actually the legal representatives of the Tapia group. One was of Irish extraction. She was afraid for herself, so she kept us posted on exactly what was happening and when the coup was coming. She had it within a day. The agency representative down there, the CIA guy, maybe you don't want me to talk about this?

Kienzle: No, go right ahead if you feel comfortable.

GRIMES: It was so long ago, nobody cares. He wanted me to give him the name of the person who was giving the information to me. I told this guy that I wasn't going to do that, you know. So he got the ambassador to call me in. I told the ambassador, "No I just can't do that; he has the information, he can do with it whatever he wants to, but I am not going to put somebody in danger for their life." The ambassador backed me up on that. She was a reliable person. They

wanted to know about the source's reliability; that's a legitimate question, but not the source's identity. They sure as Hell wouldn't give me the identity of their informants!

Shea: Did you have any regional responsibilities in Trinidad?

GRIMES: No, just Trinidad. I remember the leader of the Indian group the sugar workers. His name was Saigon Badass. He was a bad ass in many ways. He carried a weapon and was on drugs; he was a mess, but he kept the Indian community under control.

Kienzle: When you say "Indian," do you mean from the south or...

GRIMES: East Indian.

Kienzle: East Indian, you don't mean native American?

GRIMES: No East Indian. These were people imported by the Brits to grow sugar cane.

Kienzle: So the same thing that happened in the Fiji Islands. Anyhow the Agency confirmed there was a coup in the making, and they believed it?

GRIMES: Oh yeah. When they got the request from Eric Williams who was the Prime Minister, they got the request for some military support, and they got it down there promptly. They got it down there within hours. They saved his bacon.

Kienzle: Were the British involved?

GRIMES: No the Brits were not involved. There was a British officer who commanded what they call a fleet. It was really just a gunboat, but he played a crucial role because the Army had started in toward town, and if they had gotten there, they would have succeeded. This guy brought his gunboat up along the shore and he blasted a cliff that overhung the highway. He blocked the highway that way, which gave the police enough time to deploy on top of a hill with their mortars and they were able to stop them.

Shea: It sounds like the Army just gave up. As I recall, the oil workers were pretty strong there.

GRIMES: Yeah, the oil workers were strong. But I don't know, they didn't seem to cause much trouble, not while I was there, anyway. The great fear was that the students and the oil workers would get together. It never happened.

Shea: Who was the leader of the oil workers?

GRIMES: I was trying to remember that, George... It is a British name, but I can't recall it. Another interesting thing that happened while I was down there related to American labor -- the Hathaway shirt company had set up an offshore plant down there to produce these fine shirts. I think they produced them at about a dollar and a half or two dollars a shirt and they brought them into the States. They left a button hole unfinished or something so they could import the shirts

virtually duty-free. They were sold in the States for the same price that American-made Hathaways were selling. So, the garment workers ... which group?

Kienzle: The ILGW or the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, that must have been it.

GRIMES: Yes, they struck Hathaway in several places and told them you either close down or we are going to keep you closed down. They closed the plant in Trinidad. The head of the TTLC, the Trinidad and Tobago Labor Congress, a guy named Spencer came in one day and said, "Hey, you can't do this to us!" I said, "Well, it is not me that is doing it." He said, "Let me talk to..." I got the Amalgamated folks on the phone and let Spencer talk to them directly. I forget the guy's name up there who was the head of Amalgamated at the time.

Kienzle: The most recent one is Jack Shenkman.

GRIMES: No, that wasn't the name.

Shea: Morty Findlay or even before that Jake Potofsky.

GRIMES: That is it, Jake Potofsky. He said, "Well tell me, if you were up here in my shoes, what would you do?" That did it for Spencer. He said, "I guess I'd do the same thing." He said, "But don't worry too much. I hear that Hathaway's parent company is going to keep that plant down there and produce women's girdles or some damn thing." That is what happened. Those guys in Trinidad didn't lose their jobs.

Kienzle: Any other notable labor issues there?

GRIMES: No. That was the only thing. There wasn't that much going on, actually.

Shea: Did the AIFLB have a representative there?

GRIMES: No, there was a traveling representative based in Barbados, I think. Anyway, he'd come our way once in awhile; that's about it.

Kienzle: Then after Trinidad you went to Paris as the Assistant Labor Attaché.

GRIMES: Yeah. Let's see. After Trinidad I was back here for something.

Kienzle: Oh the international organizations.

GRIMES: Yeah, I had been out so long that I had to have a tour in the States.

Shea: Yeah, for 12 years. I came up against that myself.

GRIMES: They didn't have any labor job for me, so they threw me into this damned international organizations thing doing international conferences. That was a stupid thing. It was a frustrating

assignment. It was interesting in a way to see all the damn organizations we belonged to that produced nothing, absolutely nothing. One literally was called the Codex Alimentarius.

I looked at that organization; it was in my bailiwick, and I said, "What the Hell are we doing here?" I recommended that we drop out of it because they had been in existence for, I think, 12 years and they had never agreed on a code on anything. When I put in that suggestion, God damn, out of the woodwork over at agriculture, came all these clowns, "What are you doing to us?" they demanded. "That is our annual trip to Rome!"

Shea: You had a food and agricultural thing, Alimentary.

GRIMES: I found out then, once something gets a foothold in government, it never disappears.

VICTOR NIEMEYER
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Port-of-Spain (1969-1970)

Mr. Niemeyer was born and raised in Texas and educated at the Scheiner Institute Junior College, Texas A & M, and the University of Texas. He served in the US Navy in World War II. Joining the USIS in 1958, Mr. Niemeyer served in Guatemala, Philippines and Chile as Director of specific programs, and as Public Affairs Officer in Mexico and Trinidad. Mr. Niemeyer was interviewed by Lewis Hoffacker in 1999.

Q: That's good. Your wife and the kids were comfortable and content there?

NIEMEYER: Oh, yes, they were.

Q: They were able to move around normally.

NIEMEYER: Yes, they certainly were. The kids grew up speaking Spanish. They would talk to us in English, but then when they really wanted to express themselves, well, they went back into Spanish.

Q: That's good. A great asset.

NIEMEYER: It was good. Stephen and Chris - they, I think, really profited greatly from their exposure to the cultures of several different countries, but basically Latin American culture.

Well, four years in Monterrey this time. We were in Mexico City for two years, four in Monterrey, and came time, after having been out of the country for 12 years, to serve a tour in Washington. Alright. So we went back to Texas, bought a car in Laredo, drove to Washington, and I went by the old USIA Foreign Service office at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue. I thought, I would just go and pick up my mail. You know, we'd been there for a day. And as I did, the

personnel officer walked down the hall. He said, "Hi, Vic." I said, "Hi, Frank." I can't think of his last name now. He worked for Tony Covins, but Frank was this man's name I'm pretty sure. He stopped about maybe 15 feet and said, "Say, Vic, have you got a minute?" I said, "Sure." So he says, "Come." So I follow him down the corridor, through a long, long corridor back into another corridor into his office, and he gets up and closes the door after I'd sat down. I thought, well, this is strange. We had orders to Washington. I was going to work in the book program with Lou Fanget, and I thought, well, what's this? Anyway, he closed the door, and there I was. He and I were in this office - I was on one side of his desk; he was on the other behind it. He leaned over his desk and sort of quietly said, "Vic, would you like to go out again?" I said, "What? Go out again? We just got back. My wife has been buying some winter clothes." This was September of '69. He said, "Well, the PAO in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, is coming home on home leave, and he's not returning. He doesn't know it yet, but he's not going back, and we need somebody there for a year." I said, "Well, I don't know. I've got to talk to my wife." "Oh, don't do that," he said.

To make a long story short, we agreed that I would approach her over the weekend, and I'd let him know on Monday. That was a Friday. Well, I did, and the result was that, I think, about two weeks later we were headed to Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. We got down there, and that was another

—

Q: That was a promotion in a way.

NIEMEYER: Yes, it was a one-man post, and I was the PAO there, is what it was. And again, I've liked every place we've ever been, really, but Trinidad was great. No tortillas, but we were speaking English most of the time, well, not all the time really. Every now and then you'd meet somebody who spoke Spanish. The kids went to a school just about a block away, run by some English people, and they developed a little bit of a British way of talking.

But Trinidad was great, memorable for two events. One was Carnival of 1970, and it was just a beautiful experience. We participated in what they call a Jouvère. This was the Monday before the Carnival, and we had gone to what they call a "jump-up." You know, Trinidad is noted for its music, its mambo, it's jump-ups, it's steel bands and pans; and a jump-up is where you'd just be dancing normally, and then you'd just stop and start jumping up and down. This was out on a patio of grass. We danced and jumped on that grass until about 3:30 in the morning. We were supposed to start on this movement down Jouvère, a parade, at 4:30. When we left then there was not a blade of grass. It was a sea of mud. There was absolutely no grass at all, but it had been a most beautiful lawn before we started. I'll never forget that. We went home and tried to sleep. We did go to sleep for just a few minutes, which was a mistake. We never should have done it. We got up and drank coffee, but a few minutes later, there we were parading down the street, yelling, by music in this parade - we were just having a glorious time. And my mother came down for Carnival. She didn't go to that jump-up or that parade, that Jouvère, but she did go to the Carnival, the main Carnival parade. The Trinidadians celebrate Carnival by budgeting their money for the most exotic costumes, and that's about the only word I could use that I find suitable. They are exotic, the most beautiful things. Anyway, then they all parade out in a kind of a stadium-like, after going down the streets. So that was one thing, Carnival. We'd never seen that before.

And the second thing was a black power uprising. Well, this was our second, well, a little bit of a revolution in Guatemala - just a few bombs - but this was something. The militia mutinied, and they were at a camp called Tetron Bay, where I had been during the war when the submarine I served on was giving sound practice to allied escort vessels in Trinidad. This was my second tour of duty in Trinidad, really, one for the navy and this one for USIA. And they'd mutinied and were marching on the capital, Port-of-Spain, when a very resourceful British captain of the Royal Navy, who was head of the Trinidadian Defense Force, got up close to a cliff on that road and fired I don't know how many rounds of 40 millimeter shells into that cliff, which just produced an avalanche, and that blocked the road. So those soldiers who had mutinied were not about to go through the jungle and get around it. That was a bit of work, I think. And this effectively ended the revolt. They were trapped in their part of the island there and did not come into Port-of-Spain. But it was touch and go there for a while. I remember a man coming who worked for me named Lloyd Rolaire. He was head of the information program. He said, "If you look over there by your house up on the cliffs in those trees, you can just see trees moving. I think there are just a lot of men back in there that *have* gone around." But he was wrong. There weren't any men there. There was just a good breeze that was blowing those coconut palms and other palms, and it made you think that a whole army was encamped there or moving onto the city. Finally things calmed down. Two or three people were killed, but the mutineers decided that they had been wrong, and their leaders were caught, and I don't know what happened to them. But the regiment, as it was called, returned to duty to guarding the country and not to overthrowing the government. This is what Eric Williams, who was the prime minister -

Q: Oh, yes. Did you have any contact with him, or did you have any impressions of him?

NIEMEYER: No, I didn't meet him. We met his daughter, but never did meet him.

Q: He was a very tough customer. At times he was anti-US, was he not?

NIEMEYER: Yes, he had trouble here in the States, I think - marital problems. He had either abandoned a wife or divorced her and, well, I don't know the story, but I know that he could not return to the United States unless he had some diplomatic coverage.

Q: And then, as I recall, he wouldn't even see the American ambassador. Was that during your period, or was that later?

NIEMEYER: The American ambassador was Stuart Symington.

Q: Well, I guess that worked out. It must have been later when Williams decided he didn't want to see the American ambassador.

NIEMEYER: Oh, really, is that right?

Q: But that's not during your period. You had Stuart Symington. Was he a good boss?

NIEMEYER: Symington, I think, did a creditable job, yes.

Q: I can't recall. Was he from Missouri?

NIEMEYER: He was from Maryland.

Q: Maryland, okay.

NIEMEYER: I think it was his son who was governor of Arizona that we heard so much about a few months ago. We got along well with Symington.

Q: But you had just a year there in Port-of-Spain. You had one year.

NIEMEYER: Had one year, that's right. And we got there in September and left, I guess it was, July.

Q: Back to Washington.

NIEMEYER: This time we got our three years in Washington, that's right. I was in the book program in Washington and worked for Lou Fanget. I was his deputy. This was the book translation program I mentioned earlier. And then when Lou retired in 1972, I went to work in another part of the information program in USIA. That was checking on different manuscripts and so forth like that.

WADE MATTHEWS
Political Officer
Port-of-Spain (1970-1972)

Wade Matthews was born and raised in North Carolina. He attended the University of North Carolina and served in the US Army between 1955 and 1956. He then entered the Foreign Service in 1957 and held positions in Munich, Salvador, Lorenzo Marques, Trinidad and Tobago, Lima, Guyana, Ecuador, and Chile. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: You were in Trinidad-Tobago from when to when?

MATTHEWS: 1970. I got there several months after the mutiny which was the epochal political event of the time. Where the unsuccessful mutiny of officers (some were sincere but most were self-serving), which Eric Williams then Prime Minister and his group had successfully put down, largely because they had no or very little support. I left in '72. I was there exactly two years October '70-October '72.

Q: Could you talk first a bit about the embassy and who was the ambassador and what were American interests as defined during this '70-'72 period.

MATTHEWS: The ambassador when I arrived and during the first year I was there was Whythe Symington. He had run for congress from Maryland. He was a conservative Republican. I last saw him about 10 days ago when he stopped by our place up in Newport just for a visit of five minutes, no more. We've kept in touch. I have kept in touch with a lot of people over the years, some of the political appointees not. The main problem as I told Harry Clinton Reed later on, was that all my immediate bosses, with one exception, had died. Reed is now dead, too, of course, but Symington is still around. One year he was there, and then Anthony Marshall replaced him, also a political appointee.

It was customary that political appointees went to Trinidad and Tobago back in those days. One of the reasons was (A) it was an English language post; (B) U.S. interests were limited in those areas. When I arrived we had a missile tracking station which was still in operation. It was the northern part of an old navy base. It was run technically under the Air Force but it was a missile tracking station.

We had Texaco, a major oil producer by Caribbean standards, not by world standards; Amoco; and I think another oil company which came in, I think while I was there, and developed offshore oil production. Reynolds Aluminum imported bauxite from Guyana and did some additional processing and trans-shipping from Trinidad and Tobago.

The population was only about a million people. Nonetheless, we had significant - it is hard to say significant - we has some exports of interest and export potential, but most of the exports as I recall were connected with the petroleum industry.

Q: During the two years you were there '70-'72 could you describe the government? Eric Williams was an interesting person and how we dealt with - his approach to us - and how the Ambassadors dealt with him; also how you went about your work.

MATTHEWS: Eric Williams was an authoritarian individual but it was a democratic society. I would not call it a dictatorship in any way, shape or form; definitely democratic. They would say what they damn well wanted to say and nobody would arrest them for saying what they wanted to say. The people who led the mutiny were in jail of course. They were tried and most were convicted. The ringleaders were convicted; the rest were expelled from the military, and some might have even been reintegrated; I'm not sure. It was an extremely small military; they didn't even have a navy, they had a coast guard. Williams was the undisputed leader. No he wasn't undisputed. There was a dispute for the leadership of the People's National Movement which was the ruling party. The principal opposition party was East Indian dominated. The PM was Black dominated. The two races were almost equal in terms of population in Trinidad and Tobago. The mulatto element was primarily black-white mix, although some black-Indian mix made up the difference. That was a fairly substantial group of people. We are talking maybe about 20% of the population and some Chinese and what have you. Unlike in Guyana where I later served, demographically the blacks and the part-blacks had a majority of the population. The PM had that. A.N.R. Roberts, who had been the Deputy Prime Minister, Eric Williams thought had encouraged the mutiny so he didn't trust his loyalty. So he fell from the party. He organized his own relatively small political group because he was from Tobago with a population of, oh,

maybe 30,000 or so - a small population, therefore a small population base. It never really amounted to a great deal. He was younger and was considered more leftist than Eric Williams.

We had relations with them all. We had no big deal. I think the man's name, I can't remember his name, the head of the East Indian party. I got to know him fairly well; an old man. I attended his funeral pyre. He was Hindu and a pyre was built and he was cremated; that sort of thing. We had relations all over. We had very good relations with all the labor elements there. I submitted, well I had to submit reports. In fact the Waterfront workers, as I recall, one of the ways I impressed myself because they kept bringing it up, was that I drank them under the table at one sort of meeting we had. They invited me to some sort of meeting. They had an assistance program for the trade unions through the labor development arm of the AFL-CIO down there. We had an AFL officer who was assigned there. He was from the steelworkers union in Maryland and he was a trade unionist essentially, a black fellow.

Q: What was our feeling about Eric Williams and how did he deal with Symington and the next Ambassador?

MATTHEWS: Very ambivalent. Eric Williams had lived in the United States at one time; he knew the United States fairly well. He suffered some racial discrimination in the United States which he never forgot. He was mixed; he was not pure black. He was well-educated. He felt himself far superior to almost anybody else on the island, regardless of his race. And he didn't hide this feeling of superiority. He may have been superior. Certainly he was a good political tactician.

His relations with the embassy were not all that open. I would cover the legislature sometimes. Inevitably he would send a note over that he would want to see me about something, and I would hope that he would want to see me about some political development or this, that or the other. Inevitably it was someone who would like to have a visa to the United States; can you arrange this and so on. This is on the floor of Parliament which met regularly. But I had contacts all over, including with a number of the trade unions.

Illustrative, one of the trade union chiefs, he was also a senator had a farewell reception for me at his home. All the senior the waterfront workers union gave a little reception for me down at the union hall and several others. But, he had one at his home. Then he said, "After this we all want to come down to the hotel and see you before you leave Where are you going to be staying?" I said, "The Trinidad Hilton for the last couple of nights after we had moved out of our house." There was a Prime Ministers conference taking place actually at the Trinidad Hilton, part of it at least there, from the English speaking Caribbean. Carl had not come. I thought, well, you say a lot of things at a reception. About ten or eleven o'clock PM, the day before we were leaving the next morning to take a plane out. We had packed up and all that sort of thing, of course. Betty had already gone to bed and the kids were in their respective rooms. We had a suite. The way to get into the suite, oddly as I recall, was through the bedrooms. I don't remember the logistics, but it was that way. To get into the living part you had to go through the bedroom. Betty and the kids were in the bedroom, and I got a call, Carl Tull saying, "I'm coming down to say good-bye to you. I told you I was coming and I'm on my way." I said, "Carl the family is in bed now." He said, "Well, I'm coming down anyway." I said, "Okay, fine, I'm delighted to see you. Come on down.

You will have to pardon my wife, she is in bed already and may not want to get up." He said, "That is all right. I'm bringing a couple of people with me." I said, "Who?" "Michael Mannling and Forbes Brenner. Ministers of Jamaica." And down goes the phone. We got our clothes on and there was a knock on the door which was the bedroom door. Betty said she was going to feign sleep So I escorted these two Prime Ministers and Carl Tull, and they stayed a very short time. But I told Forbes Brenner later when I was assigned to Guyana and frequent Chargé and DCM, "You remember where we first met?" "No." "In the Hotel." "Oh, yes! I remember that." Anyway that is illustrative of the informality of Trinidad.

Q: How did Fyfe Symington run the embassy and what was his relationship with Eric Williams?

MATTHEWS: Stiff. Eric Williams thought he had racial prejudice whether he did or not, and he never really got over that. On the other hand Fyfe had been a strong supporter of a spirited U.S. reaction against the mutiny, and Eric Williams as a tactician liked that.

One of the issues that came up while we were there was Chinese representation. As I recall, we still recognized Nationalist China and he made a spirited case that Trinidad should not switch representation to the PRC. They did switch representation to the PRC. He took this badly and let it be known that he took it badly. Eric Williams didn't appreciate that. He left not because the Trinidadians said they wanted him out; he left just because he, he was a fairly wealthy individual His wife was one of the heirs to the Mellon fortune. His son is currently Governor of Arizona and having a few problems out there. He was a nephew of Stuart Symington who is a senator from Missouri.

He was replaced by Tony Marshall who was from a well-connected but not nearly as wealthy family of good Republican credentials, a much younger person who ran the embassy in a looser form. Fyfe for example one of the female officer a very attractive officer who later on married a Guyanese, consular officer wore slacks to the office a couple of times. He thought this was absolutely could not be permitted, that she had to wear a dress. She took umbrage at that, and there was a little tenseness, if you will, on that. Symington's analysis of how things were doing in Trinidad was pretty much on the mark. He was not a high political profile person.

Q: Then you left there in 1972 and whither?

MATTHEWS: From there I then went back and had this finally, I was offered several posts but because I was still an FSO-4. I had not been promoted. I thought my career was going absolutely nowhere. So, I was only offered 04 type positions. The best one that I could find was one of two labor positions, political-labor officer positions because after all I had one. I tried to get a political counselor position in Latin America. I wanted a Spanish speaking post, absolutely, that was my sine qua non. I was offered political officer job at Caracas and at Lima, Peru.

MICHAEL M. MAHONEY
Consular Officer
Port-of-Spain (1971-1974)

Michael M. Mahoney was born on June 24, 1944 in Massachusetts. He received his BA from Saint Michaels College in 1966. He received his MA from the University of Wyoming in 1969. He served in the Peace Corps from 1968 to 1969. His career included positions in countries including Trinidad, Tobago, Greece, the Dominican Republic, Canada, and Italy. Mr. Mahoney was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 17, 1995.

Q: *What was your first assignment?*

MAHONEY: I had an odd sort of sequence. First, I was assigned to Geneva, Switzerland, as a refugee and migration officer. But before I went, that assignment was canceled, in a budget-reduction exercise. I spent about six weeks in the Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs, as it was then called, working on odd matters, because I had a time gap. And then I went to Trinidad and Tobago as a consular officer.

Q: *In Trinidad and Tobago, what was the situation when you got there?*

MAHONEY: It had been independent for about eight or nine years. It was run by an intellectual historian named Eric Williams, a black man who had written a very impressive, standard work about the economics of slavery in the Caribbean. Educated in the United States, but quite, I would say, skeptical and dubious of American civilization and culture, and determined to keep his country apart from us. It was a multi-political-party system, free press, but Williams had been in power for some years.

As soon as he became prime minister, he brought about the closing and removal of a large American naval base at Chaguaramas, which had been initially started in World War II as part of the destroyer-bases deal that Roosevelt did with the British. Williams, in fact, ran for office and made his initial career on the slogan: "I will break Chaguaramas, or it will break me." And he did in fact get the Americans out.

He wanted very little American presence in the country. Trinidad is the only country in the Caribbean that has oil, because it gets it from off-shore deposits. Trinidad is, geologically, an extension of Venezuela. So it had income; it had money. Williams was very skeptical of developing tourism as the central point of the economy. He said that there can be some of it, as part of a mixed economy, but he wanted to use the money from oil to industrialize and promote agriculture and a broad based economy.

The embassy, as an entity, had almost nothing to do there, because Williams was not interested in voting with the United States on UN matters, or any other matters, unless it suited him. In the entire time that I was there, which was two years, Williams refused to see the American ambassador. Never saw him. Never saw any American officials, if he could help it. Williams dealt directly with the executives of American oil companies. He never came to the embassy for social events.

So that the most significant business that the embassy did was in fact consular business, because there was a fairly significant push for visas, and a certain amount of immigration, not overwhelming. And the most important thing that everyone else in the embassy did, including the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission, was to field visa inquiries from political figures on behalf of those who had been refused visas at the embassy. So it was an interesting education.

Q: *Who was the ambassador when you were there?*

MAHONEY: His name was Anthony Marshall. He was a political appointee, as a stepson of a Mrs. Astor of New York. Marshall was a decent fellow, extraordinarily frustrated, because he had nothing to do there.

Q: *Did the Cold War intrude at all?*

MAHONEY: No. Williams insisted that he was not going to be involved in it. And he generally declined to have anything to do with American representations on this subject.

Q: *Did Cuba, under Castro, have any...?*

MAHONEY: No, Williams was willing to talk to the Cubans. I don't think they had any representation there in those days. He pronounced himself neutral in the Cold War. And because he had oil money, he didn't need any aid money from the United States, and refused to take any. There was no aid program there of any type, and no Peace Corps program, either. He was a very independent, feisty guy, and in some ways, I admired him greatly.

Q: *Were there visa problems, consular problems, while you were there?*

MAHONEY: Yes, there was a great deal of visa fraud. There were a great many people trying to go to the United States, in part because Trinidad was an heir to the old British educational system, which said that you took a test at 12 or 13; if you passed that test, you went on to go to state-subsidized schools, and your career was more or less assured. But since only five or ten percent of the people could pass those tests, that's all the positions there were. Everyone else was then expected to go to trade school or do something else. The Trinidadians were very well aware that this was not the educational system in the United States.

And because of the presence of the American base and their own personal fondness for a great deal of American culture and influence, notwithstanding Williams's personal views, they had shifted their focus of immigration from Britain, where it had been when it was a colony, to the United States. An extraordinary number of people, even people with very good positions themselves, people who had been policemen for 20 or 30 years or who had small farms or something, if they did not see opportunity for their children in that country, would come in under the guise of seeking temporary visas, and end up going to the United States for the purpose of emigrating their children, primarily because they thought that there was more opportunity, especially educationally, in the United States.

So we had a lot of press for visas. And when visas were turned down (the visa-refusal rate was probably 50 percent), the people immediately went back to various politicians and sought to get the decisions reversed, through bringing pressure to bear in the embassy.

Q: How did it work out usually?

MAHONEY: That depended on the individual cases. But there was a great deal of tension, particularly between the Political Section in the embassy and the Consular Section. The ambassador and the deputy chief of mission were generally quite supportive, although if enough pressure was applied at a high level, they certainly, rather than turning the pressure away themselves, tended to apply it to the Consular Section.

Q: As the visa officer, you get a pretty good idea of patterns of success, failure, what have you, of immigration. During your time there, where were the Trinidadians going, what were they doing?

MAHONEY: Almost all of them went to New York. There was a large West Indian colony in New York. There had been some trickle of Trinidadian and other West Indian immigration. Many Trinidadians had relatives from Grenada, Barbados, Jamaica. Many had gone to the University of the West Indies, where they met other West Indians. So New York was where almost all of them went in those days.

Q: Were you pretty well confined to visa work during the whole time you were there?

MAHONEY: That was the major focus of the work, both immigrant and non-immigrant work. There was a very small amount of American Services work to be done. Yes, I would say, in the two years I was there, I did almost entirely visa work.

Q: When your time was up, how did you feel about the Foreign Service?

MAHONEY: I went through moments of extreme discouragement, with the thought that if I was going to have to do this sort of visa work for the next 30 years, it was not going to be a very happy life. Also, there was a very plain sense that consular officers were at the bottom of the status order, that you were not participating, in a sense, in the business of foreign policy, and that consular work was something else, but whatever it was it wasn't foreign-policy work. I went through a lot of what you might call agonizing reappraisal during the two years I was in Trinidad.

Q: When you came in, were you tagged to be in one specialty or another? We called them cones.

MAHONEY: Yes, everybody who was coming in, in those days, was assigned to a cone. I'm not quite sure how it was done, but initially, people were so happy to get into the Foreign Service that they didn't much care about it. Nor did I, until I had spent a year or two doing this work, and also getting a sense of what the social parameters of the Foreign Service were. But, yes, I was designated to the consular cone officer when I entered the Foreign Service.

Q: You left there in...

MAHONEY: I left in February of 1974.

JAY P. MOFFAT
Deputy Chief of Mission
Port-of-Spain (1971-1974)

Ambassador Jay P. Moffat, a third generation Foreign Service Officer, joined the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included positions in Japan, France, Switzerland, Trinidad, and Morocco, and an ambassadorship to Chad. Ambassador Moffat was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: Switzerland, one can't help but say watches and cuckoo clocks or something like that. What were our interests in Switzerland?

MOFFAT: Our interests were in the economic area, financial cooperation, legal arrangements to try to track down American miscreants who used the Swiss banking system. The political side was pretty thin gruel. We had the Swiss representation of our interests in Cuba and Algeria. Domestic developments in Switzerland. It was not a terribly exciting post. Fun, nice, a rest. When I got offered a DCM-ship in Trinidad I jumped at it.

Q: You were the DCM there from 1971 to 1974. Who was the Ambassador?

MOFFAT: I had three ambassadors. Fife Symington, a Republican Symington of the same family. A cousin of Stuart Symington. He was very much a political ambassador, later got into the newspapers when he had been promised a European post by Peter Flanagan in the White House after a large contribution and then Flanagan was unable to produce. Ambassador Symington, who was an honorable man, had the good grace not to demand his money back. It was very much a political appointment. And then later, there was Tony Marshall, likewise a political ambassador, but he had already been in Madagascar and went on to Kenya later. With the third one, there was just a few days overlap.

Q: What were American interests at the time?

MOFFAT: American interests were two. One was oil. When you think of the Caribbean islands you think of volcanic soil paradises, but Trinidad is really a part of South America that has been cut off by a few miles of water. It is a big oil producer. We had Texaco, Tesoro, Amoco all active there. We also had the remnants of a major World War II Navy Base at Chaguaramas. We still had a missile test monitoring station there. Our second main interest was to get out of the basing there with good grace and a good deal. Also Trinidad together with Jamaica was sort of big brother to the island nations of the Caribbean. We were even then trying desperately to find ways to keep the island Caribbean from going down the tubes economically. And finally, Trinidad is a great source of illegal immigration to the United States. It's a visa mill, the embassy

there. In terms of manpower and time there was a great distortion towards the consular side of things.

Q: How were the Ambassadors there. As a professional Foreign Service Officer--did they pretty much let you run the shop? What did they concentrate on?

MOFFAT: They were very different. Symington liked the big picture, liked the ceremonial side. He'd been there some time when I got there. He felt free to go away and come back to the U.S. for long visits. He left the running of the embassy pretty much to me. I should say in all this that the important thing in Trinidad was the grand old man, Eric Williams. He was the father of his country and had considerable stature in the Caribbean. Any Ambassador stood or fell on his relationship with Eric Williams. This was becoming quite difficult. It became very difficult under my second Ambassador. Eric Williams became more and more reclusive and difficult to call on, to see to talk to. I could still talk to him because he knew me from earlier, but the new people coming in--not just the American Ambassador, but the British High Commissioner--couldn't and that was a very awkward situation. Eric Williams was a brilliant man, a scholar and all that but he didn't have many people to sharpen his mind against. Over time he would get a certain distortion where he would put the important and the unimportant on the same level. He lost some perspective. He'd be talking about something very significant and then he'd ramble on about minor things. De Gaulle did it occasionally. What he needed was somebody who didn't have an axe to grind. Most of the people in his country and a lot of the visitors had their own agendas. So he very much liked a chance to try out his ideas and have someone tell him (politely) when he was crazy. And intermittently I was able to fill that function.

Q: There is always this problem of the DCM coming in and obviously knowing his way around because this is his job. A political appointee comes in and you already have a the DCM in place. In some ways nothing is a worse curse than as a DCM to have a close relationship with the Chief of State. How did you work this out?

MOFFAT: There were two sides to it. One, Tony Marshall was near to being a pro. He came from the outside but he had had some time in the Foreign Service and knew what it was about. He was the victim not of any thing to do with him, it was just this increasing reclusivity on the part of Eric Williams which got worse and worse and worse. I will tell you an anecdote later. I had to dress things up a little but, I went to a lot of functions where Ambassadors wouldn't just on the hope of seeing Williams. As a politician he would go to openings or concerts or whatever. The common man kind of thing. If you were there you could frequently sidle up and he'd be happy to have a talk. I never to my recollection made a formal call on him, rather used these occasions to talk to him. Then the protocol was all right. I would run into him and we'd talk about this, that and the other. You can draft reports so that who talked to him doesn't show. It was uncomfortable but it was not unmanageable. But you're right the situation you describe can be a horrible thing. Mr. Bloch in Vienna.

Q: Felix Bloch is sort of an unindicted spy. He was our DCM in Vienna. A classmate of the Austrian Foreign Minister. This is causing all sorts of difficulties.

MOFFAT: My one soapbox in this is one thing I've preached with declining success to the modern FSOs: You have to do a lot of things that you don't particularly want to do. Particularly investments in time and places and people who are not immediately worthwhile, but can lead to something or someone else more useful. In Morocco, where we had a large junior officer program, I really had a hard time getting them to take this on board. It's a generational thing. I think now the new FSO's want to be paid for any extra work after hours, or going to things they don't want. It's gone so far as proposals for being paid for going to national day parties. Back to my promised anecdote. After I left Eric Williams continued to become more and more remote. The British High Commissioner reportedly complained so loudly and long that he could not see Eric Williams that, so the story goes, in the middle of the night he was routed out of his bed and taken to William's house and Williams came down to the door in his bathrobe and said, "Now you've seen me," and turned on his heel and walked back into the house. Which may be apocryphal but I think is true. It certainly would be in character. Anyway Trinidad was fun. I think we did a good job on the Naval Base and we promoted American oil company interests quite well. I think that of all our posts in terms of just plain fun it was number one.

Q: One of the things propounded by many university professors is that economics drives our foreign relations. And so often when I say what are our economic interests in such and such a country I get almost a blank look. In this case would you say that the oil interests were important, and what do we do about it. We say they were important, but what would our Embassy do?

MOFFAT: In the particular case of Trinidad if I can use that as an example, Texaco had been there for a long time. Texaco traditionally held its cards close to its chest and we couldn't get much involved in their doings and they didn't want us involved. They had real problems--labor problems--problems with the government. We got involved more as an Embassy with Tesoro, a fairly small producer, and Amoco a big explorer and producer which came in for off-shore oil. There were very good oil fields off the east coast of Trinidad. So our efforts were more towards easing the way for Amoco and to a lesser extent Tesoro. Getting them and the government off on the right foot. Sort of trying to foster the interests of American business. It was not competitive among the three companies. Amoco was new and involved in off-shore exploration and production. Texaco was working very old oil fields that had been operated for decades down in the southwest part of the country. Their problem was essentially to get out of Trinidad pretty much as best it could and in face of a highly political and powerful labor union: the Oil Workers Trade Union. We got involved in that to a certain extent because we were trying to keep things from blowing up. It was a major problem for the government--and the oil workers.

Q: Were we telling the oil companies to remember their other interests besides just oil?

MOFFAT: Yes, we were. Texaco in general, and not in Trinidad did not want anybody to know what they were doing and what their plans were. They viewed us every bit as much as the enemy trying to spy on them. You can further U.S. business interests but a lot depends on whether the particular business wants help. Sometimes they see you as an impediment.

Q: Move on then? You went to the NATO War College for 6 months. And then you came back. You said you tried to avoid staff assistantships, you were the Deputy Executive Secretary. You came back to Washington as sort of a super staff assistant.

MOFFAT: Yes in a sense, but it was a Deputy Assistant Secretary-level position which is one which you aspire to. It was supervision basically. I was the junior of the three deputies. I in essence supervised two of the three operating arms of the executive secretary: the operations center and the information management section. Things like that. It was more a management than staff job.

ROBERT G. RICH, JR.
Deputy Chief of Mission
Port-of-Spain (1971-1977)

Ambassador Robert G. Rich, Jr. was born in Florida in 1930. He attended the University of Florida and Cornell University. Ambassador Rich entered the Foreign Service in 1957 and during his career has served in Korea, Indonesia, Trinidad, the Philippines and was ambassador to Belize in addition to various assignments in the State Department. He was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in 1994.

Q: I certainly agree that that was interesting work for a person who is interested in the Foreign Service as an institution and its future. You then spent a year at the National War College, which I know from experience is a rewarding year for all of us. Following that I notice you were sent to Trinidad in a totally different area where you were promoted to DCM. Could you tell us what some of the problems you had to wrestle with there were?

RICH: In Trinidad we were in a society in the Caribbean, English speaking, which had many close ties of travel, trade, shopping, immigration, and language to the United States, although its institutions and cultural orientation was still much more British. We had had a military naval base in Trinidad from World War II right up until almost a year or two before I went to Trinidad. This was one of the bases for destroyer swaps with the British before we actually entered the war against the Nazis. The long American military presence had left an overlay of anti-militarism in Trinidad which we had to deal with. This was also a period in which Trinidad was developing new oil resources. Major American companies were making offshore discoveries, so there was an economic boom fueled by petroleum. These economic issues and oil issues, and the underlying military issues were largely what I dealt with.

This was the only period of my career when I worked for non-career ambassadors. I had two political appointee ambassadors that I worked with in Trinidad, and it was a very different experience for me than working for the experienced career officers that marked the rest of my career. The first one was a real gentleman who, however, had come to this appointment from being a political contributor and really had no particular interest in our business. It soon became apparent that he was not interested in nor did he enjoy the bread and butter work that we do from

day to day in the diplomatic service. I thought that he would be able to make the speeches at the Rotary, etc. but he was a very shy man and didn't like to do that either. So, that was a new experience. He soon decided that he had better go back and look after his investments, and there followed a significant hiatus when I was Chargé d'Affaires ad interim.

The most interesting thing about the Trinidad experience was dealing with Eric Williams, who was sort of the grand old man of the English speaking Caribbean and a former historian at Howard University. He was constantly writing books. He was a man who was convinced, however, that racism was going to extend itself and be the major problem of the future. Therefore he saw most problems in US-Trinidad relations in terms of race. I, nevertheless, had good and productive dialogues with Eric Williams.

Eventually, we had another political appointee arrive as ambassador. This gave me a very strong sense of what a difference there is between some of our outstanding political appointee ambassadors who are chosen for their talent and ability and the mistake that administrations of both parties sometimes make of choosing people purely on the basis of campaign contributions, because the new ambassador was chosen exclusively for his campaign contributions. Furthermore, his wealth was accidental, if I can say that oil discovered on your piece of desert is accidental, not because he was a good manager or entrepreneur. Unfortunately, this man was very racist himself, and that created a very great difficulty. He had not wanted to go to a black society, but that is where he was named. It became very difficult for us, because after his introductory meeting with Eric Williams, Eric Williams would never speak to him again.

So those problems of trying to manage a situation in which my superior officer was essentially *persona non grata* with the host government was very difficult and one I hope I handled well.

Q: Was it not at this period, Bob, that Trinidad became an independent republic? How did that affect our relations, if any?

RICH: Trinidad was independent already, but it was a parliamentary system with the Queen as the head of state. Her representative was a governor general who was a prominent Trinidadian, himself, and Eric Williams was prime minister. So Trinidad was indeed independent. This was the period shortly after the failure of the formation of the West Indies Federation. There had been a hope that the smaller states of the English speaking federation as they gained independence could be welded into a single federation and the capital was to have been in Trinidad. I lived in something called Federation Park which was built as the housing area for the Federation government. But the rivalries of the individual leaders, and particularly the rivalry between Michael Manley in Jamaica and Eric Williams in Trinidad, caused the Federation to be stillborn and the states each went their own way independently. Later Trinidad did change its form of government to a republican form of government and it now has a president, rather than a governor general as head of state. But that was not a significant change and occurred after I departed. They were fully independent already.

ANTHONY D. MARSHALL

**Ambassador
Trinidad & Tobago, 1972 -1973**

Ambassador Marshall, the son of Brooke Astor, New York City socialite and philanthropist, was born in New York and educated at Brown University. After service in the Marine Corps in World War II, Mr. Marshall joined the Department of State in 1950, transferring to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) the following year. In 1958 he was assigned to Istanbul, after which he left the Agency and worked in the Private Sector. Returning to the Government in 1969, Mr. Marshall served as US Ambassador to the Malagasy Republic (1969-1971); Trinidad and Tobago (1972-1973); Kenya (1973-1977) and concurrently, the Seychelles (1976-1977). Ambassador Marshall was interviewed in 1998 by Richard L. Jackson.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, you went to Trinidad and Tobago in 1972?

MARSHALL: 1972, yes.

Q: That was a totally different setting from Madagascar.

MARSHALL: Certainly was.

Q: Trinidad and Tobago, I understand, was a relatively peaceful country. They had no coups, but there had been some confusion at the time of the Black Power movement in 1970, and I understand the period you were there was one of political and economic relative uncertainty, still in the time of Eric Williams, the founding father.

MARSHALL: Well, he was the founding father. He had hopes of a greater empire in the form of a commonwealth with Jamaica and Guinea and Ghana. But that didn't work out. I think he was a little frustrated by that. He was a very intelligent man, an historian. He liked to write; he was a thinker. He didn't like the United States. He and I really didn't get on. I couldn't find any rapport with him. And he didn't help me very much to try and find one. I got along well with a number of other ministers fortunately, and extremely well with the Governor, who was Chinese. His name was Ho Tsoy. When I had a problem with the Prime Minister, I was able to go to the Governor. In those days the Governor was the representative of the Queen, who was appointed by the Queen of England, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. A rather odd arrangement in a constitutional monarchy, I feel, or felt. I have to go back a little bit in the history of Trinidad, to briefly give picture of the way it was and the way it was changing. One has to go back in a very simple way to look at the people who came to Trinidad because the blacks from Africa came to Trinidad as slaves to work in the sugar fields. Then slavery was abolished – you might say, almost as far as Trinidad was concerned – because a lot of the slaves were kept on on a paid basis but at very menial wages, and indentured servants – Indians – then came in, were brought in, to replace the blacks. What happened to Trinidad when I was there, was that it was 40 % Indian, 40% black, and 20% mixed – Chinese, Carob, White, other races and nationalities. The blacks essentially moved into government and the Indians moved into business. I'm oversimplifying it and being a little cynical about it, but it's what happened. Each eyed the other

and the blacks felt, "Well, I'm in power, so why shouldn't I do something to fill my pockets and get into business?" The Indians felt a little threatened by this and therefore wanted to get into politics. All of which was happening when I was there. It happened even more so, I believe, since I left.

Trinidad could have been much more of a success than it is, than it turned out to be. I really only can comment on my time there with first hand commentary on, but they made quite a lot of money from that oil. They had four oil companies who were doing business there. The one I was closest to was Amoco, because they wanted a relationship with the embassy. Texaco felt that they didn't need anything. I got a tour of their plant and that was about it. Tesoro was a little operation down in the southern part of the island which was almost operated like a country club. But Amoco had an official operation that was quite successful. All in all, oil was coming in as an income, as a revenue-bearing industry. And the Trinidadians, to an extent, squandered it, either in the island, or maybe some of it might have gotten into private pockets, private government pockets. And they also gave a lot of their money away to other Caribbean countries – a worthwhile cause. But on the other hand, this didn't help them that much. So, that's the way I saw the situation when I arrived.

Q: And, at that time, did we have the naval facility at Chaguaramas?

MARSHALL: No, we didn't. That had been closed, just prior to my being there. There was a (I can't remember what they called it.) NAGO, I think it was, or something foolish like that, an instrument finding, directional, navigational aid facility on the island. Very small, and although I had contact with them it was not a major interest. As I had been before when I was in Madagascar, I was interested in trying to help American business. I did get around to all the American businesses but, except for the oil companies, there were companies that bought fabric from North Carolina and elsewhere and brought it into Trinidad and Tobago and set up workshops at low wages and shipped the material, the ready made articles of clothing out. The Trinidadians didn't like that. They felt they were being used which, of course, they were. There was an artificial tooth factory there which seemed to me probably to be a rather unique thing but, nevertheless, they were used to doing the same thing – they found cheap labor to make artificial teeth. Singer Sewing Machine, of course, was there. They were always there and everywhere, all over the world. There were a few companies, but they really didn't need an embassy. In fact, this gets me around to making comments on embassies. I personally – I don't know if I said this when I was talking about Madagascar; it didn't apply there – it certainly applied in Trinidad and it applied also in a delightful country to which I later became accredited – the Seychelles. So I comment on both of them at the same time, making this observation. And that is that I think it's too bad that we ever gave up legations – legations which were headed by a Foreign Service officer with the rank of Minister. It showed a dignity, an appreciation of the country, a recognition of their needs. But it was not a full grade embassy – a full grade senior country, or developed country, if you want to put it that way. I think it's too bad we did that. In my way of thinking, which would not have been acceptable, Trinidad only needed a consul general or, if you wish, a consulate general because the main business of Trinidad really was visas, and it was a consular operation, as it was also in Jamaica, where Vincent de Roulet was ambassador the same time I was. He made a big noise about it. Too much of a noise, I'm afraid to say. He was

rather derogatory about it. I felt the same way, but I did not raise my voice with the Trinidadian about it because there was no need to do that.

Q: The consular and visa operation you mentioned was basically Trinidadians coming to the U.S. or was it U.S. tourists?

MARSHALL: Trinidadians coming to the U.S. In my second year there, I remember 46% of all the applicants for a visitor's visa had to be turned down because they did not qualify. They had no job in Trinidad, no bank account in Trinidad, no reason to go back to Trinidad. But they came up and Brooklyn, New York, was principally their geographic target where they had relatives. And they would come up here and be allowed to live... in the United States. And I'll parenthetically mention here that the visitor's visa is different from the immigration visa which usually took 18 months for an applicant to receive such a visa and that meant that they went through the process of applying to come up here and live. But we didn't want and don't want, and didn't then want foreigners coming to the United States on a visitor's visa and staying. So we ran into, particularly after World War II, we ran into this elimination of legations. I'm not sure whether Switzerland was one of the last countries – it's hardly an underdeveloped country – to have a legation, but we should have stuck with legations.

Q: Ambassador George Kennan made that same point in a conversation I had a few weeks ago with him.

MARSHALL: Really?

Q: Yes, that we should return to legations, but it's hard when the other countries are at the level of embassies, for us to walk back to legations.

MARSHALL: You can't go back and change it. It's hard to take away something you've given, whether it's a wedding ring or a dollar bill. But I think that there is a little example here which I must say I'm not totally informed on, but I'm going to jump to the Seychelles which has nothing to do with Trinidad and Tobago except that I was appointed as non-resident ambassador to the Seychelles when I was ambassador to Kenya. The issue of legations/embassies is relevant, so I'll mention it here. And that is that, after the Seychelles had its independence day, and I had presented my credentials and gone through all the formalities of agrément and all that, to the President, James Mancham – we did all that. We could have had a resident ambassador. There were resident ambassadors there, but we chose to have a non-resident ambassador, which is half a step down. We had to have an ambassador because it was still during the Cold War. Not only were the British and French there, but the Chinese were coming, the Russians were coming, and we had an Air Force Tracking Station on the Seychelles. We not only wanted to protect that for as long as it was necessary for that to operate, but we also wanted to protect ourselves in the Cold War in the Indian Ocean.

So, time went by and what has happened? After I left Nairobi, we appointed a full-time resident ambassador to the Seychelles. More time went by. Where were we now? As I understand it, and unless something changed the game, we have no ambassador in the Seychelles, and any questions or administrative or economic information or action is held through Mauritius. We do

have an agent in the Seychelles. Well, when I was in Trinidad and Tobago, we had an agent in Tobago, if you want to make these comparisons. I think if a country of 50,000 people, which is what the Seychelles was when I became ambassador, even though they are scattered over 1500 miles across, in the Indian Ocean – 86 islands – that pure geography is not as important to us now as when we wanted to see oil pass through the Suez and we wanted to have access to the Persian Gulf. I got a little side-tracked there, but having served as ambassador in both countries, I think my drawing the analogy, drawing the comparison, is valid.

Q: Returning to Trinidad and Tobago, to finish up on that. In your second year there, I think there was a somewhat controversial election in that many of the other parties boycotted Eric Williams, although I think he was reelected and continued on until he died in '81.

MARSHALL: He was reelected. That was the ongoing process, as I see it, of the conflict between the blacks and the Indians. The haves and have-nots. All of which produces a turmoil in politics and can have an effect on the economy.

Q: Coming back to what you said before about Eric Williams, it would seem to me that he would have had so much to gain from an easing of the relationship with the U. S. ambassador in terms of trade and the role and power of the United States in the Caribbean. What was it in his make-up that held him back, as an obstacle?

MARSHALL: I really think he was more of an intellectual than a politician. He wrote a number of books which had very good observations on government. And I think he was more of an intellectual, than a practical one. A simple observation.

Q: Coming there from Madagascar, did you see more similarities than differences in terms of new nations in the flush of independence, or was it a completely different Caribbean culture?

MARSHALL: I did know the Caribbean quite well before I got there. I'd been to Tobago in 1954. So I'd been down there. I had visited all of the Caribbean Islands for one reason or another. So, what was there was no surprise to me. It was island living. You can't compare it to Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world. You can't compare the small island of Trinidad which were tops of mountains to Madagascar. I think that – I'm sort of searching now to answer your question – one might have analyzed them not from the standpoint of their own culture, because their own culture became a lot of what was imposed on them, but rather to have looked at them from the standpoint of whether it was the French or the Dutch – and I did not get over to Curacao – or the English, who had a colonial influence there. I must say that one of the islands that I thought was the most peaceful and delightful was the little island of Saba, up in the northern part of the Caribbean which was owned by the Netherlands. Part of the Netherlands, I think. But I think you might stretch it and say there was an analogy between the colonial approach and temperament in Africa and the Caribbean in that the British in Africa brought Africa administration and the French brought them culture. I used to think it was an easy simplification, but it's not; it is a very complicated over-simplification. It does have some truth to it though. The French did bring them language. They spoke French and not pidgin English as in Nigeria. I'm skipping around now, but I remember when I first went to Nigeria – you know I was in business there for 10 years – I learned a little pidgin English. There was one pidgin English

phrase that I thought was a good example and perfectly ridiculous – I had a house there – when I ordered a light dinner and wanted my steward to go home, I would say, "Bring small chop, then you go for bush." Well, that is not a very sophisticated way of teaching people how to speak the language. I think the British did allow and even encourage that kind of development, a holding back development, while the French did the opposite. Getting back to the Caribbean, I think the French parts of the Caribbean – particularly Guadeloupe and Martinique, are quite delightful sophisticated areas, with an emphasis on culture. The culture of Trinidad is, in one word, carnival. Three days a year, they are wild with carnival, with jump-ups, steel bands, floats, drinking and abandoning everything for the carnival life. And the other days of the year are in preparation for carnival. And that is not an over-simplification.

THOMAS MACKLIN, JR.
Desk Officer, Trinidad, Barbados & West Indies
Washington, DC (1973-1975)

Thomas Macklin Jr. was born in Fort Worth, Texas in October of 1935. He attended San Diego State University and majored in political science, later receiving a masters degree in history. He entered the Foreign Service in 1965 and took his first post as a Consular Officer in Amsterdam. His career took him to The Hague, Vietnam, Barbados, Israel, Russia, and Italy as well as several posts within the State Department. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in September 2000.

Q: After a year, in 1973, where did you go?

MACKLIN: I went to the Caribbean desk and became desk officer for Trinidad, Barbados, and the West Indies Associated States.

Q: You were doing that from '73 to when?

MACKLIN: '75. I did that for two years.

Q: Looking at it from the other end... What was your impression of the Caribbean interest within the State Department?

MACKLIN: The views I developed when I worked in Barbados and in the West Indies were only reinforced when I worked in the Department. I felt that these were very small islands. They were little microcosms of democracy. They had serious economic problems. We ought to go in there with a bilateral aid program and try to help them develop the relationship with the U.S. and help them with the transition to a better economic life. We had a lot more in common than we did with Venezuela or Colombia, the bigger nations in Latin America. These were English speaking, Anglo-Saxon countries with the same rule of law that we had. I thought we should do more. I beat on that drum during my entire two years in the Department and it was only after I left that we really started to develop a bilateral aid program. We put money into the Caribbean

but it was through multilateral organizations like the Caribbean Development Bank. We didn't put much money in. it was pretty bad news.

Q: I would have thought that given our Cold War concerns with Cuba that we would be interested in precluding the Cubans from fishing in these troubled waters.

MACKLIN: One would have thought, but it didn't really have much impact until Eric Geary was overthrown in Grenada and a relationship was developed with the Cubans. Then we got a pretty good aid program going. I had left long before that. Until then, there hadn't really been any interest in a major aid program.

Q: I would have thought also that, being the West Indies and a beautiful place to go to, you would have a lot of people within the government (Congress, State Department) putting this way up in their priorities and really having to go there, particularly during the winter months.

MACKLIN: You'd think, but when I was in Barbados, only once did we have a congressman come down. Once we had a STAFFDEL. Two times during two and a half years, we had somebody from Capitol Hill come to Barbados. It was interesting that they didn't seem to have any interest in this area.

Q: Did the immigration flow from that area cause any problems for you? I'm thinking of people who settled in New York.

MACKLIN: It didn't cause any problems for the Consular Section. There was concern over bone fides and problems with people coming up and staying. When I was working in Barbados, we did a lot of H visas (for temporary training) in Grenada for people to become dental technicians. Finally one day, I said something to the head of the Consular Section about, "You know, we're probably training an awful lot of people to be dental technicians. There are only two dentists in Grenada." He looked up and over the past three years we had trained something like 80 dental technicians for Grenada. So, there was a lot of that sort of stuff. But I wasn't plagued with it either on the desk or when I was down there. Only once was I ever called on the desk for help with getting a visa for someone.

Q: How about their embassies? Were they at all effective here in Washington? You would be their point of contact.

MACKLIN: The Trinidadians had a pretty good embassy staff. They were very active in UN circles. Eric Williams was prime minister of Trinidad. He was kind of a prickly pear. He was a difficult guy, very egotistical. He went through a period of being anti-American. He desperately wanted to get Trinidad in OPEC and the Arabs kept blackballing him because they didn't produce enough oil. He was a historian by background. At one time, we had an ambassador in Trinidad, Tony Marshall, who had worked for the Agency. He was desperate to develop a relationship with Eric Williams. For some reason, Eric Williams decided he didn't like him, so he refused to talk to him. The ambassador went for a year without ever being able to talk with the prime minister, which he found personally extremely embarrassing. But their diplomatic missions in Washington were pretty good.

The Barbadians usually had a good ambassador. They had a couple of staff members who were dumb as doornails and caused problems. But the Trinidadians had a couple who were really smart. They were easy to work with.

SARAH HORSEY-BARR
Visa Officer
Port-of-Spain (1973-1976)

Mrs. Horsey-Barr was born in Maryland into a Foreign Service family. She was raised in the Washington DC area and abroad and was educated at Georgetown University; and Loyola University in Rome, Italy. Her service with the State Department took her to several posts in Latin America dealing with both consular and political/management affairs. Her last assignments were with the Organization of American States, where she served in various senior capacities with the U.S. Mission. Mrs. Horsey-Barr was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

HORSEY-BARR: Well, actually it was from '74 till the middle of '76. No, you're right. It was '73, because it was a three-year assignment in the end. I extended for a year.

Q: What was the situation on Trinidad when you went there? Can you give me sort of a feel for the politics and the economy and American interests there.

HORSEY-BARR: Well, just about everything was affected by the economy because Trinidad, of course, has oil. The price of oil, I can't remember exactly what it was back then, but it was high, so they were living high on the hog. In terms of politics the government was controlled by a Eric Williams. Trinidad got independence, I believe, in the late '60s, so they hadn't been an independent country for terribly long. Eric Williams' approach to life was sell oil, and he was very anti-US, saw the United States as essentially exploiting countries such as his. He had two policies that stick in my mind. I'm sure there were plenty more, but the ones that stick in my mind were that he would not permit tourism development on the island. He didn't need it so much because, of course, they had the oil revenue at the time, but he did not want Americans coming down and living in a tourist fashion. He also wanted to export whatever unemployment he had to the United States, which is interesting because, of course, that then became a big issue with Mexico. It still is today in terms of exporting and exploiting unemployed people. But Trinidad was pretty calm in those days. It has had some periods of unrest since. I guess from a political standpoint it wasn't terribly interesting. I was a visa officer, as I suppose almost everybody is on their first post, and I enjoyed it. Trinidadians are very open, warm people, very educated. Actually it was the first experience I had had living in a non-Caucasian culture. Trinidad, as you know, is almost 50 percent black, Afro-American if you will, and 50 percent East Indian. That was an interesting experience for me. But all were very well educated and mostly, a high percentage, living in the city. Already it was starting then for folks leaving the farms, so there were still a good crop. A small embassy...

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

HORSEY-BARR: Well, I just don't know. With the series of political appointees, I just don't know. There were, I think, 3 ambassadors during my tour, so none of them must have stayed very long.

Q: It doesn't sound like...

HORSEY-BARR: It was a very sleepy little place at that time.

Q: There was Anthony Marshall, Lloyd Miller, and Albert Fay.

HORSEY-BARR: None of them have left any lasting impressions.

Q: How did we handle the visa problem?

HORSEY-BARR: Well, most days I would just say no. There wasn't as much. I suppose, as in so many walks of life today, there's a lot of doing things right. Even with children and education and discipline, it's quite different than it was 25 years ago, and I suppose the way one handled visas in those days reflected the society at large. It was, I think, easier to say no without having a lot of explanation required than it probably is today. There was a bit of an informal economy, which is often very difficult to measure, as, I suppose, in so many less developed countries, because the people just don't have the normal objectives or things you look for as ties to the country. I guess the highest percentage of no's went to Indians because they were primarily agricultural and had a tradition - perhaps as they do in India; I don't know - of kind of safeguarding their wealth in jewels, in gold jewelry, and so it was very difficult for these officers. Another group that was difficult to tell but were very good risks, as I found over time, were government employees, who earned next to nothing, such as most of their teachers, earned next to nothing but had such good benefits once one looked into it, that comparable salary and benefits packages in the States would not have been comparable enough in the financial sense. It was still a fairly stratified society, so one could assess groupings. I remember playing carniway, at the carnival because Trinidad is a big carnival place, and they had what they called bands, which are masses of, say, hundreds of people in groups of 30 or 40 with an overall theme, and each group of 30 or 40 would represent one aspect of whatever the theme of the band is. I remember the expression there is 'playing mats' as in playing matchsticks - they use that expression - and I did this several years running. There were always newspaper articles about the visa officer plays mats.

Q: What were you doing?

HORSEY-BARR: You mean with the carnival?

Q: Yes.

HORSEY-BARR: Well, one would join a band, as they call it. The band had a theme, and there were rival bands, generally run by artistic folks. Each band had a theme, and then these smaller groups of, say, 30 or 40 people would kind of pick one element. You would go to the band store, and depending on what your price range is, you'd end up in one sort of grouping or another - it was generally dictated by price - and so you got your costume. Then on the appointed days you went off with your band and everybody danced in the streets in the carnival to the calypso music and drank rum under the hot sun. That was the thing to do, and it was a lot of fun. Everybody did it; Trinidadians from all walks of life did it. Sort of all barriers came down, and it was really a leveling and sort of unifying experience for the whole country, and persists today. They probably have them in Washington now. They have the Trinidad carnival up in Adams Morgan. I've not been but...

Q: Calypso music, of course, particularly shortly after the war and during the war, was very popular in the United States. I think of Lord Invader and some of these other people...

HORSEY-BARR: It was, and I think the United States adopted a rather simple kind of calypso music. Calypso, calypso music, by and large, the lyrics to their music is generally of a political satire nature. It's very difficult to appreciate each year's calypsos unless you've been a part of the society, because it just sort of grows out of whatever's been happening in the country that year. The ones, I think, that we got early on in the United States were all about women and men and sun, and love and things like, more than political...

Q: Rum and Coca Cola was kind of that ilk, that type of thing.

HORSEY-BARR: But if you really knew what was going on in the society, they're absolutely fabulous. Well, there was an interesting thing too on that point, because while the society revolved around carnival and calypso competitions and stuff, the folks didn't make any money. Many of the better known calypsonians actually came to the United States and Canada to practice their other-than-music professions. They had other, more regular professions and oftentimes left the island completely just to make money.

Q: How did Eric Williams' hostility towards the United States translate itself, say, to the embassy and your work?

HORSEY-BARR: There would be regular articles about the embassy and policies and such, but it didn't translate in terms of interfering or with hostility by the general population. It was almost a personnel thing, which is interesting because I think at least one or two of his children were born here and raised here in the United States, but I guess that's not unusual.

Q: Where were the Trinidadians going in the United States?

HORSEY-BARR: New York. There's still today a big concentration of Trinidadians in New York.

Q: What were they doing there?

HORSEY-BARR: I don't know, I think probably anything they could do. I don't remember any particular kind of person, if you will, that left more regularly than others, at least that we knew.

Q: I was just thinking of Jamaica. At least at one time many were going to the United States, the sort of New York area, to work as maids and that sort of thing, which meant that you get some very irate calls from very high-placed people in the United States because they weren't getting their maid or housekeeper. I was wondering whether you were getting that.

HORSEY-BARR: I don't remember anything particular around those lines. We may have and it just didn't register.

Q: Did Castro have any sort of effect where you were?

HORSEY-BARR: No. I think there was entirely too much prosperity and they were really reveling in it. There were no kind of socialist leans that I can recall at this time. I don't remember running across Castro at all.

Q: How about social life? Was it easy to mix with...

HORSEY-BARR: Very, very easy to mix. I found Trinidadians, people just like Trinidadians. The Indian ones were still at that time more agriculturally based and therefore not as present in the city and very much family oriented. Black Trinidadians formed the government and were more numerous by far in the city and very open. I suppose there was prejudice there, but I certainly didn't feel it and never had any trouble making friends with blacks. Whatever prejudice there was overwhelmingly between the blacks and Indians. They had strong dislike for each other, and a resident sort of British group. There was a lot of animosity toward them, but their numbers were so small that it really didn't permeate. I remember the country club. The country club was, I think if I'm not mistaken, still all white, which was a farce because there just weren't any whites. It was pretty absurd. But the yacht club, I had a little Sunfish and I learned to play golf, went out there every day, and none of those places were in the least bit of that nature. Trinidadians like to party and like socializing and would have all-day events where people would come and go, dancing and all, very casual, very laid back. They're an open people. I had lots of friends there.

Q: Well, it sounds like they almost had to pry you out of there.

HORSEY-BARR: As I said, I did extend for a year, and I enjoyed it very much. I suppose everybody enjoys their first post. People seemed to have a certain fondness....

**JOHN H. ADAMS
Consul General
Port-of-Spain (1976-1979)**

John H. Adams was born in 1939 and entered the Foreign Service in 1966. His assignments included initial positions in France, Israel, Trinidad, and China (Hong Kong). Mr. Adams was interviewed by William D. Morgan in 1992.

Q: What period of time--1975?

ADAMS: It was 1976 to 1979 when I was in Port of Spain, Trinidad. But by then I was also not working on the non-immigrant visa line. I was managing people who were working the line. So my career has really not, at any time, put me in a situation where I was likely to have consular burnout that results from working in these hopeless situations where you're faced with a daily onslaught of visa supplicants as a line officer in a real visa mill.

Q: But Tel Aviv has a lot of pressure in terms of both political pressure and interest pressure--but also volume.

ADAMS: Both. But only part of my tour was working on the visa side of the Consular Section. The second part was in charge of the American Services side. So there was that balance.

Q: You didn't feel that invasion into your survival?

ADAMS: No, and I think that that's the key now with consular managers, even in the visa mills. That's to keep your perspective and rotate the vice consuls out of the visa lines before they burn out, to the degree that's possible.

Q: Had Trinidad become a visa mill?

ADAMS: At the time I was there we were very busy but it wasn't a mill in the sense that Manila, Mexico, or Santo Domingo are.

Q: So how did you lead it?

ADAMS: I think, by example. You try to project an attitude of caring, responsive public service. You keep the officers informed, you take them into the decision making process, you have regular meetings with them, you show them that their ideas are as valid as those of anyone more senior. You know, it's a team effort and you delegate responsibility. I find that, by and large, junior Foreign Service officers are very bright and motivated people who will do a good job. But you've got to give them the responsibility and confidence to do it.

Q: Did you have support from above in this effort?

ADAMS: I did. The ambassadors that I had there were both very supportive, and we had good, two-way communication between the Front Office and the consular section. Yes, I have no complaint about that at all.

Q: So that was a good, "learning" management job for four years?

ADAMS: It was an excellent management responsibility for me. I learned a lot in the process. I then came back to Washington for a period of time, to the Visa Office and then to the Inspector General's Office, where I traveled around the world and inspected close to 50 different operations.

RICHARD K. FOX, JR.
Ambassador
Trinidad & Tobago (1977-1979)

Ambassador Fox was born and raised in Ohio and served in the US Navy in World War II. Educated at Indiana University, he served with the Urban League in several states before joining the State Department in 1961. His Washington assignments include the senior positions of Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Personnel, of the Bureau of Management and of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs. He was appointed Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago in 1977 and served there until 1977. His other overseas post was Madrid, where he served from 1965 to 1968. Ambassador Fox was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: You became Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago from 1977 to 1979. How did that come about?

FOX: I don't really know. I wasn't in Personnel at time. I had been told in 1974 when I was still in CU that I was the Department's candidate for the post in Barbados. My name had actually gone to the White House. Unfortunately, the White House had a political appointee in mind. By 1974, I had been a Class 1 Officer for several years and presumably I was being considered for appointment to Ambassadorial assignment. I think it would have been just a matter of time before I would come up for consideration again. After the job in Personnel and the Senior Seminar, I was on a couple of lists.

Q: What were our interests in Trinidad and Tobago in 1977?

FOX: Back in 1977, the Carter administration had indicated that it wanted to strengthen our relationships with the Caribbean, and particularly with the Eastern Caribbean. We had come through a period of time in the latter part of the Kissinger era and during the Ford administration when it was felt that we had tended to over-look the countries in the Eastern Caribbean. We had not really supported them and yet they were our closest neighbors. They supplied a large number of immigrants to the United States--I am referring primarily to Jamaica and Trinidad and Barbados--. I had done a paper when I was in Personnel pointing this out and suggesting that we had made a mistake in assigning non-career people to the Ambassadorial positions in that area when ideally we should have career officers there who could recognize the importance of the relationship between the Caribbean and the United States. That may have surfaced at some point and may have led to me being considered for one of those jobs.

Back to your question concerning our interests in Trinidad. The Carter administration had announced at its beginning, the "Caribbean Initiative". The idea was to try to strengthen our relationships with those countries through some direct support and through multilateral assistance as well. They needed help because in 1973 the oil prices had sky-rocketed and all of these countries were facing very serious debt problems. They needed some means of servicing their debt as well as some funds for internal economic development. The Secretary had gone down to the Caribbean in early 1977, had visited each country and had stopped in Jamaica for a conference at which he agreed that he would propose an Caribbean initiative which would have the United States attempt to persuade a number of Western European governments to form a consortium of donors, that would make funds available to these countries for debt servicing and internal economic development. Trinidad was the only country in the Caribbean that did not need this kind of assistance because it was an oil producing nation. Trinidad had profited from the increase in oil prices. Our interests therefore in Trinidad in those days was to get it to agree to be a donor. I went there with instructions to try to move Trinidad in that direction to the extent possible and to do all we could to keep it supportive of the Caribbean initiative.

We had some problems because one of the countries that had been identified as a major donor was Venezuela. The relationship between Venezuela and Trinidad historically has been very poor. Eric Williams who was then Prime Minister in Trinidad had always looked on Venezuela as an extremely racist country. He was very critical of Venezuela. One of reasons for this attitude was that the Venezuelans would allow Trinidadians to enter Venezuela but they could not become citizens, even if they married Venezuelan nationals. He thought that this was typical of a racist government and so when we began to talk about donor countries and mentioned Venezuela among them, Mr. Williams was offended by this idea. I had to keep the Trinidadian government aware of our interests in proceeding with the initiative and to persuade them that Venezuela would not be the prime mover. The United States would be chief sponsor of the proposal and we hoped that the British and the Canadians and the German and the Dutch governments would provide assistance. We had however to approach others in the area who had enormous of amounts of assets to contribute.

We also had some US investment In Trinidad which were to protect. We had a navigational facility, the OMEGA station, was extremely important to us.

Q: How did you find dealing with the government of Eric Williams?

FOX: It was extremely difficult. Eric Williams was a recluse and as a matter of fact, he was characterized as being manic-depressive. He had periods when he was very visible and socially active, but then there were long periods when he would seclude himself in his residence and would only be available to his Cabinet. He was a very difficult man to deal with. He developed the idea that he as Prime Minister would not be available to any foreign Ambassadors. We would have to work through his Foreign Minister. However, I did see him on a couple of occasions when he was interested in discussing an issue with me. When I had instructions to get in touch with the Prime Minister, he was never available.

Q: Your main dealings were therefore with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

FOX: Main, but not solely. Trinidad had in addition to their oil production large amounts of natural gas-- a by-product. In those days, we were concerned about having an adequate supply of natural gas. The Trinidadian government decided that they had a sufficient supply of natural gas to export it and the United States was the obvious market. They began discussions with us about developing a facility for gas liquefaction. They also began negotiations in the US about sales. They quickly found out that liquefaction is an extremely expensive venture because you not only had to be build a plant in Trinidad, but also had to have tankers for transportation and then you had to deliquify it in the United States off-shore and pipe it to terminals on the mainland. The brunt of those costs would have to borne by the Trinidadian government. In addition, they had competition from natural gas from Canada as well as from Alaska and it appeared that the US would have an adequate supply.

So I had long discussions with the Minister of Petroleum about this proposal. We also discussed with the Trinidadians their foreign reserves which at that time amounted to two-two and half billion dollars. They wanted to start a very ambitious development program, at the center of which would stand an iron and steel mill. When the people in Washington heard that Trinidad was considering building an iron and steel mill, it caused a great deal of concern because our steel industry was in the throes of a down-turn at that time.

Q: That was period also which lasted till today during which steel was in surplus--it is one of those products that looks wonderful and employs a lot of people, but the product is going begging.

FOX: They had done a very quick survey and they found that there was a shortage of construction wire rods in south-east US They considered that situation as an ideal market. They had talked to a number of wholesalers who had indicated a willingness to handle the product. But they had not done an adequate survey of the market and had not really looked very carefully at the potential costs and at the long-range market before committing themselves to this plan. They came to Washington to talk to the Export-Import Bank about credits and loan guarantees in order to build this plant. They got a commitment from Ex-Imp that it would support the plant; subsequently, the Bank backed down. This generated another long series of discussions about the US government renegeing on its promises.

Q: The problems then were primarily economic?

FOX: Almost entirely.

Q: And almost all technical?

FOX: Yes. Technical in the sense that I had to learn quite a bit about the oil and gas industry, which was relatively new to me. I had a very good economic officer and had good support from Washington.

Q: Did you treat Trinidad and Tobago as a whole or as two separate entities?

FOX: I treated it as a whole, but the government did not. The government treated Tobago as a separate entity. The government had very strong ideas about their own counties. Tobago was separated by about forty miles of water--beautiful island--but poorly developed, very inadequately developed. There were several hotels. It was largely a tourist area for the people of Trinidad. Had the government decided to go into tourism, it could have been another Jamaica, it could have been another Virgin Islands, it had beautiful beaches, with shallow waters and a sandbar that goes about fifty yards off-shore. A lot could have been done with natural resources, but Mr. Williams did not want all these people, particularly Americans, turning his country into a tourist haven. He therefore refused to consider any tourism development in Tobago.

The government in Trinidad felt that the people of Tobago were always critical of the central government and were not very supportive. So they didn't treat them very well. This generated internal political disputes that occurred frequently.

Q: Continuation of interview: June 13, 1989. When you were in Trinidad-Tobago, did you have any trouble with American tourists or businessmen?

FOX: No. I had no problems with either. The number of American tourists was not great. The travel between the US and Trinidad is usually the reverse--Trinidadians going to the United States. Therefore the tourist problems were minimal. US investment was not large at the time I was there. The largest US firm was Amoco and they enjoyed very good relations with the Government of Trinidad because they were extracting oil.

Q: Did Amoco have its own international relations experts to take care of any problems that might arise?

FOX: They had that office in Chicago which was available to all of their overseas operations. In addition, the Trinidadian Government was cordial to the American oil firms. They had their own network and their contacts within the government. That system operated very effectively. They didn't need any assistance from the American Embassy.

Q: How would you describe the staff of your Embassy?

FOX: Given the state of relations at that time between the two governments, I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the staff. We didn't have a lot of economic activity with the Government of Trinidad. Yet we had a solid and competent economic officer. Political problems were minimal and we had a very good staff to handle that area. I thought we were quite well off.

Q: You dealt in those days with a figure who had been in the foreign affairs establishment for a long time, Terence Todman. He was Assistant Secretary for American Republics Affairs (ARA). What was his operating style?

FOX: I did deal with Terry because he came to Trinidad once for a visit to the Caribbean. He had a deep interest in the Caribbean because he was born there--in the Virgin Islands. He had a personal interest in the Caribbean affairs. His operating style was to give the Chiefs of Mission as much support as they needed. There was not great interference out of his office with what we

were doing. Yet we knew if we needed to get to him on a particular issue or to get some support either within the Department or outside, we could. I did spend quite a bit of time with him, discussing one specific issue: the tariff on rum produced in the West Indies. We spent some time trying to develop a strategy for attacking that problem.

The issue was that the tariff on rum produced on the West Indies was considerably higher than on rum produced in Puerto Rico. The reason for it was that the funds that were derived from the tariff on West Indian rum was used for a federal payment to Puerto Rico. So the West Indians always complained about the difficulties they were encountering to win their share of the market, in light of the high comparative cost their rum. That was a problem which I was aware of when I went to Trinidad. I began to try to solve it, but after looking in to it for some months--talking to people on the Hill-- it became apparent that because of the federal payment, there was little inclination to change the system.

Q: After Trinidad-Tobago, you went were assigned to the Inspection Corps as the deputy Inspector General. How was that as an assignment?

FOX: I felt quite good about it. The Inspection staff had always enjoyed a high reputation in the Department. It had its ups and downs in recent years, but when I went to it, the whole inspection, auditing and use of resources process had become extremely important. I spent almost four years in that office. It was one of the more enjoyable assignments that I had in the Foreign Service.

JONATHAN B. RICKERT
Labor Reporting Officer
Port-of-Spain, Trinidad (1977-1980)

Jonathan Rickert was born and raised in Washington, DC and educated at Princeton and Yale Universities. After service in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1963, serving tours in both Washington and abroad. His foreign posts include London, Moscow, Port au Spain, Sofia and Bucharest, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission. In his Washington assignments Mr. Rickert dealt primarily with Eastern and Central European Affairs. Mr. Rickert was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Jonathan, I think we're about ready to get you assigned to the embassy in Trinidad, Embassy Port of Spain as political labor officer. It seems to nicely follow your year of labor training at Harvard. Is that a correct assessment, assumption? Tell me about that assignment.

RICKERT: Yes, in fact, under that program it was a requirement when we go in to a labor designated position, following that year of labor training at Harvard. Among the list of countries that were available to be bid on, Trinidad was my second choice, but one that I was very happy to get. My wife and daughter and I transferred there in July of 1977. It was a small embassy, which, if I recall correctly, had fewer than 15 Americans; it had State element and had a two person USIA element. The ambassador was Richard Fox, a career fellow who was followed by

Irving Cheslaw, also a career officer. I was the sole political officer. There was a one person, Econ-Commercial section, and we were located right next to each other, and when she was on leave, I covered for her and vice versa, so it was a very cozy arrangement. Obviously, as it could be expected, the biggest section by far was the consular section, with a number of junior officers earning their spurs in Port of Spain for their first tour as consular officers.

Trinidad was a small but unusual country. It's the only tour I had in my career outside of the EUR, and it's one that I'm very grateful for because it brought a different perspective to my work and to my experience from anything I have had elsewhere or would have subsequently. The country was about 60 miles long and 30 miles wide – that is Trinidad itself – and Tobago was smaller, 18 miles away if I recall correctly. It was a country that in the '70s was enjoying a bit of a boom due to the presence of oil and gas in not huge quantities, but for a small country, you didn't need all that much to make a real impact on the economy. 1.2 million people: a very interesting ethnic mix of Indians from India and black people and black people mixed with other races, fairly evenly divided, and then a fairly small white and what they call Lebanese-Syrians and some Asians there. It was quite an interesting microcosm for inter-ethnic relations in a country that celebrated Hindu, Muslim and Christian holidays. One of the things that I noted about the Christian section of the population was that it ranged from very high church traditional Anglo and Roman Catholic to what one could call "voodoo-Baptist" with heavy doses of African influence and everything in between. So it was much more variety and a lot more surprises that one wouldn't expect in such a small country. The prime minister, when I got there, was Eric Williams who was the leader of the Trinidad independence movement, a very brilliant man who had been a professor at Howard University but a very strange man. He, shortly after I arrived and I don't think there's any connection, declined to meet with American officials for the rest of his life actually.

Q: Why was that?

RICKERT: Well, he had some problems in the United States: Legal problems, the exact nature of which I no longer recall. He was somebody who never forgot a slight or an insult and that's the best explanation that I can give. I'm sure since he was an extremely complex person – it was a lot more complex that. He had a daughter who was living in Miami, but the fact is that he avoided all Americans. Interestingly, I was there for three years and we had zero CODELs in three years. We had one Democratic congressman from California, a man named Mervyn Dymally, who was born in Trinidad. He used to come down from time to time, ask for no service at all from the embassy, and he would meet with Eric Williams, but the Ambassador of the United States did not.

Q: It was a personal thing?

RICKERT: It apparently was a personal thing. Other ministers would call me directly. It's a small country, so you got to know most people very quickly even as a second secretary. You were on a first name basis with a lot people in a small place like that. Ministers would call and ask for help with visas and things, some of them do-able, some of them not. It wasn't a situation where the rest of the government was inhibited from meeting and contacting anybody in the embassy. But the Ambassador of course had much broader contacts. I covered the trade unions

and the opposition, which was mostly Indian, although there was one small Tobago-based party headed by Arthur Raymond Napoleon Robinson, "A.N.R." as he was known, who was very black. Tobago is not mixed, really. It is essentially a black island and when you go there the people show very little evidence of having mixed with other races and there are very few non-blacks living on that island so it really is kind of a distinct unit compared with Trinidad, which is much more cosmopolitan.

A couple of observations about Trinidad: as it was a small embassy, one thing I learned is that small embassies can either be wonderful experiences or quite the opposite. When I arrived there had been an ambassador, a political appointee, who apparently didn't like people of color. His DCM, who was a very able fellow who later became an ambassador, didn't have enough to do, so he did everybody else's jobs for them which was not exactly a morale builder. This was the way it was related to me.

Q: That was before your time?

RICKERT: Before my time. I arrived about two weeks after both of them had left and found an unhappy and demoralized group of people, by and large. Within a period of a relatively few weeks with a new ambassador and new DCM, it changed very quickly and was, I would say, a relatively happy and productive embassy.

Q: Richard Fox was the new ambassador? Who came about the same time you did?

RICKERT: That's correct.

Q: And the new DCM was?

RICKERT: A fellow named Michael Yohn who had served in the Office of Caribbean Affairs previously and had a fair amount of ARA experience. The rest of the embassy, I don't remember the names, but John Adams was consul-general and that was a big job in Trinidad. A fellow named Reese Louise was admin officer. A lot of very good officers got their start in Trinidad. Lou Dent was a junior officer there when I got there; he's one of the top folks in admin these days. I've come across a number of others over the years. Kathy Stephens, who is now the EUR ambassador for the Balkans, came while I was there. A young woman, Denise Mathieu who was an ambassador in Africa someplace, was a junior officer there. It was a ... I wouldn't say breeding ground, but it was kind of a preparing ground for people who have gone on to have very good careers.

Q: Were U.S. interests primarily related to the consular field, immigration, terrorism and so on?

RICKERT: Immigration and visitor visas, because although Trinidad-born population or origin population in the United States isn't very big, there's a lot of travel back and forth. Especially to Miami, but also to New York. There's a Trinidad group or enclave in Brooklyn.

I'd say that the main interest was economics, because Amoco and a joint-venture called Trinidad Tesoro, which was an oil company, and a number of other companies had links or operations

with Trinidad. Texaco had a big refinery there, Amoco was doing offshore drilling. That was the main economic interest.

A couple of little anecdotes about it: The leader of the opposition was an Indian. When I say Indian here I'm speaking of people of Indian origin whose ancestors came from India after the freeing of the slaves in the mid-1800s. The black-African origin slaves left the land and the land owners had sugar plantations. That was the main form of economic activity at that time. They had to have workers, so they brought indentured workers from India. From what I understand, they took mainly untouchables ... they took the bottom of the social ladder there and brought them to Trinidad. They had ten or 15 years to pay off their passage, so they were virtual slaves. Basdeo Panday, who was leader of the opposition, was head of the sugar workers' trade union and later became prime minister. I became quite friendly with him. He took me around the island one day. We just got in his car and we drove all around the island. He showed me many different things. I remember two things that he said because they were interesting.

Basdeo had studied in England and had been an actor earlier, so he was very expressive and volatile and lively. He had been accused by people in the American trade union movement of being leftist and Marxist and so forth. He said to me: "Karl Marx was a cold weather philosopher. His philosophy was thought up in countries that had cold dark winters and where people go hungry. Marxism will never thrive in places like this, where no one ever froze to death and no one ever starved to death." Obviously, Marxism has thrived in a way in Cuba, but it was an interesting perspective that he linked Marxism with: with Marx's physical environment among other things. The other thing I remember from that trip was that we went past a bird sanctuary and just to make conversation, I asked if people did hunting in Trinidad. He said, "Oh yes, a lot of hunting." I said, well what kind of hunting do they do? And he said, "Well mostly birds." And I said, "Well, it's fairly built up and occupied, where do they hunt? And he said, "Oh, in the bird sanctuary, of course." I raised my eyebrows and he patted me on the arm and he said, "Jonathan you have a lot to learn about Trinidad."

Q: They didn't hunt for the ... what do they call it?

RICKERT: Scarlet Ibis.

Q: Ibis?

RICKERT: I don't know what they hunted for, but that was an interesting situation.

Going back to the ethnic business: I remember the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was an Indian with the wonderful name of Sir Isaac Hyatali. He was a Presbyterian. He kind of encapsulated the Trinidad experience. The Anglican Archbishop was named Clyde Abdullah, and he was half Indian and half black and Anglican with a Muslim name. There was a lot of interesting mixture in Trinidad, which made life interesting. Culturally the most important event in Trinidad is Carnival. The Indian part of the population isn't deeply involved in it and many of them are not involved in it at all. The African origin part lives for Carnival. Half of the year they prepare for the next Carnival and the other half they talk about the last Carnival. It really is a big deal.

In connection with Carnival you also have the steel bands, which I found delightful. This is a music form that – legends don't have to be ancient, no one really knows how it started – but the commonly accepted wisdom was that it came about during the time the U.S. took over the base in Chaguaramas, which is on the north of the Island of Trinidad. It was one of the bases when the destroyer deal was worked out between Churchill and Roosevelt. Oil was brought in these oil drums and the drums were discarded. The local folks found that by beating on the tops of them they could make a noise. Then with some refinement they found that by, as they call it, tuning the tops, heating it and hammering it in certain ways, they could actually get different notes. You cut off the oil drum so that they were only six or eight inches and you'd have a soprano pan, it was called. If it was 12 or more inches than it might be an alto, tenor and then bass. None of the musicians could read music, it was all done by memory and they trained in outdoor hen yards. I heard bands do very complicated classical music out of these instruments in fantastic ways. The 1812 overture was the most impressive.

So it was Carnival, the steel drums and with competitions, concerts during the Carnival season. The third element was calypso. When most Americans think of calypso, we think of Harry Belafonte and a Jamaica girl and that type of thing. But calypso in Trinidad is very topical, very current and sometime gaudy, but the music is not the most important part. The lyrics are the most important part. They have calypso competitions and wonderfully named calypsonians are national heroes like the Mighty Sparrow and Lord Kitchener and various other names. Attending a calypso tent, which was the place where the bands would perform before carnival and listening to the music was one of the very nice things about being in Trinidad.

Q: You mentioned the U.S. military base going back to the second world war, does that still exist?

RICKERT: No, that was a major part of the independence struggle, to get the base back. It formed kind of an extraterritoriality. I think even more important to Eric Williams, despite the employment that it provided to Trinidad residents, natives, he was very big on not having Trinidadians do things that created what he thought was the colonial mentality: poor black people serving rich white people. It was why Trinidad, of all the islands in the Caribbean, had virtually an anti-tourism policy; whereas all the others, one way or another, had used tourism as a labor-intensive activity that doesn't require huge investment, a way to reduce unemployment, to keep people employed and so forth. There are a lot of _____ from tourism. Eric Williams didn't do anything, really, to encourage tourism for the same reason. I'm not sure I agree with what he did, but I understand what was behind it, and I think that anyone ... that's the only post-colonial country that I lived in. But I imagine others who have lived in such countries have found what could be referred to as a colonial mentality, which has led to less initiative and aggressiveness than one would find in North America or Europe.

Q: When was independence?

RICKERT: It was 1962.

Q: And in terms of Trinidad's foreign policy and our interest in that? Did that occupy a lot of

your time or are you doing mostly internal recording on the labor or opposition?

RICKERT: I did a lot of recording on labor and the opposition. But the Trinidad foreign policy was interesting. They were, as a people, I don't know if pro-American is the right term, but they were very friendly towards Americans. But their government and their policy were strictly going along with third-world positions, so they voted against us on practically everything at the UN.

One of the things that I did, besides the reporting I just mentioned, was demarches. This led to an interesting situation. We used to get these circular tables going to speak to the foreign ministry at the highest appropriate level, urging them to support this or to oppose that. A lot of them were IBRD loans and that sort of thing. This was during the Carter administration, and there was a lot of focus as using loans as a means of rewarding or punishing those who had good human rights or bad human rights records. I did this quite often. I remember one time I was called in by one of the senior people in the foreign ministry. The foreign ministry was housed in a building probably about twice the size of this and they had a third secretary who was responsible for R.O. which was "rest of the world" and that was after North America, UK and a couple of key countries. He had most of Africa, most of Asia, all of the Middle East and he was ...

Q: United Nations?

RICKERT: He's like a J.O. Anyway, I can't remember the fellow's last name. Trevor was his first name. He called me. We were on friendly terms and he had a woman on either side with a notepad and I said, "Uh oh, this is not a good sign." Then he gave me a prepared lecture very politely and correctly and so forth. He said, "We're a sovereign country and you keep coming in and telling us what to do and we can figure out what to do without being told by the United States. We'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't do this." I was taken aback at first and I said, "Trevor, we know each other very well. First of all, I don't tell you what to do. I express to you what the views of my government are on a whole range of issues that we hope you'll take in to account. I hope that your embassy in Washington is doing the same with us on issues that are of importance to you. We see this as a basic element in bilateral relations, talking about these things. If you agree, that's fine; if you don't, that's your business, but we talk about them. I just don't get this." He had a script from which he could not deviate, and he just repeated what he had to say. I told the Ambassador. Of course, he couldn't tell Washington to stop sending his demarches, but I didn't look forward to the next one because there was obviously a matter of pride and some element of misunderstanding there as to what was involved in normal diplomatic exchange in this young country.

I was there in the late '70s. They had been independent for less than 20 years. They lacked a well-developed foreign service and traditions, and I didn't take offense at this. It was a good lesson as to how things work in countries that don't have the long traditions that some others do.

Q: Well you mentioned the years of the Prime Minister Eric Williams and this experience with the foreign ministry. Did you run in to that sort of thing in the labor movement or with the opposition at all?

RICKERT: No. They were very open, very friendly. George Weeks was the head of the oil-field workers trade union. Another Trinidad ... I can't think of the right word, not dilemma but ... you know what I mean, almost a contradiction. He was considered to be the biggest leftist by the AF of L, CIO. He didn't even want me seeing him because he was so leftist. He had two sons in the U.S. Army, living in the U.S. of course. He was always most cordial, most un-ideological. He used to invite me down to the trade union headquarters which was south of Port of Spain, the capital, where the Texaco refinery was. We'd go always to a Chinese restaurant and we'd have some of his people with him and we'd talk. He told me about his experience going to Moscow and Warsaw one time. He said he had been invited as a Communist-equivalent ... an IVP I suppose. He talked of Moscow and he said, very sour people. No sense of life, no sense of laughter. When they drank they got drunk. It was cold and it was dark and he didn't like it. Then he went to Warsaw and it was much the same. On the way back he passed through Cuba. He said, now that's another story. They're Communist but they know how to have a good time. Obviously he could relate to them even through the language barrier. So we didn't really have much trouble with ... I didn't have any difficulty of the sort I mentioned with the foreign ministry, which wasn't a problem. It was a little blip on the screen with any of the others I dealt with.

When I left, the trade union federation held a lunch for me. There were 18 or 20 unions there from among all the other unions. They gave me a tray with Trinidad and Tobago inscribed on it. One of them said very proudly and happily: "Jonathan we enjoyed knowing you here, you worked very well with us, you've always been very straightforward and not for one moment have we always suspected you of being a CIA agent." Because, at some point in the past, one of my predecessors either had been or had been suspected of being CIA. So they were very sensitive to that, but I apparently passed the test on that.

Q: How often did you go to Tobago? Were there different things you were interested in there or did somebody else in the embassy pay any special interest in that island?

RICKERT: Tobago, if I recall correctly, had about 40,000 people out of the whole country's 1.2 million. Tobago did not figure very big in anything that we did. I went over as a tourist on a couple of occasions. There was a trip, if I recall correctly, in connection with some economic council or conference. In the first two weeks I was in Trinidad, Eric Williams did attend that. I met the President and the Prime Minister, Ms. Universe, who was a Trinidadian at the time, a woman named Janelle Commissioning and it was downhill from there on [laughter]. Tobago, rightly or wrongly, was fairly significantly rural. It wasn't easy to get to and there wasn't much there. The main political reason was the party headed by A.N.R. Robinson. He was so often in Port of Spain and I could see him there.

Q: Was there a parliament?

RICKERT: Yes.

Q: This was opposition within the parliament? Elected opposition?

RICKERT: That's correct. There was a two-house parliament, with an appointed senate and an elected lower house. The senate appointments were based on different segments of society. There were always trade unions, there were always educators, there were always different business people. It was done in that way. It could not like the House of Lords. It could not stop legislation, but it did consider legislation passed by the Lower House. Sometimes it was able to get amendments accepted.

Our son, our second child, was born in Trinidad which was a cultural experience in and of itself. We looked into the possibility of my wife leaving and giving birth elsewhere but she would have had to leave early and we had a small daughter. In the end we decided, what would we do with the small daughter? So we decided to have the baby there and it worked out well. But it may not have been the smartest thing we ever did, because the conditions, had there been any significant problem, were not good. But towards the end of our time there, there was a film they made in Chaguaramas for television, an eminently forgettable film called "Gold of the Amazon Women." The only thing about it that was notable, particularly for somebody with Swedish influence in the family or element or family, my wife, it was that the chief Amazon was Anita Ekberg, who was well past her prime. We took the kids out to watch the filming and she and her other Amazonians were panning down a path through the jungle which was supposed to be Amazon jungle. She looked over and we thought she looked at this extremely blonde, blue-eyed, young boy and was a little surprised because he did not look like any of the natives of Trinidad. She went on her way to wherever it was she was going.

Q: She didn't remark further on it?

RICKERT: No, we didn't talk to her about it. It was curious. One thing that didn't have a direct effect on Trinidad or wasn't directly related to Trinidad but it had happened during our time there was Jonestown, the 25th anniversary of which had just occurred. A friend of ours from a previous assignment was the Trinidad desk officer and he covered Trinidad and Guyana. He went to Guyana at the request of people in Congress. He actually went out to Jonestown, met with Jim Jones and took residents from Jonestown community out in the field some distance from the town to question them at the request of their family members who claimed that they had been brainwashed. They agreed to talk to him, but he said that each one he spoke to gave a planned answer. He said at that time, I remember talking with him and my wife on our terrace outside the house, he said, "You know, they look drugged to me." He said, "It's not good and it's not right, but what can you say when you talk freely to people who are not under any immediate intimidation or anything like that and they tell you that they're happy and that everything's fine and they don't want to leave and so forth." It was not long after that, the Jonestown incident took place. Our consular officer, John Adams, was on the first plane that went in to Jonestown and could see the bodies from the air. We've all seen the photographs: a horrendous scene. Later, as duty officer, a couple of weeks later, I met Jonestown people who had been ... they had a boat that they used to buy supplies around the Caribbean, they stopped in Trinidad. Trinidadians didn't want to let them land. Jonestown was not a name held in high esteem or anything to do with Jim Jones at that point. They lost all their family and friends. They just happened to be out on one of these buying trips when the mass suicide took place. That was really quite a shocking experience to go through.

Trinidad to me, in some ways, is one of the best examples of what freedom, even relative freedom, can do for people who start with nothing. When you look at the people who came from India as indentured servants – these were considered the scum of Indian society, they had no education, no money, no background. They were mostly Hindus, some are Muslim but, interestingly, Hinduism in Trinidad has no caste system because everyone who came was at the bottom. So they just ignored it. They also eat beef and drink scotch, but that's another matter. They consider themselves to be good Hindus.

Within the space of one to two generations, living in a country where there was relative freedom and a decent education system, these folks have produced a large numbers of doctors, lawyers, architects, dentists, professionals and very successful business people. V. S. Naipaul was from that group. In fact, there are two Trinidadian players in literature. Derek Walcott who is black or of African origin, and V.S. Naipaul, which is quite something for such a small place. It struck me that Trinidad is a very good example of what freedom of opportunity makes possible for people who are motivated and willing to work hard. Not all of them, of course, had been successful, but an amazingly high percentage and a much higher percentage than ever would have happened had they stayed in India, I am convinced of that.

Q: The time that you were there, people worked for you had liberties of the press and ...?

RICKERT: There was freedom of the press. Eric Williams ran a rather autocratic country, he behaved in a rather autocratic way, but he was democratically elected in free and fair elections and between elections he kind of ran the show as he saw fit. At the same time, there were the basic freedoms of religion and expression and assembly and so forth. They were observed very well, I would say, on the whole. In a country that small, there's always somebody who knows somebody and undoubtedly there were pressures to not print certain things, to friendships and personal contacts and so forth. But there was no systematic suppression of human rights. In fact, I wrote in the first human rights report for Trinidad because when those reports first came out, they were done for the countries that were deemed to have human rights problems and then were gradually expanded to cover everyone. I won't say that the arrestees and prisoners were always treated with the utmost delicacy and interrogations were not necessarily in accord with the highest standards but I think if you go in a country, you can tell whether a people are afraid or not. Are they intimidated? Are they unwilling to maintain contact? Having spent so much time in Communist countries, I have something of a feel for that. There was none of that in Trinidad. I suspect that to people who were mistreated, the large majority of the population would probably say they deserved it. That was kind of the attitude. If you were criminal and the police are there, then they'll slap you around a bit. I don't recall any cases of overt torture or gross mistreatment but they certainly didn't live up to the highest standards in every case.

Q: I noticed that you were nominated for the Director General's Reporting Award in 1980. It must have been near the end of your tour in Port of Spain. Was that for a pattern of reporting over the three years or were there some special reports that you did?

RICKERT: There were two main reports, plus the spot and other general reporting. We did a very long report on whether Trinidad – which, I think, I was not the sole author but I did a large part of it and kind of put it together – taking a look at all aspects of Trinidad society, economy,

politics, culture and all the rest and trying to figure out where it was going, what would happen when Eric Williams left the scene ... Which was to happen actually not that much after my departure from Trinidad. The Ambassador was very pleased with that.

The other thing that I did, that I remember particularly, was Trinidad had a lot of small, wack-o, extremist groups. Sometimes two or three people. As far as I knew, no one had ever tried to figure out what they all were and which ones meant anything and which ones didn't. The political section had very good newspaper archives. The FSN secretary and her predecessors for years had been clipping things out. I pulled everything together. It was 18 different groups that had appeared in that press. I got hold of everything that I could find in open sources and went and discussed it with the counter-intelligence folks who were actually very reticent. They said that there were only a couple of them that we needed to be concerned with. It provided, perhaps in one place, the first real compilation of information on these various groups. Some of them were black power, some of them were crypto-Marxists. Some of them were just wack-o but there were a lot of them for such a small place. I felt, and the Ambassador and DCM felt, that it was a situation where we ought to know more about who they were.

Trinidad had a black power uprising in the early '70s before I got there. It was a minor military revolt. That was always in people's minds because that had showed that there was some tinder there for this kind of thing if people felt dissatisfaction to a significant degree or if rabble rousers were successful enough in stirring things up.

Q: Did you do the political military work of the embassy such as it was? Ship visits?

RICKERT: Yes. We had no resident military or defense attaché. We were covered out of Caracas. The main activity we had was an occasional ship visit. Those were fun and always well received. I don't remember the exact ships that came but we didn't have any battleships. We had some cruisers or some destroyers. They held open houses and invited people on board. There were so many people who remembered the old days, with mixed feelings, but a lot of people had good feelings about Chaguaramas because it had provided employment and it was in fact, the symbol that Trinidad mattered. Of course there's always Coca Cola too.

Q: It was a Navy base?

RICKERT: It was a Navy base, yes. The base was still there, but most of the buildings had just been allowed to deteriorate. Some warehouses were still being used, this going back to Bush.

Q: Trinidad had a military establishments that went on some of our training programs?

RICKERT: Yes they did.

Q: You had arranged that?

RICKERT: The visiting we were covered as I said, out of Caracas, some of that was done by the visiting defense attachés who'd come twice a year, something like that. I did some of the set-up work on that. But they had a coast guard and a Trinidad defense force. My recollection was that

it was 500 people, something like that. They took advantage of IMET and also, if I recall correctly, they used FMF to get some upgraded patrol boats. Drugs had not become a major problem when I was there but I think most of us could see the handwriting on the wall that any of those islands had the potential of being a transit for drugs headed north from Columbia or Bolivia or wherever. Trinidad being bigger than any of the other islands except for Jamaica and Hispaniola of course ... but of the English islands, it was a tempting target. My understanding is that subsequently there has been considerable amount of concern about drugs transiting through Trinidad.

Q: Did you have a lot to do with the British High Commission at the time that you were there?

RICKERT: Yes.

Q: I assumed they played a significant role?

RICKERT: Mostly socially because there really wasn't that much going on politically. We compared notes on how Eric Williams was and tried to figure out what was going on. Their interests, essentially, were commercial as ours were. There were a number of British banks and other Brit-Insurance Companies and others there. Politically Trinidad was more aligned to Africa than to Europe and North America.

There was one little incident that was perhaps the most bizarre incident that I've had or I observed in my foreign service career, but it says a lot about Trinidad at the time. The Argentine Ambassador was living in a house that was rented. The house was sold by the owner to the Nigerian Embassy. At the time of the sale there were about three months left on the lease. I'm no real estate expert but as I understand it, if you sell a house that has a legal lease, you can't throw the people out until the lease expires, that's the contract that goes with the sale.

But the Nigerian High Commissioner was impatient and tried to get the Argentine to leave and the Argentine refused. One night, in the middle of the night, a bunch of goons came and raided the house, threw the Argentine Ambassador and all of his belongings out on the street, ripped the flag down, ripped the shield down and occupied the house. The Argentines complained to the foreign ministry and the foreign ministry said, "We understand your concern but this is a bilateral problem between you and Nigeria." It was a huge scandal obviously. What eventually happened was the foreign minister at least had the decency to tell the Nigerian High Commissioner and said – I don't know what exactly he said but he did say, he'd never speak to him again. This message was conveyed in Lagos and the Nigerian government had the sense and decency to recall the High Commissioner so the approximate cause of all of this unpleasantness was removed. But the Trinidadians never took any steps to resolve the issue. Since the period of time was relatively short, it ended before the Nigerians had legal control of the house within a relatively short time. They withdrew their Ambassador and had a chargé there for an extended period but it was quite an odd performance.

Q: Unusual. I see you also received a Meritorious Honor Award in Port of Spain. Is that for reporting?

RICKERT: That was for reporting, yes. The embassy was much more proactive on rewards than some others I've been in.

Q: Anything else about your assignment in Trinidad?

RICKERT: No, I think that pretty well covers it.

ROBERT K. GEIS
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Port-Of-Spain (1978-1983)

Mr. Geis was born in Havana, Cuba of American parents and was raised in Houston, Texas. He was educated at Rice University and American University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1962, he served as Cultural Affairs Officer and/or Public Affairs Officer in Argentina, Romania, Ecuador, USSR, Italy and Trinidad and Tobago. His service also included several Washington assignments with USIA. In the years 1973 and 1974 Mr. Geis studied at Johns Hopkins University (SAIS) and the George Washington University. Mr. Geis was interviewed by Lewis Hoffacker in 1999.

GEIS: Toward the end of my Leningrad assignment, the new director of USIA, John Reinhardt, visited. He has been much criticized by agency officers as not sufficiently political and hard-information-oriented. In contrast, I liked him, approved strongly of his emphasis on two-way reciprocal communication with foreign cultures. In other words, the idea is that you're more effective as a communicator inasmuch as you get to know and involve yourself in the local culture, language, *et cetera*. Reinhardt called this the "second mandate," which, as I saw it, was something that most good agency officers did anyway in the course of business. Now it had official sanction, and Reinhardt also actually changed the name of USIA to the U.S. International Communication Agency. Maybe seeing in me a kindred spirit and in any case taking pity on me after the draining Soviet experience, Reinhardt gave me my first country PAO-ship. This was to the lovely country island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It would prove to be my most wonderful and my favorite assignment.

Trinidad and Leningrad could not have been more different. In climate, in lifestyle, in culture and history, it was like going from Siberia to paradise. I was warmly received and rapidly became involved in a modest but vibrant program of information and culture using the USIS-created American center, Port-of-Spain. I had a fine Trinidadian staff of information, cultural, and library specialists, both of African and East Indian descent. These were the two major ethnic groups of Trinidad. On a personal note, in 1980, I met my West German information officer colleague, the lovely and very talented Anneliese Sturm. As we got to know each other better, I decided she was much too capable and much too much competition, so in October I married her. Unfortunately, she did have to resign from her foreign service to marry. We happily honeymooned in Tobago, sister island of Trinidad.

Eric Williams was the Prime Minister and father of his country. From 1956 to 1981, he was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. By 1979, Prime Minister Williams had become a strange, very reclusive figure. He had locked himself away in the Government House and appeared only for certain national holidays. He did not meet with foreign ambassadors. In fact, he very rarely met with his own cabinet. And this fate befell, unfortunately, the American ambassador. Ambassador Irving Cheslaw arrived in Port-of-Spain shortly after I did. He had known Williams when he was a more junior officer serving in Trinidad and Tobago at the time that Williams still was in office but before he had become as reclusive as he later became. And it was hoped that this would serve Cheslaw in renewing contact with the Prime Minister with his previous experience. But unfortunately no contact was taking place. The ambassador and I arranged for the visit of a distinguished American historian, Henry Steele Commager. Commager was an old friend of the ambassador's and had also been a friend of the Prime Minister. Unfortunately, even this did not result in a meeting. And Williams died in 1981, and Cheslaw departed the same year, never having met the Prime Minister. It was very sad. It was crazy. It should never have happened. It was very disappointing, I know, to Ambassador Cheslaw.

Q: *Williams was, I guess you'd call him, senile?*

GEIS: Yes, he really was paranoid and very strange and very critical at that time of the United States.

Q: *He had a mental health problem.*

GEIS: I think he did, yes, I really do. And it was sad because the country deserved better, and later on... Well, our relations still were fairly good with Trinidad and Tobago, but he certainly was no positive element.

Although it's a small country, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are immensely creative. USICA and the American Center worked closely with cultural luminaries in the theater, dance, and plastic arts. One of the most rewarding collaborations was with the famed Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott. In 1980, Derek received a MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant, and he decided to use some of the funds to promote U.S.-Caribbean cultural ties. Needless to say, we were delighted and honored to collaborate with him. As a result, we cosponsored visits to Trinidad and Tobago by the late Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky, who was a revered defector from Leningrad, and another visitor for workshops was the distinguished American writer and essayist, Susan Sontag. Later on, two young American actors, Coster Smith and Frances McDormond, came to Trinidad and performed in Derek's play, *The Last Carnival*. We were thrilled when in 1992 Derek received the Nobel Prize for Literature. And later, Fran McDormond received the Best Actress Oscar for her fine performance in *Fargo*. Other Trinidad and Tobago luminaries with whom we worked included the famed dancer Beryl McBurnie, the artist Boscoe Holder, actor Wilbert Holder, dancer and choreographer Astor Johnson, and the noted journalist George John, who was my best man in my wedding.

In 1981, the Reagan Administration came into office, and although I was never a fan of this politician, I strongly supported the policy of emphasis on economic development of Caribbean island nations, the Caribbean Basin Initiative, which was one of Reagan's major foreign policy

initiatives. USICA became very involved in promoting the CBI. After laborious negotiations in 1983, we arranged for USIA's energy exhibit to be shown in Port-of-Spain. The President of Trinidad and Tobago, Ellis Clark, visited the exhibit, and the exhibit director turned out to be an old friend and colleague of ours from Soviet days, Frank Ursino. But a recounting of our programs cannot convey a feeling of why this was my favorite assignment. The greatest pleasure of Trinidad, aside from its lush ecology and delightful climate was the wonderful and creative people on the island. The annual outburst of new calypsos, the steel band competition, and the costume bands which culminate in Carnival is truly one of life's greatest experiences. It is an authentic street carnival in which everyone can participate. And Anneliese and I "played mas," which is to say we participated in Carnival in the bands, and we "jumped up," another expression for participating in Carnival, each year of our stay there, and we really miss it today.

We left Trinidad and Tobago in August of 1983 for a Washington assignment, but I didn't leave the Caribbean. I was in charge of Caribbean affairs for USIA for the next year or so. On another personal note, my life flip-flopped again on December the 22, 1983, when Alexandra Sturm-Geis was born at George Washington Hospital, Washington, DC.

The most significant event of my brief stint on the Caribbean Desk was, as you can imagine, the U.S. intervention in Grenada. It was one of the few cases in my career when I knew a real state secret in advance. Most of us who were knowledgeable about the region supported the activist policy adopted by the Reagan Administration. We felt that it was in the national security interests of the United States to protect that Caribbean island from a totalitarian Communist takeover. I had the pleasure of visiting Grenada to assist our staff there during the visit of Secretary of State Shultz in February of 1984. After a tour of my island posts in December of 1984, this was preparatory to writing the dreaded performance reports, I had the great pleasure of returning to my birthplace, Havana. I would never have done this without a diplomatic passport. As it was, I received a visa only at the very last minute, and upon arrival in Havana, sure enough, I was pulled out of line and quizzed about my being born in Havana. But no problem. Our man in Havana, Don Besom, who was an old buddy with whom I had served in Argentina and Ecuador, was there to meet me. Havana was sad to see, really run down. We visited some officials, some artists, and the famous *finca*, the farm, of Ernest Hemingway. The visit culminated in an evening at the famed Tropicana night club, also now a bit seedy. And then, true to form, the Cubans, some three years later, put my picture in *Granma*, the Communist Party newspaper, along with Don Besom and other former PAOs. We were labeled as CIA agents.

During my stint as desk officer, I worked with our exhibit division to put together a major U.S. exhibition celebrating Caribbean-American cultural interaction. Funds for this came from the East-West exhibit money, which was not being used due to declining relations with the USSR. Among others, we consulted with Derek Walcott, our old friend, on exhibit content. And the exhibit opened in Nassau in the Bahamas in January, 1985. It was truly a wonderful show, which included performing arts groups and jazz and such musical areas as Louisiana performers and Zydeco, among other things. Sadly, the exhibit would never reach my beloved Trinidad. USIA director at the time, Charles Wick, a personal friend of the Reagans, who was a very energetic idea man, made the foolish decision that the exhibit was too costly and could not continue to be shown. So very penny-wise and pound-foolish, it was canceled. This sort of mentality periodically affected USIA's leadership. Like as not, the cultural side of our program tended to

suffer the most during budget cutbacks. I was horrified to learn, just a few years ago, that in a fit of belt-tightening, the USIA assistant director for Europe closed every single library in Europe, including my own American center in Bucharest. I was stunned and still am. As usual, during this Washington assignment it didn't take me long to tire of USIA's bureaucracy and Washington infighting, and I began to look into another foreign assignment. Fortunately for me at that time, a former colleague of mine from Bucharest departed early from our branch post in Florence, Italy. There was fierce competition for the assignment, but I emerged the winner, and Anneliese and I began language training in spring of 1985.

JONATHAN B. RICKERT
Desk Officer for Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam
Washington, DC (1980-1982)

Jonathan Rickert was born and raised in Washington, DC and educated at Princeton and Yale Universities. After service in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1963, serving tours in both Washington and abroad. His foreign posts include London, Moscow, Port au Spain, Sofia and Bucharest, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission. In his Washington assignments Mr. Rickert dealt primarily with Eastern and Central European Affairs. Mr. Rickert was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: It looks like in 1980 you came back to Washington and what was your assignment in the Department?

RICKERT: One last footnote which isn't about Trinidad. Before I left, I did a TDY in Surinam because when I was coming back to Washington I was going to be in the Office of Caribbean Affairs, ARACAR, with responsibility for Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. Suriname was an even smaller embassy. Nancy Ostrander was the ambassador there. The DCM had to leave or his political officer, the DCM, had to leave on short notice for personal reasons not permanently but for a period of time. They just had a military coup there. So ARA agreed to my going down and filling in as a TDY political officer. So I had a good introduction to Suriname before taking over the Suriname desk. It was a lot of fun, it was a much more open society in terms of willingness to be able to talk to people. In Trinidad you can meet with anybody but they wouldn't say much. In Suriname, they would not only meet with you but they were very open. In the three weeks I was there I met the President, the Prime Minister, about half the cabinet, the trade union leaders, Alcoa had a big operation there and the union worker Frank Darby was later murdered ... and also Desire Bouterse or the corporal who had staged the coup and a number of his thugs and others.

Nancy and I went one time to meet with the Prime Minister, Chin A. Sen. He was of Chinese origin and he was very despondent about the way things were going. Nancy and I convinced him not to resign which I thought was because he was viewed in Washington and by the embassy as a stabilizing force. You don't think as a mid-level officer that you were going to be involved in trying to convince prime ministers not to resign. The scale of these countries, there is only,

roughly, 350,000 people in Suriname. There are more Surinamese in Holland than there are in Suriname.

In any case, then when I left, I came back to Washington, took over as desk officer and had responsibility for those three countries to start with.

Q: Now, did you spend any time in Guyana?

RICKERT: Only one visit on the way back from Suriname. I stayed with Dick Dwyer who had been shot at Jonestown. He was DCM there. That was kind of a scary place, I have to say; much poorer and much more lawless than either Trinidad or Suriname but part of the same Caribbean culture with the same tradition of colonialism and sugar and other tropical products and exploitation of slave labor and all the rest. So one could feel at home culturally in Guyana very easily if one had lived in Trinidad or other parts of the British West-Indian empire.

Q: So as the desk officer for Trinidad or Guyana or Suriname you did the usual desk officer things, you liaised with the embassies in Washington and went in the field, made recommendations up the line ... Anything particular about this period which was at the end of the Carter Administration and the beginning of the Reagan administration?

RICKERT: Well, I don't know where you were at that time but our assistant secretary was Bill Bowdler. One of the lessons that I learned very quickly when the Reagan Administration came in was what happened to people who were on the wrong side of the new administration because Bowdler was there one day and he was gone the next. There were no farewells or anything else. He was out the door because, I gathered, of the position that he had taken legally, correctly, honorably, on behalf of the previous administration on Central America. So he was an immediate casualty who was eventually succeeded by Tom Enders.

Rob Warren was our office director when I got there. Richard Howard was the deputy. We had a number of good desk officers. Marsha Barnes who took over Guyana at a certain point is now Ambassador of Suriname and later was director of Caribbean affairs. Her first tour in the foreign service was in Guyana. She spent a fairly significant chunk of her career down there. When Tom Enders came in, as I understand it, there were pressures to have a bunch of DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary] including political ones. He insisted on having two DAS's for ARA. One was Steve Bosworth and the other was Ted Briggs. They really had their hands full because, I've forgotten the exact number of countries, but it was in the range of 25 or so countries in ARA. Just with reasonable travel, that meant that there was usually one DAS. The assistant secretary was gone and the two DAS's were there or one of the DAS's were traveling. So it was tough, but that's the way Enders apparently wanted to do it.

Q: I assume his main focus was on Central America and things other than the three countries that you were responsible for?

RICKERT: Right. Steve Bosworth was our DAS. The main concerns in the Caribbean were the Reagan Administration's Caribbean Base Initiative which was an effort to increase trade and investment and help raise the standard of living in the region and then to prevent further spread

of Communism. There was a lot of concern about Suriname. Steve Bosworth was very much involved on Suriname because no one knew where this Corporal Desire Bouterse was going to take the country. There was concern that he might have Marxist links or leanings. The U.S. had been caught by surprise in the Western Hemisphere before and the Reagan Administration, I think quite rightly, didn't want to see that again even in a very small place.

Q: As I understand the situation in Suriname there was presumably a debate between those who thought that we'd try to work with him, work around him, have contact with him, as I guess, Ambassador Ostrander did and you mentioned the visit you had made with her ... and those who thought maybe the best thing was to maybe try to oppose him, isolate him, boycott him. I did an interview in this program with Ambassador Denis Hayes who was there much later than the time we're talking about but as I understood from him, he decided not to have any contact with Bouterse.

RICKERT: Bouterse there and the military.

Q: ... feeling that anything he did would be misinterpreted, it was better to shun him and then I'm not sure I pushed him hard enough on the success of that approach which I kind of wondered about. I wish I had debated it a little bit more. But anyway, is that the kind of thing that you had to deal with at the time?

RICKERT: My recollection is that we didn't want to do anything that would raise him in the estimation of the population. But we needed a key contact with him in order to know what he was up to. I don't recall any efforts to isolate him during this time. I don't recall the exact date of the military coup but it was early in 1980, February, something like that. So Bouterse was unknown to the outside world. People were still trying to figure out who he was, what he wanted, why he had done this, where he was headed, all these other things ... I remember I sent, I don't remember his name but the Army found a fellow, a Major if I recall, who was sent as defense attaché. We haven't had a defense attaché before, but he was an American of Indonesian origin and therefore spoke Dutch. Bouterse did not speak English as I recall, or spoke very poor English. The hope was that through this defense attaché we could get a closer contact with Bouterse, not to glorify him or to get him attaché but know what he was up to and why.

When Nancy Ostrander left, a very good career officer, Jack Crowley, who had been DCM in a number of places and sort of a career ARA hand, took over. He was there for a while. I think, from what I could tell, did a very solid job. He was replaced after a couple of years at the request of Tom Enders actually.

Q: I'm very interested in hearing what you're about to say given that build up.

RICKERT: Well, Enders called Rob Warren and me and our deputy director, Dick Howard up to his office one day and said, "How are things going in Suriname?" We said, "going well." Well, "How's Jack Crowley doing there?" We said, "Fine professionally, he's doing a good job so forth." "How does he get on with Bouterse?"

Rob Warren actually carried the conversation and said that he talked to him from time to time but there is a cultural difference and generational difference between the two. Enders, I'm sorry I have to quote this but he said: "Well, I think we should have somebody down there who can really get in with Bouterse and his people." "Somebody who'd go drinking and whoring with him" – was the term he used. Enders didn't think Crowley was the man so Crowley was recalled. The person who was supposed to have replaced him ran into problems. He had been in Afghanistan just prior or was it after, I don't know if I've got the chronology exactly right but Spike Dubbs had been assassinated there. Then we had a series of chargés maintaining relations on a very reduced level. This officer had been there as chargé. He had, according to what everybody said, I can't say this from personal knowledge, but apparently a girlfriend, an Australian girl who came and stayed with him there for extended periods. Others didn't have local girlfriends or spouses and some complaints were made. This got to the undersecretary for management. When the undersecretary heard about this, he blocked the appointment. I can't vouch for anything except the quote from Tom Enders for which I was personally present, but I heard the rest of this from enough sources so that I think in outlines at least it is an accurate picture of what happened.

Q: Somebody went to Suriname?

RICKERT: Frankly ... I don't know.

Q: That was perhaps after your time?

RICKERT: It may have been after my time because I honestly don't remember who ended up going. As time went on, Rob moved on. Enders was told he was going to get a DAS he didn't want, a political gentleman named John Upston. He refused to accept Upston. To make a long story short, Upston agreed to take a political appointment. He was made the coordinator for Caribbean affairs and he took over Rob Warren's office and he had his own secretary but because he had a, shall we say, less than sterling reputation, Rob and Dick Howard and all of us went to see Enders and asked that we not be put under his direct direction. Enders, to his credit, created a special position that supervised no one but went around, made speeches and visited the region. Upston was a perfectly amiable fellow. He wasn't nasty. He accepted this arrangement. He didn't make anyone feel that they had stabbed him in the back or anything like that. The tradeoff was that we didn't get a director because the slot was taken. So Dick Howard, who was really a career ARA person and a very good and decent fellow and very good officer, became the acting director. And I, as the senior most desk officer, became the acting Deputy Director. So I gave up Guyana to Marsha Barnes who was delighted to get it back and did the deputy stuff in the office.

Q: And continued to do Suriname and Trinidad.

RICKERT: Right.

A couple of interesting things that happened. What happened during the Reagan administration? I remember they were very concerned, as I mentioned, about Communism possibly in Surinam. The Surinamese foreign minister was due to come to have a meeting with Secretary Haig. I was

told to write very tough talking points which I did, which were cleared up through the chain and went to Haig. I was the note taker at this meeting. The Surinamese foreign minister came in. Haig put his arm around him and didn't use one of the talking points. He achieved the same end through different means. I'm not saying he just rolled over but he figured that in this case, I'm assuming, that talking tough to a person representing 350,000 people was less likely to get the desired end than showing some concern and interest and friendliness ... So that was one little lesson there.

One bizarre Trinidad thing happened while I was there. After I left Trinidad, the second DCM, I mentioned the first was Mike Yohn, the second was Joe O'Mahony who had spent time in India and Latin America: a fine person who had been very badly shot up in WWII and was in a lot of pain a lot of the time. Joe was a decent person and a good DCM. He was chargé after I left because the next ambassador who was a politico had not yet come. There was a delay in his getting there. I came back from lunch one day and I was told by my secretary, "you have a flash message from Trinidad." That's almost a contradiction in terms. I had never seen a flash any time in a place except during my time in the OP center. The flash dealt with the following: Prime Minister Williams had died suddenly. Well, you don't need a flash message for that, but the decision had been made to cremate him in Trinidad. They needed a crematorium, because the only cremating that was done in Trinidad was done on the banks of the streams, Indian style. That was not considered sufficiently respectful for a person who came from an African and Christian background. So I had about three or four days to get a crematorium ... a portable crematorium to Trinidad so that Eric Williams could be cremated. Where do you start?

At first I called DoD [Department of Defense]. They were extremely pleasant but they said they had no such thing. They didn't know of such a thing and they couldn't give any help. I scratched my head and I finally thought, well, let me call Gawler's Funeral Home out on Wisconsin Avenue. They had handled the arrangements for Abraham Lincoln's funeral. I figured they had long experience when they handled the arrangements for my father's funeral in 1950. I got hold of the cremations guy there and explained the dilemma and he said to me, he was very polite and understanding and helpful and said: "You know, I hope you don't mind my asking but, most of the time, it's found more efficient to take the body to the crematorium than the crematorium to the body." I hadn't told him who this was for, I said I couldn't, because it was all very hush-hush. I said, "I understand, but in this case it doesn't work." I said it was for someone outside the country. So he said, there's a company in Orlando that makes crematoria. He gave me the name and the phone number and everything else and he said, "Why don't you call them and see what you can find out." So I got hold of someone there and they said that they had a crematorium that had just come off the assembly line and was test fired and was ready to go for use in Michigan but that it could be diverted. We got the dimensions and found that it would fit in a 747 cargo plane, big enough to take it. They of course wanted to see the color of the money, which I don't blame them. The payer for this operation was TRINTOC (Trinidad and Tobago Oil Company Limited) which was the Trinidad oil company which had an office in New York. I put them in touch with TRINTOC and TRINTOC took care of the money. The crematorium was trucked down to Miami. We had to hold the plane a bit but it got on the plane and got there by the deadline.

It was one of the more bizarre things that I did in foreign service.

Q: So the Trinidad government came to the embassy for help and it was told that this would be a nice gesture?

RICKERT: I guess. I could only surmise. As I recall, the cable was a request. They certainly didn't cook it up themselves. It may be that the Deputy Prime Minister or someone mentioned it to the chargé and he said, well, we'll see what we can do. Whether it was request or demand or just something that they heard about, I no longer recall. The chargé took it on and was "charged" to get hold of this crematorium. It was a gas-fired crematorium. They had plenty of gas in Trinidad so that's what happened.

Q: And it worked?

RICKERT: Well, that, I've heard mixed stories about that. There were problems with it but I think it eventually worked. There's a little footnote in this. I'm jumping ahead in this story and I won't go in to all the gory details but some years later in the late '80s I was in Bulgaria and we had a CODEL [Congressional Delegation] a large CODEL there. I ended up chatting with the military aide that normally accompany these CODELs. He asked where I served and so forth, I mentioned Trinidad and he said, "Oh, Trinidad. I worked for BWIA, the British West-India Airways, for many years." To make a long story short, he said, he knew that it must have been me there who made the arrangements, but he picked it up from the point where there was a crematorium and all the rest and he got it taken care of. So here was an American diplomat and an American military officer; He was a Reserve officer; He did this in his free time, so to speak, standing in the garden of a Bulgarian government villa in Sofia talking about the cremation of the Trinidad prime minister. It was really kind of macabre. It was very enjoyable to both of us to meet the other half of this process.

Q: It helps about your assignment in Caribbean affairs.

RICKERT: There are a couple of other things I might mention. The way things worked back then. Of course, the Caribbean countries were very small. When Rob Warren was Office Director, a foreign minister would come to town. There were no representational funds. So Rob would ask, "Anybody from the office want to have lunch with the prime minister of Grenada or the foreign minister of some other island like Barbados?", and we'd all trundle off to the Foreign Service Club and split the bill. That was our representation and entertainment. It was nice for meeting some of these guys, but I thought a little bit from the skimpy side.

Q: It reminds me of the time I took Javier Perez de Cuellar to have a bite to eat at the Kennedy Center way before he became Secretary General of the United Nations.

RICKERT: Another thing I ended up doing in Caribbean Affairs... There were a couple of people that were not really *persona non grata* with the State Department but whom we couldn't ignore completely. One was Cheddi Jagan, the once and future prime minister of Guyana. When he came to town I, with my elevated position as Acting Deputy Director of Caribbean Affairs, would be given the pleasure of meeting with him because nobody of higher rank than I would

see him. I only remember one meeting with him. I remember he was a very charming, engaging, articulate fellow who was fun to talk to.

Q: And didn't feel insulted that he had to talk to you as opposed to somebody else.

RICKERT: No. I think he was pretty savvy. I don't remember meeting with Eric Gairy, the prime minister of Grenada who believed in UFO's and had Grenada introduce UN General Assembly resolutions on the subject of UFO's. But I had correspondence with him and talked to him on the phone. I don't recall meeting him, but I ended up with some of those tasks.

Q: ...and the U. S. military action in Grenada came well after you left.

RICKERT: That's correct. One other little incident that was one of the less attractive sides of the Foreign Service – and I might want to edit this when I get to it – I had a call one day when I was still on the Guyana desk from a gentleman whose first name I can't remember, but his last name was McCormack, and he later became assistant secretary for EB (Economic Bureau).

Q: Richard...

RICKERT: Richard something. I can't remember for sure. But he called me up as the Guyana desk officer and chewed me up one side and down another because of the problems that a businessman who had gone – he was a staffer for Helms at the time...

Q: McCormack was.

RICKERT: McCormack was and he had a fellow who was dealing with the Guyana government and the embassy hadn't helped this guy. This was an African American fellow who was taking advantage of some kind of a set-aside to provide rum to American Commissary, military commissaries, and I had met and spoken with the guy. He had essentially a trade dispute with the Guyana authorities. He claimed that he'd been ripped off and he'd been cheated, and so forth and so on. And McCormack really tore a strip off me in the State Department for our failure to get this guy's money. He was loud, abusive, obnoxious over the phone. I put the phone down shaking and immediately typed up everything I could remember and sent it to Steve Bosworth. No one wanted to have someone be blindsided at a higher level by this. And after I calmed down, a couple of hours later, McCormack called back and, in a sense, apologized, and said, "I'm sorry I had to do that, but he was sitting in my office, and I had to put on a show for him."

Q: Thanks a lot! Anything else? We haven't, other than this trade dispute, haven't talked much about Guyana, and you mentioned Jagan coming to see you. Is there anything else...

RICKERT: There was not much. Guyana was in a quiet period then. The name of the prime minister who was somebody that we favored over Jagan escapes me, who later became a tin pot dictator of his own. He was running dishonest elections and persecuting the Indians there mostly through disenfranchising them to a sufficient extent yet reelected though the Indians were the majority in Guyana by that time. And Guyana was of interest, but I don't recall anything of particular note had to do with our relations with Guyana during the talks the year that I dealt with

it. There are a couple of other things that I might mention. The next ambassador to Trinidad after Irv Cheslaw was a black politician from the American Virgin Islands, a republican, believe it or not, named Melvin Evans. He was actually a very nice man. He'd been the Virgin Islands delegate in Congress. I learned a little something about Congress from him. He was named, and I didn't hear from him, and I waited and waited, and so forth. He finally called, and we had a chat. His hearing was scheduled for Monday afternoon. He came to town on Sunday, and I had a meeting with him on Sunday, and we chatted and so forth. His first question was, Jonathan, what does an ambassador do?" I told him a little bit, and he had read some things about Trinidad, but he hadn't done very much. Well, of course, when it came time for his hearing, he received, shall we say, members or former members courtesy, and wasn't asked any questions of any sort at all. And so he hadn't done the usual homework which, I know, you were very familiar with to assignments as ambassador. But he was very relaxed through this whole thing. He was a very nice man, a very decent man, but he had medical problems and actually died in Trinidad during his time there. He went over for his meeting with President Reagan, and he was there with his family and so forth, and I had accompanied him just to be there as kind of an escort. He said, "Jonathan, come on in. You're welcome to come in for my meeting with the president." I declined and said, "This is a moment, Mr. Ambassador, for you and your family, and not for outsiders." As much as I would like to have done it, his wife was there, his children were there, and some grandchildren. This was not...I mean it was very kind and thoughtful of him to ask me to participate, but not a situation which I thought I should insert myself.

Q: Maybe you should have. He probably really didn't _____?

RICKERT: He was, but I didn't feel that I should. I did meet Vice President Bush on that occasion. He was wandering around in the vicinity. We had another ambassador named Milan Bish who went through Barbados who was a developer of commercial real estate from Nebraska or some such place. As you recall, one of the very good things in my view as one who was never an ambassador that Ronald Reagan did was to call each appointee to tell him or her personally that he had been...or she had been...named ambassador.

Q: Actually it was really a request, a question, "Would you be willing to serve as the United States ambassador to somewhere?"

RICKERT: You're entirely right. Milan Bish was a very jovial and outgoing Elks and Lions Club type of guy but with a somewhat limited geographic background. He told us about this story about how this had happened and how he got this call. He knew he was up for something, but he didn't know exactly what. Ronald Reagan got on the line, and they chit-chatted, and he said, "Well, I want you to know that I'm offering you the position as U. S. Ambassador to Barbados, and I hope that you will accept," and so forth and so on. And Bish said, "Oh, yes, Sir, I'd be very delighted to accept." They finished their conversation, and the first thing he did was to run for an atlas because he also didn't know where or what Barbados was. And we heard that he was telling the story in Barbados. We quietly suggested that he save that for the Elks of the Lions Club in Nebraska and not for Barbados because people from small countries can be very prickly about these things. So anyway, he was the ambassador that was totally ignored during the invasion of Grenada which was staged on Grenada which was technically one of his areas of

responsibility. He was accredited to Barbados but co-accredited to Grenada and some other smaller islands.

Q: And wasn't kept informed, and wasn't consulted, certainly.

RICKERT: No. The whole thing was just done over his head because, I'm afraid, he was in over his head.

LAWRENCE H. HYDLE
Political Officer
Port-of-Spain (1983-1985)

Lawrence H. Hydle was born in Indiana in 1940. He graduated from Occidental College in 1960 and also attended Columbia University. Mr. Hydle entered the Foreign Service in 1965. In addition to serving in Ghana, he held positions in Vietnam, Ireland, Trinidad and Tobago, and Kuwait. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 21, 1994.

Q: How did the system respond when you came back?

HYDLE: Because they had first asked me to extend for a third year and changed that, there were not many jobs left so I was just given a few options that happened to be open. I took the one that I thought was best, which was political officer in Trinidad-Tobago.

Q: Where you served from 83 to 85.

HYDLE: Yes.

Q: What was the situation there?

HYDLE: Trinidad-Tobago was a democratic country. However, it had been under one-party rule for all of the years since its independence which I guess was in the 60s. Basically, there were racial politics because the country is divided almost equally between people of African origin and people of East Indian origin. But the Africans had the better electoral situation so they stayed in power.

The country was somewhat aloof from the Americans. They always felt--maybe it was the personal experiences of Eric Williams the previous long time prime minister, or some of the officers in the current government had been students in the US during the black power era of the late 60s--so they all somewhat feared US influence, and even influence unconsciously exercised. They were very sensitive about it in contrast to the other eastern Caribbean countries who were very small and wanted to be very close to the US.

This showed up in the US intervention in Grenada. Where the eastern Caribbean countries wanted it very much, the Jamaican government wanted it although the opposition in Jamaica didn't want it. But the Trinidad government was against the killing of Morris Bishop, Prime Minister, by his more radical opponents, but they also were against the US intervention.

Trinidad-Tobago was a producer of oil. We had some companies that were US owned that were the oil producers. Texaco, I think, maybe Amoco, I don't recall. We wanted to have reasonable relations with them, we wanted to have a supply of oil from them. They had refineries that refined oil from elsewhere. Because of the oil, a small population, it was a fairly wealthy country.

We had not had US bilateral assistance for some time. There were a fairly significant number of Trinidadians who were citizens of the US or green card holders. Immigration was not a big problem because there was sufficient prosperity there, not everyone was trying to get to the US.

Those were our interests, they were not really big at all. The relations were fairly friendly but there were these reservations on the part of the government.

Q: How about, did you find as the political officer, did you have easy access to the various parties and groups?

HYDLE: Yes, I had fairly easy access but I would say that the access was less good to the ruling party, People's Nationalist Movement, than it was to the oppositionists. This reflected their reservations toward the US. For example, I wanted to attend the convention of the PNM. This was a period, I think 1984, when the US government has a policy of facilitating the access of foreign diplomats to the Democratic and Republican conventions. So I asked to be allowed to go and they dithered and turned me down. So I recommended, in the spirit of reciprocity, that our government not let the Trinidadian ambassador come with all the other diplomats to the convention. But that was vetoed in Washington by whoever. I guess they didn't think it was important enough to impose reciprocity in this case.

Generally the opposition was more accessible to us and they wanted to be friends with us.

Q: These are mainly East Indians?

HYDLE: The official opposition was mostly Hindus, east Indians. Then there was Tobago, you know it's Trinidad and Tobago. Tobago is a small island and the Tobagonians, although they are all African-American, tended to be different, oppositionists in comparison to PNM which was more based in Trinidad. Then there was another party, I'm sorry I forget the initials, things change over time but there was another party that was more of a middle class party, and which sort of wanted to be pro-American. But they were always being accused of being too pro-American so they couldn't overdo it.

Q: This is during this period when you were there, 83 to 85, sort of the high of when the United States, particularly the Reagan administration, was very exercised about what was happening in

Nicaragua and El Salvador. This was one of the major focal points of our foreign policy. How did this play out in Trinidad and Tobago?

HYDLE: We had instructions, of course, to go in and make demarches on El Salvador, Nicaragua, and so forth but they never had the slightest impact. To the extent that, first, it's important to know that really these eastern Caribbean countries, English speaking and African origin people, they really know next to nothing about Hispanic Central America. Their view, to the extent that they had any views, were sort of conventional Third World views about the US and small countries. They generally, the Trinidadians, were opposed to whatever we were doing in Nicaragua against the government there.

We were lucky that they didn't actually come out against us. We would have demarches saying they should support us. Fat chance.

Q: What happened? You just sort of say, "Okay, here's another one."

HYDLE: We would all go through the motions. We'd go in and make the presentation. They would thank me for our views and say that they would be taking it into consideration and ask critical questions.

Q: How about the media?

HYDLE: They were okay, they were privately owned. That is, the print media were privately owned. They didn't, in general, they didn't give us a very hard time but there was one sort of tabloid style newspaper that published a picture of me and somebody else, at a convention of one of the opposition parties, and that this was yet another CIA plot.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

HYDLE: Ambassador Melvin Evans. He had been the delegate from the Virgin Islands, political appointee, black Republican. Unfortunately, he died in September 1984. For the next several months Mike Carpenter, the DCM, was the Charge. As I left in 85, Sheldon Krys came in.

Q: Were there any problems with drugs? I'm thinking about narcotic traffic.

HYDLE: There were some problems. We had a program, an anti-drug program, with the Trinidadians which consisted mostly of training. I wasn't directly involved in that. I think we saw Trinidad as a transit point for drugs that were going in the United States, maybe from Columbia, to try to make an end run against our defenses. And also, the Trinidadians themselves were having a drug problem, cocaine I think, and certainly marijuana was popular among the Rastafarian elements around Trinidad.

Q: But there were no major issues at this time that we haven't discussed?

HYDLE: In 1984, I think, Trinidad became a member of the UN Security Council so we did take up with them a lot of other issues that we wouldn't normally be dealing with them in an intensive

way. They adopted sort of classic Third World non-aligned positions in the UN Security Council, despite our hopes that they might do otherwise.

Q: You left there in 1985 and then where did you go?

HYDLE: For a year I was in what was then called the Program Inspector General, headed by Ambassador Bill Harrop, the Inspector General's office. We were doing these program inspections of US Missions overseas. I was attached to a team that was led by Ambassador Frank Kredler, also Ambassador George Roberts was the deputy. While I was there, this turned out to be only a year assignment, but during that time we did inspections of the Office of Medical Services, Saudi Arabia and the other Arabian peninsula countries and then Southeast Asia: Thailand, Laos and Burma.

SHELDON D. KRYS
Ambassador
Trinidad & Tobago (1985-1988)

Ambassador Sheldon D. Krys was born in New York City and was educated at the University of Maryland. He entered the Foreign Service in 1965 and has held posts in England, Yugoslavia and an ambassadorship to Trinidad and Tobago. In Washington, he held many positions including ones in the Inspection Corps and Administration and Information Management. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1994.

Q: We'll go back to Trinidad and Tobago.

KRYS: There were good times in Trinidad and Tobago.

Q: Before you went out to Trinidad, did you have anything that you were putting in your mental attaché case as far as what you wanted to do? What was the situation there and what were American interests?

KRYS: We had two major interests at the time of my arrival. One was that Trinidad and Tobago was a member of the United Nations Security Council and the other was, of course, we had major oil interests. If you look on one of those shelves over there, you'll see [that] in my time there, Amoco shipped the 500 millionth barrel of oil out. At one time, I am told, it shipped more oil on a daily basis to the United States than Saudi Arabia. It is not a tourist island. It sucks oil out of the same basin as Venezuela does because it is only 11 miles off the coast of Venezuela. It eschews tourism. The father of the country, Eric Williams, long ago decreed that service is servitude and since the per capita income in Trinidad rivals that of any developed nation in the world, there was no service. Tobago, which would be the tourist island when I left there, had something like 536 rooms available for tourism, but it has since changed. I think Madeline Albright is going there in the next week or two. It was very different [then]. Oil was a major

thing and the development of other business plus the fact that we sold Trinidad and Tobago all of its wheat.

Agriculture is very, very poor and difficult commodity locally grown and some of the traditional barriers were breaking down. The Indian population which when I arrived was either on an equal footing or just slightly below the Afro-Trinidadian population, had traditionally been the farmers. That was breaking down. The Indian population was far more integrated [in] the cities but not with the other cultures. The population was about 44 percent African descent, [and] about 40 or 42 percent Indian descent. [The Indians] had come there as indentured servants after slavery had been abolished by the British in the 1840s. The rest was a mixture of Creole. There had been about two percent Chinese, and it was down to about one percent after a sort of black Muslim-style uprising years before. The population was changing.

Democracy was not changing; it was very solidly entrenched, but I wanted to see how we could move Trinidad and Tobago from what was essentially a parastatal economy to a more capitalist-style economy of private development.

Q: Why would the United States be interested in this change?

KRYS: Mainly because it wasn't helping the economy of Trinidad and Tobago very much. Trinidad and Tobago was a stabilizing force even though it disagreed with U.S. policy on many issues; it was adamantly opposed to the Grenada invasion for instance. Nonetheless, [the change] was in our interest, particularly at that time. Looking back, you see a much better picture today because of the number of countries that have gone away from parastatal economies; ultimately it weakens the state.

It is an oil fueled economy. During my tenure, the price of oil [was] at its highest, [and] per capita income was about \$7,200 a year when I arrived. This made it the third highest per capita in the hemisphere (and it's fairly well distributed) after the United States and Canada, which says a great deal. Unfortunately because of the drop in oil prices it went down to \$4,000 when I left, but it is still the third highest except for some of the offshore banking islands. The economy went through a difficult period of time.

The parastatal countries themselves saw they couldn't stay that way. In the heydays, they had built a steel refinery. That's brilliant but there is no iron ore, there so they were buying billet from Brazil and paying whatever Brazil wanted to charge for it. [That] was highly inefficient. The "tea kettle" oil refineries were just horribly inefficient. Amoco did not refine its petroleum, it shipped it out right out. You had Tesco just leaving there, and a big dispute. Texaco had diminished its holding. The reverse of all of that is true today, or mostly. Oil companies are going back in a big way. Gas has unlimited potential there. U.S. investment is much heavier, and I think I started the process.

Q: How does one start the process? You were the American ambassador in a state where at least Eric Williams had set the tone and was a very difficult person, particularly difficult towards the United States.

KRYS: He had a love-hate relationship with United States. First [I was] not dealing with Eric Williams. When I arrived, George Chambers was his successor. [He] wanted to follow in his footsteps, but the economy wasn't going well. They began to realize the excessive over-employment in these parastatal organizations was really becoming a drag. Then for the first time in the history of the country, the ruling party lost an election. The man who had been deputy to Eric Williams was banished to Tobago from whence he had come because Eric Williams in his later stages of life certainly took care of those he thought were not going to be his friend. He was a lawyer, ANR Robinson was his name.

I called on him within the first two or three weeks of banishment in Tobago, and we established a rapport. What you really talk about is what's good for [their] country that is also good for our country. For instance, how do we hook up so that you have economic development? You are not going to get foreign investment in here if it is just going to go down a rat hole. Just look at what is going on in your own country. I am not going to tell you how to change this, but I'll make suggestions as to what sectors might benefit from privatization and the first one would be [the] oil refinery and [gas stations]. Privatization doesn't mean you are giving something to the Americans, it means you're going to sell something at a profit, or try to. Today the concept is everywhere. Privatize telecommunications and what do you get out of that? These things were unheard of back in 1985. That's how you start. You talk honestly and frankly. You also talk about an impending narcotics threat which fell substantially on deaf ears at that time. Trinidad and Tobago was a transshipment point and today it is a major problem for them. The crime rate has just gone up much higher than they ever anticipated.

You speak frankly, you speak honestly, you speak constantly, and you speak privately. The biggest thing that I had was I think access and a sense that people knew that what I told them was what I believed. Also when I made a demarche that dealt on principals that were absolutely contrary to what they could accommodate, I would state as I would in a report that I understand what their principals are. The question of apartheid comes to mind, [where I stated] the reasons [why] the Reagan policy is this on apartheid at this time.

Q: Why would there have been a problem with the Reagan position on apartheid with Trinidad and Tobago?

KRYS: Because of the approach that we took officially. We had our ambassador to the United Nations come down there to make [the] case himself. [For them], there was no [acceptable] policy short of full boycott and elimination of apartheid through whatever means necessary.

Q: Our policy being constructive engagement wasn't it?

KRYS: That's right. Ours was to ensure that we [can] continue to talk to the government of South Africa and move them in the direction that would eliminate apartheid. As you remember, Maggie Thatcher, the prime minister of England, had a rough session with the Commonwealth [at] that time.

Q: Did you have a lot of frank discussions about how to deal with South Africa? Was this on the agenda at formal and informal sessions with the people there?

KRYS: I don't want to get into formal sessions between our country and Trinidad and Tobago, even now; let others do that. The answer, of course, was yes, it was on the agenda, but it wasn't a constant lobbying on my part on behalf of the United States government. We were not [so] instructed, and it was not one of those areas where you can tell the leadership of a country that our principals must override your principals because it doesn't happen and it doesn't matter what is said back to you, it isn't going to happen.

Q: You were there from '85 to when?

KRYS: '88. I was there three years short two months.

Q: What about what was happening in Central America? Trinidad and Tobago was within earshot of what was happening there. How did that play out?

KRYS: I think there was distrust as to what our policy was in Central America and we didn't get the support in some areas like Panama that we wanted. I think there was distrust. If you look at the makeup of the parties irrespective of party, the People's National Movement, which had been in power for 25 years, or Robinson's coalition that came into being, you have a social democratic government. When you represent the largest most powerful nation, particularly in that region, I think that's a [limit on expressing] what the interests of the United States are. Nonetheless you make the case and you do point out that just because you're large, you're dealing with someone that's bad and it's against your interests as well. It just may not seem that way at the moment but these are the reasons. Sometimes we won their support. Trinidad and Tobago particularly with regard to the United Nations, tended to abstain more than vote yes or no. In some instances, that was good enough for us and in some instances we expected them to support us.

Q: Was there any other country where there was more a meeting of the minds like Canada, or, I'm just trying to think of some other country?

KRYS: You mean between Trinidad and Tobago?

Q: Between Trinidad and Tobago where they would use somebody else to show that they weren't subordinate to the United States, was this a problem?

KRYS: You've framed a very interesting question which is so complex I would really almost want to take the issue and apply it against that. The Canadians had a much more benign presence in a place like Trinidad and Tobago than the United States. The Canadian high commission with whom I worked very closely had an awful lot to [offer] to the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago. Their schools were much cheaper than ours, [and] their higher education system was certainly admired because the public school system both in the English and in the American sense in Trinidad and Tobago was very good. The literacy rate was about 97 percent. [That is] higher than in the United States. The Canadian high commissioner was certainly seen with a less prejudicial eye; nonetheless the American government is the power in the region. About 90 percent of the population in Trinidad and Tobago has a relative in the United States. The big dishes in the back of the properties that people owned were tuned to American television.

Q: We're talking about antennae...

KRYS: Huge antennae and this is before cable really came into being and if they could catch the [signal] they did. They watched American television and Miami was the port of call. American schools were just very expensive. Nonetheless, those [who] could afford it sent their children to American schools and clearly the elite - there are no racial barriers here [in the U.S.] with regard to the elite - sent their children to Yale, Wellesley, Harvard, and Howard. Howard had a very strong influence in Trinidad and Tobago as you know. Eric Williams had been a tenured professor at Howard before he went back home and the Howard Alumni Association was very powerful. I of course went to their dinners and spoke each year at their dinners. They had a very, very good core of professional people who graduated from Howard, dentistry in particular. Coincidentally, my parent's neighbor across the street was the dean of the dental school, so I had sort of a natural hookup there; she's a remarkable woman to this day.

The joy of being an ambassador was even enhanced when you were in a country such as Trinidad and Tobago. I would lecture once a year at their college and as you know their university has campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and elsewhere. I could fly the flag going on to the campus and if not cheered, I was certainly not jeered or threatened in any way. I would speak to their political science faculty. It was an extraordinarily enjoyable experience.

Q: What about Cuba? Did Cuba in that time play any particular role?

KRYS: The United States, as you know, had a [definite] policy as to how you would react to your Cuban counterpart. Cuba had diplomatic relations with Trinidad and Tobago and the ambassador would come to call; he was not a resident. I once greeted him and he snubbed me so I thought I'd done my bit and that was the end of that.

Q: The Cold War is still going on, but things were beginning to change. Did that intrude on you at all?

KRYS: No. You asked about Cuba, and there was a point there. The man who is now prime minister had been one of the leaders of the opposition in the Labour Party. He had gone into the coalition with ANR Robinson and left the coalition. He had been head of the sugar workers union, Basdeo Panday, and today he is prime minister. He had a long history and was, I think, someone who thought very highly of Cuba and the labor movements there so that was a little point of contention. At one point before I left, he became foreign minister, and Minister Panday and I would have a few discussions. It wasn't heated, and it wasn't bitter because by then you know things had been laid out for a long time. It wasn't new policy towards Cuba and it wasn't really evolving policy.

I had a very strong relationship with the Papal Nuncio who was resident in Trinidad and Tobago. We did some really good things together with regard to human rights, even in places like Cuba. There were times that he was a good source for exchanges because he traveled widely.

Q: This dioceses included Cuba?

KRYS: I don't think Cuba was his, but I could be wrong because he was certainly very knowledgeable. There were one or two issues that came up that really required humanitarian assistance, and we managed to work together on that. A very erudite man, truly a diplomat. He had served in Brussels in a similar capacity. The major religion in Trinidad and Tobago is not Church of England; it is Catholic.

Q: What about relations in the other countries? Were you getting any reflections from Venezuela? Did it play much of a role?

KRYS: Not a great deal. There was some reflection with regards to narcotic interdiction because that was where it was coming from. We were not very successful with that because row boats could come across at night and the Venezuelan government did not [then] have the most forthright and honest police forces that would stop that flow. In addition, there is a real antipathy between and among the English speaking nations in the region and the Spanish speaking nations, so Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago which had quite normal relations, wouldn't have warm relations considering it's 11 miles away.

Q: What about the Grenada invasion, which happened before you had arrived? I was wondering about the echo there. You might explain what the Grenada affair was for somebody who's reading this in the 25th century and then talk about how it was reflected when you were there.

KRYS: About two years before I went down there, there was the feeling that the Cuban presence had become larger than just assistance [in] building a [civilian] airport and that they were putting in a military base which would be a staging area for [activities in] Central America. You had the situation in Nicaragua at that time with the Sandinistas and other matters, and there were American medical school students who might be threatened by the Cuban presence and so on. We invaded Grenada, liberated the American medical school, rid the island of Cubans, [and] jailed the insurgent government that had been there. You should know that commerce, population exchange, and family ties between Grenada and Trinidad, in particular, are extraordinarily close, so there was enormous feeling that the United States was an aggressor and Trinidad and Tobago was very unhappy with the United States.

You asked what you can do as an ambassador. One of the examples of what you can do is, perhaps in hindsight with mixed results but I don't think so, I convinced the prime minister to go to the conference when President Reagan went to Grenada to meet with the heads of state in the region. George Chambers was one of the few leaders of the island nations who had taken the position that he had and he was not necessarily considered a joyous addition on the part of the Grenadians in particular and perhaps the other heads of state. Nonetheless I convinced him to go, and I think it did him good, quite frankly, even in the time of the Reagan administration.

When I was there, the new prime minister, not George Chambers but his successor Robinson, went to the UN Security Council to speak. The foreign minister, Basdeo Panday, and I also went up there. I was fortunate enough to be invited with the foreign minister (the prime minister had gone back to Trinidad or out to the West Coast) aboard the Ford's yacht which was an annual event. George Shultz, the foreign minister at that time, [who is] the prime minister now, and I

spent about 25 minutes onboard the yacht up on the deck. I'd like to tell you that brilliant exchanges were made, and there were enormous steps taken on behalf of democracy but the foreign minister really had not anticipated his role as foreign minister and I don't think he had a great deal that he either asked or brought forth during that conversation.

Q: What about tourism? You said that this was not encouraged, but what about Americans coming? Were there any consular problems or anything of this nature with tourism?

KRYS: [There were] very, very few tourists [who] came from the United States. There was a very small number in Port of Spain except during carnival. At carnival, there was this enormous influx of tourism and there were Americans, but they were Trinidadian-Americans for a very large part, [though] not completely. Crime was not a big problem in those days. People would go through the streets all night, but they were in huge bands which meant you marched, you sort of strutted behind the band. I did that one year. You started Sunday and ended Monday morning.

The tourists that went to Tobago went there by and large for the surfing because it was one of the great surfing areas. The real tourism came mostly from Italy. They would rent out a hotel year after year. There were some from Germany and from other parts of Europe. The change was dramatic. Tobago's tourism at that time, and this has changed, was severely handicapped because the runway was short and the Tobago side of the government kept it short so you had to land in Trinidad. Since there was not a non-stop into Tobago even from Barbados, tourism was handicapped. As I said there were very few rooms. That is changing.

Q: We're going to stop at this point. One question I have is that you were in Trinidad and Tobago during an interesting period as far as the administration in the United States went. Did you notice during the '85 to '88 period a change in interest or focus from your particularly perspective of the Reagan administration towards Trinidad and Tobago?

KRYS: That's fine. Remind me to talk about the Caribbean Basin Initiative.

Q: We'll talk about the Caribbean Basin Initiative and if there is anything else there.

Today is May 18, 1998. Sheldon, I guess we will start with the question I asked you about whether you saw a change. When I asked about Trinidad and Tobago, I was really talking about the region.

KRYS: I saw more of an announcement of the change. There were changes made in the region. Most of the Eastern Caribbean states were really not put at any great advantage. The major beneficiaries of the Caribbean Basin Initiative were Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Puerto Rico benefited mightily on every barrel of rum exported out of the Caribbean because they received a portion of the tax on the rum, and I think in the Dominican Republic, it was more for its location and political purposes [than it] was a beneficiary.

Trinidad and Tobago is quite far from our shores. It is a couple of thousand miles from Florida. It is an oil state. An American company was the major driller, user, [and] exporter. Over the years, [it] got away from refining aspects. Texaco sold its refinery [to] the state, [so] the only refinery was a parastatal organization which had overemployment. [Thus] it was very hard for them to take advantage of the CBI. But even in the areas where they tried to take advantage of it, they were pretty much [ineffective] and so the answer was that a great deal of attention was paid to the Caribbean because of Grenada, but in different terms. Grenada received a massive amount of aid [based on] what it could absorb, [so it] really didn't do much.

Mind you, Trinidad and Tobago, when I arrived, had the third highest per capita income in the region. You had the United States, Canada, then Trinidad and Tobago, in that order. It was from oil, and it was a spillover, which is a lousy pun, of what happened with the '73 oil crisis. During my tenure, the price of oil came down dramatically and per capita income went from \$7,000 plus to some \$4,000. They were a first world nation really in the Eastern Caribbean which gave aid to some of its neighbors, Guyana most particularly, in the form of oil, and they cut off [that] aid during the time I was there.

For us it was a very important economic post. Amoco was shipping several hundred thousand barrels a day out of there even when I was there. At one time, many years ago, it exported more oil to the United States than Saudi Arabia. During my time, they were doing secondary drilling and recovery rather than new exploration, because the price of oil had fallen. Today it is booming, and there are many oil companies there. They have unmeasured amounts of gas. Tourism is still a very minor thing, and we touched on that very briefly earlier.

The long and the short of it, other than a conference in Florida once a year, I really had to fight to at least put them on the map with the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and they were a very tiny dot on the map. Part of the problem preceded my arrival. They had countervailing duties imposed on [their] steel. Because the country had so much money and fought so hard to avoid tourism (Eric Williams saw service as servitude), I mentioned earlier, they looked for industries. They went into steel refining, which is kind of crazy because they had no iron [ore and] they were dependent upon Brazil for billet, which they shipped in and then produced steel rods and things of that nature. Because they subsidized the shipment of these products to the states (many of the companies were still parastatal), the [U.S.] company that sold them the refinery equipment went to Commerce and [got] countervailing duties imposed upon them, which is [not] a very friendly gesture. We tried to straighten that out and ultimately [we] more or less [succeeded].

Trinidad and Tobago is a major chocolate producer. None of it is sold in this country, [as] it is all sold to Switzerland. It is very good chocolate. It produces some coffee. It imports 95 percent of its food from us and my goal was to continue to do that. Wheat was 100 percent purchased from the United States, and there were real discussions as to whether they shouldn't bring in Canadian wheat. Frankly, it had less chaff in it. I don't know if it's of any interest but [in the U.S.] you are allowed to put chaff in wheat. X percent of chaff in wheat is permitted and apparently not the wheat growers but the Wheat Growers Association that sold it, added chaff to it.

Q: I've heard other times complaints that our wheat isn't that pure, so when it ends up in another country, there have been complaints.

KRYS: I had conversations with the Wheat Growers Association when they came down. I'm not sure it made any difference but in my tenure at least, they continued to buy wheat from the United States.

Q: What about Argentina? Was that a competitor because they are a wheat producer?

KRYS: Not really. Interestingly enough, there has always been some resentment in Trinidad and Tobago and I suspect other English speaking eastern Caribbean states, with regard to their Spanish-speaking neighbors. Relations between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago were really very mixed and at times quite strained. There really was a separation between the English speaking Caribbean and the Spanish speaking Caribbean.

Q: Did you get any high level visits while you were there?

KRYS: I guess the highest level was a cabinet officer at that time and that was Dick Walters. Dick Walters came down, and as it turned out he traveled with an entourage. I don't know if you know Dick, but he is one of the most gregarious, charming people in the world. He came at carnival time, which is a very prolonged period; it is more than one day. It is a bigger carnival than Brazil or Rio because more people participate in it, rather than just a few naked bodies that are [the] most beautiful. This means you had no staff in your house among other things, and, of course, we invited Dick to stay with us.

My wife had put beside his bed a book by Divertoy which is [about] a Trinidadian family going back to the Creole Europe. Most of the people who came from Europe, if they weren't British, came from French speaking Europe, really from the islands off France rather than France itself. I'm not sure we heard a whoop, but we certainly heard something. It turns out that Dick Walters' mother was a Trinidadian, and she had left Trinidad when she was 15. It was an Irish family, and they had gone to Brooklyn, and Dick was born in Brooklyn. The Divertoy family and others were all family of his, and this book was as though some divine hand had reached down. He knew these were all his cousins. Over the years he had stayed in touch but lost touch somewhere in the '50s. He knew many of the calypso songs but [they were] the songs of the '50s, the really old calypso songs.

Dick came down three times during [my tour]. He is wonderful company, and we always had a grand time with him. He always had business to conduct because particularly during the first year of my tenure, Trinidad and Tobago was a member of the United Nations Security Council. If we haven't gone over that, my problem was getting them to vote yes occasionally. Generally they would have abstained and I didn't change their mind very often, but there were instances where the vote mattered and even abstention was better than voting with the so-called non-aligned bloc, which they did. Dick had reasons to come down. [The] closest the President came was to Grenada and I think I mentioned getting George Chambers to go over there.

Q: You did. We've covered quite a bit of this. There may be something else, but maybe we can move on. You left there in 1988?

KRYS: In 1988. Actually, I came back in 1987 while I was ambassador and George Shultz asked me to come back to serve as executive secretary to the Lair Commission.

Q: *Could you explain what that was?*

KRYS: As you remember, in Moscow there was the Lonetree-Bracey affair. Two Marine guards allegedly permitted Soviet citizens, benign Soviet citizens, into the embassy and perhaps into the communications area.

Q: *I think we covered this.*

KRYS: I think we did too. I [went] back then [to Trinidad and Tobago], but in '88 I received a phone call to come back to be Assistant Secretary for Administration. Charlie Hill called me, and if we didn't cover it I think I mentioned to him there were about six or eight people who I thought were better qualified for the job, but I came back. Then I got the next call and took up the portfolio of Assistant Secretary for Administration and Information Management.

LACY A. WRIGHT
Deputy Chief of Mission
Port-of -Spain (1988-1991)

Mr. Wright joined the Foreign Service in 1968 after earning degrees at Mendelien College and Loyola University. His foreign service took him to Vietnam both during and after the War. Other assignments took him to Milan, London and Bangkok as well as to the State Department in Washington, where he worked with International Organizations in matters concerning refugees, and UNESCO affairs. Mr. Wright was born and raised in Springfield, Illinois. Mr. Wright was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: *Well, you were in Trinidad from '88 to when?*

WRIGHT: '91.

Q: *The Ambassador there was—*

WRIGHT: —Charles Gargano. He was the person who hired me. In fact, before I got the job, I was invited back to talk to him, and I was invited back by Gene Scassa. Gene was then the executive director in ARA. Gene very much helped me get that job, I think, because he took a look at all the bidders, and Gargano trusted him a lot, liked him, I think, and Gene said—I think he said this, he told me— "Well, you ought to take Lacy Wright." So he invited me back, we had a talk, and he said yes.

So then I went out. I actually got to Trinidad a few days before he did, and the former Ambassador had already left. It was being run by a chargé, Bob Dickerson. And so I overlapped a few days with Dickerson, and then he left and Gargano arrived.

Q: What was Gargano's background?

WRIGHT: Gargano was a head of a New York City construction company. He had done very well. He was also active in Republican politics. He had been deputy secretary of transportation—I guess it must have been under Reagan—for a while and then gone back to New York. Subsequently, after Trinidad, he was the head of the New York State committee to re-elect the President, on behalf of President Bush, who, of course, did not win. I'm sure he was active in the campaign to elect Governor Pataki, and today he's one of Pataki's closest advisers, and he is the head of the Empire State Development Corporation, which is the New York State economic development arm.

Q: When you arrived in Trinidad in 1988, what was the situation there? How would you describe the political-economic situation?

WRIGHT: In 1988, the NAR Party—I can't remember what the acronym stands for—was in power. The NAR Party in the last election had obliterated the party which had been in power for many years, the PNM, the People's Nationalist Movement.

Q: That was Eric Williams's party?

WRIGHT: That was Eric Williams's party, that's right, which was a black party. Trinidad, as you may know, comprises two principal ethnic groups, the Indians and the blacks, each of which has maybe 45 per cent or so of the population, the rest comprising people of European descent, Trinidadian-Chinese descent and I guess a few other odds and ends. But the big groups are the Indians and the blacks. PNM is a black party; the NAR's boast and effort and achievement, for a while, was to have a party which was not based solely on racial considerations but represented both of the two major racial groups. The prime minister was A. N. R. Robinson, who today, by the way, is the President of Trinidad.

Economically, Trinidad was living in relatively hard times. Trinidad is, I guess, alone among the Caribbean Islands to have oil and gas. And in their heyday—this is the early '70's—Trinidad had had the third highest per capita income in the hemisphere. So there was a huge amount of wealth then, which was not, unfortunately, used always in the best way. For example, the Trinidadians built a huge hospital complex outside of Port-of-Spain, which then when the money ran out went largely unused—a horrible amount of money wasted. They tried to build a medical school, to which, of course, nobody would come, and so on. But at any rate, now they were living in much reduced circumstances, with the price of oil having gone down dramatically in the interim. However, probably the problems that they would later have with drugs had not matured. Violence was a problem, but less of a problem than it became later. And all in all, Trinidad was a delightful place to be, a wonderful place to be.

Q: During this 1988-91 period, what were American interests?

WRIGHT: Drugs and commerce. We had big oil companies there. We had Amoco, which drew out about half of Trinidad's oil. We had other large companies which were either there or were angling to go there and drill, like Mobil. So for a very small country, there was a lot of American investment in Trinidad.

Q: Was there concern about nationalization of oil things that crop up?

WRIGHT: I think that had pretty much occurred already. You see, there are two Trinidadian oil entities which had been takeovers of other companies, but that was already done. I don't think any one envisioned that there would be further nationalizations at that point.

Q: Was there concern at this time about Cuba? Did Cuba play any role?

WRIGHT: I don't think particularly. I think that played a bit more of a role in our relations with Jamaica later, but no, I would say not. Now the big event that occurred while I was in Trinidad was the attempted coup of mid-1990, in which a bunch of Black Muslims, called Muslimin, took over both the radio station and the entire Parliament with the prime minister and much of his cabinet inside and held them for five or six days. That was by far the most dramatic event ever to have occurred in Trinidad, and it was one which really shook the country to its foundations. The prime minister was brutalized during this takeover. Selwyn Richardson, the minister of defense, was shot in the leg, very badly treated. By the way, he was later assassinated, about two or three years later. One person among the hostages died of a heart attack, but outside even more damage took place. A fair amount of the downtown was burned down by looters, who took advantage of the situation to wreak havoc. Overall, about 20 people were killed during the whole thing. So it was a very serious event, and I must say that the reaction of a lot of the Trinidadians, particularly to the prime minister, I found shocking. The prime minister really behaved heroically during the time that this was going on. He was told at one point to go out and—I think it was—to talk to the police and tell them to lay off, which he refused to do. But he got no sympathy from most of the people, certainly from the common people, and instead of being treated like a hero when it was all over, he was simply the object of lots of criticism for various things. Probably some of this had to do with his personality. He's kind of an erudite man who speaks like one. There's nothing common about him at all, and this clearly worked to his disadvantage as a politician. But I see that he's been rehabilitated because within the last year, I think, he was elected President of Trinidad, which I was happy to see.

Q: Where were these black Muslims coming from?

WRIGHT: They were a very tiny sliver of the population, although I think they mined a kind of rich lode of resentment among the poorer people in Port-of-Spain, witness the burning down of part of the city. They had no real power. They came from a group which had long been well known in Trinidad. They had a kind of mosque which they had built. By they, I mean maybe a hundred or so people, maybe a few followers. They had squatted on land, and the government was in a constant quandary as to whether to throw them off of it. They had just taken over some land that belonged to the government and built on it. And so Selwyn Richardson, minister of national security, whom I've mentioned—it was his job to figure out how to deal with them. And

eventually, he did not throw them off this land, but he made them stop building, earning their wrath.

They had a bunch of grievances against the government—some of them, I guess, valid, and most of them not. The way this happened, however, it could never have happened had they not received guns from guess where. The United States of America. They had a guy, it turned out afterwards, who was the number two person in the organization. His name was Bilal, I think. He had taken a trip to Miami. He had made contact with an individual who was able to get him a cache of weaponry. This was sent down to Trinidad disguised as something else—this was all dissected, so it was very well known at a certain point—stashed in some other kind of container. There was a sympathetic customs guy who had been paid off to look the other way when it came in. He did. The stuff was taken off. And these were the weapons that were used in this coup.

It also turned out that—this is very ironic—I think it was the FBI, one of our law enforcement organizations had been onto this guy, the American party, who was in Miami. They were in fact trailing him. They knew he was up to something. They knew he was buying weapons. They knew he was going to do no good with them. But they didn't know where he was going to send them. They knew he was going to send them somewhere. But he eluded them long enough to do what he did. It also turned out that the Trinidadian Government knew that this guy Bilal had gone to Miami—I think this is right, I'm a little hazy on this—and had put in a request to the FBI to find out who he had been meeting with. The FBI treated this, as far as I can tell, as a kind of routine request. They threw it into a big hopper with lots of other requests, and they finally got him an answer about a week after the coup occurred. And had they done this faster, this would not have occurred. And this, by the way, became an issue in the Trinidadian papers afterwards. But anyway, just one more kind of dramatic example of how the Americans, with their nutty penchant for having firearms, not only kill themselves at a tremendous rate but export this violence to other countries as well.

Q: Well, when this coup took place--I mean, obviously we're very sensitive to things of this nature happening in the Caribbean--was there any thought that we might send experts for taking care of this matter or SWAT teams or anything like that, or were we just bystanders?

WRIGHT: One of the things that happened was that a lot of people thought—and hoped—that we would rush in and save the day. One of the things that occurred was this. This happened right after the Fourth of July. And at the fourth of July we had had in Trinidad the *USS Eisenhower*, our aircraft carrier—

Q: Brand new one.

WRIGHT: —which was massive, and we had had our Fourth of July party on this ship—which is another story I'll tell you about. There were rumors going around that the *USS Eisenhower* had turned around and was steaming back to Port-of-Spain, which, of course, was not true. There were also other rumors that we had landed at the airport. There were rumors flying everywhere during this period.

One of the main factors in the resolution of the coup was the staunchness of the Trinidadian military. Trinidad, being a small country, doesn't have a big military, but it has one, and it has a regiment. Their highest ranking officer is a brigadier general, who was a colonel at the time, I think, and his name was Ralph Brown. And Ralph Brown deserves a huge amount of the credit for saving Trinidad, and he did it by being absolutely tough, at a time when there were probably people within the police who wanted to, well, let me back up. The Muslimin were being communicated with all the time by the government, which had set up a kind of command center, and one of the first things that they did, after a day or so, was to cut off all the telephones to these guys except one. First of all, they found out that these guys were calling all over the world, particularly from the radio station, and talking to the newspapers and everything. So anyway, since they owned the telephone system that was no problem. They got in there and fixed it so the Muslimin could talk to only one person, and that was the government spokesman. So that really contributed to a sense of isolation on their part. Then they were still making a lot of demands, and there were people who wanted to give in to some of these demands. There were emissaries that went in, church people and so on. And it was Ralph Brown and his troops that said, "Forget it. We are not giving in to any of these things." And since they were the guys on the Trinidadian side with the most guns, they were the guys who prevailed. And in the end, Ralph Brown's message to the Muslimin was, "You guys either come out and surrender, or we're going to kill you." And they thought that over for a while, and they came out and surrendered after about six days.

Q: Were we looking around and seeing what this meant? I mean, were we seeing any hand elsewhere, or was it pretty clear at the beginning what it was?

WRIGHT: Well, yes and no. I think mostly it's clear it was a homegrown thing, but these guys did have links to—I believe it was—Iraq. And in fact, a number of the calls that went out from the radio station on the part of the Muslimin—I don't think it was Iran, I think it was Iraq. So clearly, they did have links with these guys. It turned out that some of the Muslimin had been there for training of various kinds, so they were certainly abetted by other terrorists.

Q: Well, this is at a time when had the Gulf War between the United States and its allies and Iraq taken place at this point, or was it still—

WRIGHT: I guess so. Well, let's see. When did it take place?

Q: Well, wait, because it was over in May, I think, or April.

WRIGHT: Of '90?

Q: Of '90, yes, and we're talking about after the Fourth of July. But still, there were repercussions. After this was over did we get involved in trying to explain the gun role and all this? I mean, did this cause problems?

WRIGHT: It did cause problems, and it died down after a while and went away. But as I recall, I think the prime minister said—I guess had to say—that he was going to demand an explanation of what had happened. In fact, I remember he did say that. He was going to demand an

explanation of what had gone wrong in our police liaison, so that flared up for a while and then went away.

Q: *Well, you were mentioning the visit of the Eisenhower. Could you explain this? That was probably at that time our most modern aircraft carrier.*

WRIGHT: Well, this is pretty humorous. Ambassador Gargano worked very hard, as ambassadors tend to do in these instances, to get the *Eisenhower* there so that we could have our Fourth of July party on it. And he was successful, and it came. It was so huge, however, that it could not dock so that it had to anchor about five miles out. So you could only reach it by boat. So it came and stayed for two or three days, and on one of those nights we had our Fourth of July Party. In order for the guests to reach the boat, they had to be taken there, of course. And so we chartered a ferry boat, the same kind of ferry boat that routinely goes from Trinidad to Tobago. And you can picture these things—it has some inside cabins and it would hold maybe a thousand people or so. This was *the* event of the decade, I guess, and there was tremendous pressure to get tickets—invitations, I should say—and we were besieged with people who were not on the list and who wanted to be, and there was all kinds of chicanery going on, people showing up without invitations, presuming they would get in anyway, which they usually did. So we had an elaborate setup to take the invitations and funnel people onto the boat, and all that worked pretty well. And in the morning, by the way, they had had—if you'll pardon the expression—a dry run. They had sent out the ferry, and it had to link up—it kind of fit in the back. There was a kind of gangway that let down in back, and this had to fit into a kind of slot in the boat and then people just walked right from one onto the other. And they had tried this out earlier in the day, and it had worked and so on. So all kinds of planning, months of planning, had gone into this, and now it was working and in progress. So we all got onto the boat—all 500 or 700 people, however many it was—and we were drinking and having a great time, and after about 45 minutes we got out to the carrier. We could not link up with it. The tides, which had obtained earlier in the day, had shifted, and so getting these two to mesh with one another time after time proved impossible. So there we were, all of these people out there again and again trying to do this and again and again failing. By now it was getting late, of course, and one of the people among the guests was the head of the port authority. It was a woman. And so at a certain point she asked the Ambassador to come into her private quarters, and I think I went with him. I guess I went with him. And she said, "Mr. Ambassador, I think we're just going to have to give up and go back. This is awful. I'm horribly embarrassed, a terrible thing, but I just don't see—I think we have to give up." And Gargano didn't let a second go by. He said, "We are not giving up. *We are going to have this party tonight.*"

And sure enough, we finally made it. It took about two hours. And one of the things I remember is we finally got on there—I guess about 10 p.m. or so—on this massive ship and I went up onto this massive deck where there was a band there and so on. And as usual with these things, the Ambassador was supposed to say something, and he had a speech that I had written for him. And a few days before, President Bush had been in a certain situation with a speech, and he had very dramatically torn his speech in two and said, "I'm not going to use this speech. I'm going to talk to you by myself." And that's probably what put this into Gargano's mind, although it was probably a good idea. He stood up and ripped up my speech and said, "We're not going to have a speech tonight."

Q: Well, how about tourism? Tourism was not much of a factor in Trinidad, was it?

WRIGHT: Not a huge factor, but it was a subject of constant debate, and the debate was between those who wanted tourists and saw it as something that Trinidad, for its economic well-being, ought to have, on the one hand, and on the other hand, those who didn't want to do any of the things that you needed to do to accommodate tourists and saw them as sullyng their way of life, and all that stuff. So one of the things that one heard constantly was "environmental tourism." I think a lot of people in Trinidad felt comfortable with that. They thought, these are higher kinds of beings, these environmental tourists, and we have what it takes to attract them, and that's the niche that we ought to be trying to fill. And indeed, Trinidad does have some rare things to show people. And so there was a certain amount of that, but I think that probably everyone agreed, both there and later in Jamaica, that environmental tourism might be nice, but people do not come in great numbers to watch birds. So there was some of it.

Q: Well, also, as a people, I think I've heard that Trinidadians aren't terribly receptive to tourists. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I have it mixed up with another island. I mean, it's not a warm, friendly, fuzzy feeling when you get there.

WRIGHT: That could be. The Trinidadians, on the other had, are especially when compared with the Barbadians or even the Jamaicans, are a very outgoing and fun-loving people. But I think you're right. Don't forget, when it comes to serving tourists, there is a cultural problem here. I mean, there was slavery and being black and all that. And that's not absent from this equation. So you do not have, and I suppose you never will have, the kind of service in these islands that one encounters, say, in Thailand, where I think they have the best hotels and the best service in the world. So this is different.

You know, if I could introduce a new subject, V. S. Naipaul is a Trinidadian.

Q: Oh, yes, a famous author.

WRIGHT: Famous author.

Q: Indian-Trinidadian author.

WRIGHT: Yes. And I was fortunate enough to get to meet him several times while I was there. He had not often come to Trinidad. In fact, he was on the outs with the Trinidadians because of what he had written about them as, indeed, he is on the outs with everybody about whom he writes.

Q: Including India.

WRIGHT: Especially India. I usually conceive of the world as an ever-shrinking place for V. S. Naipaul because after he writes about a place he usually can't go back to it. And he's now written about a lot of places. He is regarded—I guess rightly—as a man who's very full of himself, a man who—maybe takes himself very seriously is a better way to put it—and who has pretty

trenchant views about almost everything. He's lived almost all of his life in London. He's been long married, married to an English woman, a white woman, and those who know him—I know some people who know him very well—say that he can be hard to take sometimes. The times that I saw him, I must say, he was very gracious to me. In particular, one night I was invited alone—Jackie was not there, she was out of the country—to a very small dinner with Naipaul by a friend of ours by the name of Grace Phelps, a black Trinidadian woman. And Grace had a dinner for about six people, including V. S. Naipaul, including one of Naipaul's sisters and her daughter, Naipaul's niece. There was also a guy called Selby Wooding, whose father was a famous lawyer in Trinidad, a longtime friend of Naipaul, and one of the former wives of—who's the guy who won the Nobel Prize from St. Lucia a few years ago?

Q: It's not ringing a bell right now.

WRIGHT: I'll think of it in a minute, but anyway, this was one of his former wives. Walcott, Derek Walcott. And it was a very interesting evening. Naipaul talked about a lot of things, talked about the British, talked about the colonial period, talked about—who's the author who about 10 years or so ago wrote a book which Muslims found offensive?

Q: Oh, yes. Salman Rushdie.

WRIGHT: Salman Rushdie.

Q: He's an Indian.

WRIGHT: That's right, yes. We talked about him. But I remember we talked about the British and about how bad the British were during the colonial period, and there were a lot of negative comments about them. And finally, Naipaul's niece, who was a very young woman, maybe 20, 21, who had not said anything, piped up, and she said, "Well, gosh. I don't know what you're talking about. I was in London last year, and people were so nice to me, I had such a nice time." And Naipaul turned and looked at her and said, "My dear, that shows you have not understood a word we have been saying to you."

Also I remember at another point, Margaret Walcott was talking about American TV and what drivel it was and complaining that that's all they had to watch because that's all that was shown down there. And I remember that Naipaul's sister, whose name I can't think of right now, turned to her and said, "Well, stop complaining. You do what I do. You turn it off."

But Naipaul also talked about Rushdie, whom he obviously detests, and he said, "You know, Rushdie's not in any danger. He's not in any more danger than you or I. He loves all this attention." And apparently Rushdie had panned one of Naipaul's books once, so he had that against him. He had called him a tool of the CIA, I believe, than which, I guess, there is nothing worse that can be said about a human being in the world.

Q: Ayatollah Khomeini, during the late '80's, had put a—what is it—a fatwa, or whatever it is, an order out—

WRIGHT: A murder order.

Q: --a murder order on Rushdie because of his book concerning Mohammed, and so he's been under protective custody ever since.

WRIGHT: Yes. Well, it was interesting that only several days after that, after Naipaul had fulminated about Rushdie, Rushdie appeared in a bookstore in downtown London signing copies of his books. So maybe he was right.

Q: *Were there any particular problems with Trinidad during the time, outside of the fact that we were supplying guns to the wrong people and that sort of thing?*

WRIGHT: I don't think so. As I say, Trinidad is a delightful place, full of interesting people, interesting characters, a well educated people, as compared, say, with the Jamaicans, partially because much richer, partially because, they say, Eric Williams made education a priority and funneled a lot of money into it. A lot of people are educated still in England, although that's changing. Full of interesting people and full of wonderful music.

Q: *I was going to ask. I always think about Lord Invader and the calypso music that during the '40's was very popular.*

WRIGHT: Well, the Trinidadian has several kinds of music which are really wonderful. First of all it has the steel band, which it invented. Trinidadians invented the steel drum. It's theirs. And when you have a steel band of maybe a hundred pieces, it's a marvelous thing. They have calypso, which is uniquely theirs, which is great stuff, as you've said, and there are a whole new round of calypso songs created every year for the carnival. And so every year it's new, and every year there are some marvelous songs that come out of it. And then they have "soca" music, of which the name means a combination of *soul* and *calypso*. And this, too, is really unique to Trinidad, and now to the Caribbean because it's spread all over there. The greatest of the calypso singers, I think, is Sparrow, whose real name is, improbably, Francisco Slinger, and he is still around and has been pretty much since the Second World War, and his stuff is just terrific. You know, I remember at one point while we were in Trinidad, we were visited by Colin Powell, who was then just leaving his job in the NSC, and before he came down we sent up a cable saying is there anything particular, special, that General Powell would like to do while he is here in Trinidad? And we got back a message which said, "Yes, General Powell would like to buy some Sparrow records." So he certainly had heard of Sparrow.

Q: *Colin Powell was from Jamaica, along with Barbara Watson and some of the other people who have been involved in American government.*

WRIGHT: That's right.

SALLY GROOMS COWAL
Ambassador

Trinidad & Tobago (1991-1994)

Ambassador Sally Grooms Cowal was born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1944. After graduating from DePauw University she joined the United States Information Service as Foreign Service Officer. Her service included assignments as Cultural and Public Affairs Officer at US Embassies in India, Colombia, Mexico and Israel. She subsequently held a number of senior positions in the Department of State, including Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs and Deputy Political Counselor to The American Ambassador to the United Nations. In 1991 she was appointed Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago. Ambassador Cowal was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy August 9, 2001.

Q: Sally, we're coming to the point in '91, I guess, that the new administration is coming in, and what happened to you? We're talking about the Clinton administration.

COWAL: Well, actually, that didn't come until '92.

Q: Yes, that's right. Actually, '93.

COWAL: Well, actually, they came in in January '93, elected in '92. I was already out of harm's way, as ambassador to Trinidad.

Q: How did that appointment come about?

COWAL: You know this, because you've talked to 2,500 people who have done the same thing, but there's always a certain jockeying for which positions will be political and which positions will be career, and how does the State Department decide among the career positions who is going to fill them? I must say, I was pretty anxious to get out of Washington for very personal reasons, so was anxious to get the first job that came along, actually, and that was Trinidad. I had been to Trinidad, and I liked Trinidad. Although it had been mostly a political post, there had been, I guess, Sheldon Kryss, who was a couple before me, had been ...

Q: I've interviewed Sheldon.

COWAL: The only other career ambassador to Trinidad that I know of.

Q: I've talked to people. They've had a few political appointees who were sort of disastrous.

COWAL: They have, indeed. Some before me and some after me. But for some reason, Trinidad at that point in time bubbled up to the top of the list, and I guess in part because it was late in the Bush administration, because there had been 12 years of Republicans, and I guess most people who wanted to get embassies already had them. Although why Bush wasn't out raising money for his next campaign, I don't know, and therefore rewarding somebody, but at any rate, there were no takers, and I held up my hand and it went through the process and I got the job.

Q: Well, you were ambassador to Trinidad from when to when?

COWAL: I was ambassador from '91 to '94.

Q: What was the situation like in Trinidad?

COWAL: Well, I said what we needed to talk about in the Caribbean was Haiti and Guyana and so on, but Trinidad had its moment also, because in 1990 there was a takeover, a coup attempt that initially succeeded. I don't know that it was a coup attempt so much as a hostage taking. A group of radical black Muslims took over the parliament house and held the prime minister and, I can't remember now, I think it was 26 members of parliament. I think about 24 of them were there, a couple had missed the session, but the 26 members of the lower house of parliament were held hostage for about a week, and a couple of people were killed in the process. It was with the help of the United States – we sent a team of FBI and people who specialized in hostage negotiation, and it was ended peacefully, in the sense of the hostage takers walking out and surrendering and being arrested and then put on trial. This is now many years ago, but they were finally amnestied after some period of time in jail.

But Trinidad had its little political moment. That was just about the time of the Gulf War. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which led to Operation Desert Storm, was taking place about the same time, so not that Trinidad would have gotten much notice anyway, but it got none, because it was totally overtaken by events. I went down, and the ambassador before me had been a political appointee, and I must say, a real mixed bag, good in some ways, not good in other ways. Good in the sense that there had been for the first time in Trinidad, they had also, like Guyana, had these rigidly defined ethnic political parties, the country being about 45 percent Afro, 45 percent East Indian, and the other 10 percent being Chinese, Lebanese, Portuguese, some sort of leftover English colonists. But it was sort of equally divided between the two major ethnic groups, and suddenly in about '89, '88 or '89, a sort of middle way political party called the NAR (National Alliance for Reconstruction) had sprung up, with an Afro-Caribbean leader who had defected from the major African party, a guy named A.N.R. Robinson.

A.N.R. Robinson led the first sort of mixed government in Trinidad. He was actually from Tobago. I think he was also the first and only prime minister from Tobago, which is the smaller sister island of Trinidad. The two principal parties sort of divided and he was able to make a coalition. His party didn't hold all that many seats, but in the parliamentary system, they were able to get the government together. They were more open to reform in the economic system. Trinidad, since its beginning, like Guyana, had been governed always by the African party, because that's sort of who the British left in charge. They left the Africans in charge because they were easier to run than the Indians, as far as I can tell. The Indians, they were more rural, they were more commercial, they were more entrepreneurial. The Africans were more the civil servants and the sort of political leaders, so government after government after government after government, not so corrupt in Trinidad as in Guyana, but they were able to mobilize their forces better, and they continued to get elected.

Trinidad has another important difference with Guyana, and that's that it has oil money. Now it has natural gas money, and it has a lot of money. At one point shortly after independence, which was 1962 for that whole region, Trinidad had the highest per capita income in the region, after

the United States and Canada. So it was the third-highest per capita income, and this was a country that at that time was probably under 1 million people. Now it's probably 1.5 million, but nonetheless had a very high per capita income. There were always stories like even the ice was imported from Miami, and a higher per capita consumption of Johnnie Walker Black Label than anyplace in the world.

Q: Whiskey.

COWAL: Whiskey, of premium whiskey. So they lived high on the hog. They decided to, in this way of being, they were this African party, although they were very rich, their philosophy was more or less socialist. They saw government as the answer to most problems and the government should run most things. They pretty much squeezed out any opportunity for the private sector to do very much in Trinidad, and also they protected the little bit that there was by establishing very high tariff rates and non-tariff barriers to the importation of foreign goods. I think with the election of Robinson, who actually is quite a distinguished figure. He's now the president of the country, which is an appointed position, but he's I think best known for being the intellectual author of this International Criminal Court, which the Clinton administration signed onto and the Bush administration is signing out of. But this idea that there should be an International Criminal Court for drug dealers and terrorists and people like this is really an A.N.R. Robinson idea. He was quite a distinguished scholar and jurist and economist.

Gargano was my predecessor, and he paid almost no attention to the running of an embassy whatsoever, or doing the traditional things that ambassadors do. Still he had a pretty good relationship with that government, and he was quite supportive. I think they were unusual enough and not tied so much to the past that he was able to establish a pretty good relationship with them. The highest point of criticism might be that when this coup attempt took place, he wasn't anywhere around, and nobody knew he wasn't anywhere around.

He never understood that if you're the U.S. ambassador, you're supposed to be in charge, and if you're not there, then your DCM is supposed to be the chargé and is supposed to be in charge. He didn't play the social game. He just sort of disappeared on weekends, and people assumed he disappeared to the quiet of his lovely residence, but in fact, I guess most weekends he went back to his family and friends in suburban New York, which is from whence he came, from Long Island. At the time the coup took place, he was actually in Long Island, and nobody knew that.

He was certainly not traditional, but I think in his time we began to see that there were potentially some real problems in the drug trafficking arena, and that there were some real opportunities to have Trinidad become more open to the international trading system, and particularly trade relations with the United States, and a more open economy. So I was the inheritor of that little bit of opening, and then new elections came along very soon. The African party reestablished its hold on the country, and my time was with them in office, with Patrick Manning as prime minister. But I think I was able to play quite well on the beginnings that Gargano had established.

Q: All right, well, we'll pick it up the next time there and obviously we'll talk about the drug business.

COWAL: So the drugs and the economy being the two major issues.

Q: And whether there were any roots of anti-Americanism there, because the first prime minister – what was his name?

COWAL: Eric Williams.

Q: He really kept us at a considerable distance.

COWAL: Yes, indeed. I must say that I was regarded as being, I don't know, you either loved me or hated me. I became sort of a big figure there, and the people who didn't like it were those who thought that since Eric Williams always kept the Americans at a distance, that was the way it ought to continue to run. The fact that I had pretty good relations, certainly with certain people in the Manning government, and indeed with Manning himself, was a point of criticism for both them and for me. And yet, I think the trend was exceedingly good for Trinidad. I think that, particularly on the economic side, they made a lot of the right decisions. I like to think that I had a background role in terms of, not just me, but presenting to some individuals and to some materials that made them take certain decisions that have been enormously good for the country. So where they had been very rich, as I described, soon after independence, their oil reserves lessened and their way of trying to mastermind the economy from the top down was a colossal failure, and the country got poorer and poorer.

That has now, from about the time I was there, again reversed itself, through some luck since there's a lot of natural gas – more than North America has, actually, so that's enormously important. But, also, I am a great believer that if you make certain mistakes and you continue to operate the same way, you'll probably end up in the same place. So if they had continued to operate in the same way in the 1990s as they had in the 1960s, the natural gas boom wouldn't be any more sustaining to them than the oil boom was in the '60s. But they have made certain course corrections in the economy, which have survived the change from the NAR, which was a coalition government, to PNP, a Manning government, to then the leader of the opposition, the Indian party, taking over, which happened also when I was there, and now back to the Manning government, but continuing on the same broad economic thrust, which is doing very well.

Q: Okay, so, we'll pick this up the next time. We're ready to talk about your arriving, your relationship with the various governments, the economic side, and you'll talk about maybe the disassembly, which I think the curse of all the British colonies, former British colonies, is that damn London School of Economics approach.

COWAL: Absolutely.

Q: They've done more damage than the Marxist movement.

COWAL: Absolutely.

Q: Today is the 17th of November, 2003. Sally, first place, again, you were in Trinidad and Tobago from when to when?

COWAL: From August 1991 to August 1994.

Q: Okay, well, we talked about when you arrived, but let's talk about dealing with the government, and what was your observation at that time of sort of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago?

COWAL: The economy had suffered tremendously, both from forces outside of its control and from things that were within its control. It had gone from a position at the time of independence, which was '62, or in the late '60s and early '70s, from being in per capita income terms the third highest in the Western Hemisphere after the United States and Canada, based on a petroleum income, to being one in which – gross national product had fallen tremendously. Per capita income had fallen tremendously, still not to the levels of poverty and deprivation that you see in many countries around the world, and including in Central America and in South America, but nonetheless there had been real economic hardship experienced by the country. And it wasn't a very well-managed economy. At the time of independence, the leader of Trinidad was a guy named Eric Williams, who was one of a series, like Manley's father and other outstanding leaders in the Caribbean, who had been British educated. I'm not sure in his case it was LSE (London School of Economics) or not. It might well have been. It might have been somewhere else, I don't remember.

Eric Williams was one of a generation of independence leaders, and he had very strong ideas on things. One of them was of basically a socialist point of view. He thought it was better for the people of Trinidad that the government have the commanding heights of the economy, I think they called it. He also had made a clear decision that because Trinidad and Tobago had this oil reserve, had had oil – I can't remember what the height of it was. When I got there, they were still pumping about 500 barrels of oil a day, which compared to Saudi Arabia is nothing.

Q: It was 500,000, I think I saw.

COWAL: Right. But made them a little niche sort of producer, with several foreign oil companies, several of which were then nationalized, or they took over their oilfields, not to the extent that PEMEX (*Petróleos Mexicanos*) had, for instance, of nationalizing everything, but still making it an unwelcome climate for foreign investment and deciding that it would be to the best interest of people of Trinidad and Tobago for the government to exploit this facility itself. And he had also made a decision that because they had another source of revenue, they wouldn't become a tourist destination. Both of those things had legacies, not all bad, but certainly not all good. I mean, tourist economies are notoriously bad for trickling down wealth, and they can tend to make people somewhat subservient and so on, or feeling that they are. The jobs are mostly low-wage jobs. You can see the bad effects of things like that in places like Barbados and Jamaica and other countries which have relied much more than Trinidad ever did on tourism.

On the other hand, a tourist economy, or at least having a tourism sector, does, A, provide a lot of jobs, and, B, it provides sort of an opening on the world. It provides access to people from

other cultures, and Trinidad sort of shut itself off from that. So way down there at the bottom of the Caribbean basin, seven miles from Venezuela, it was kind of out there floating by itself, not really very well connected to anyone else in the world. Obviously, linguistically not a part of Venezuela or a part of the Latin American continent, not having many visitors from Europe or the United States, because they had no tourist industry, nothing that tourists particularly wanted to visit.

The decision to do it on their own in the oil business also limited the exposure to new ideas and new technology and an expat community. That also had its isolating phase, so that I don't think Trinidadians very much lived in the world. The oil industry soon became noncompetitive as a nationalized industry, because the oil – and natural gas then actually began to come on in a very big way. But most of it was offshore, and a lot of it was deepwater located, and so the amount of capital infrastructure and capital investment needed to reach this oil was just beyond the reach of a single little national oil company, or oil companies. So I think after 20 years or so of running on that tack, it was kind of running out of gas by the time I got there. Yet, the fact that there had been a lot of wealth meant there had been a lot of national pride, which is both good and not so good. It's mostly good, unless it puts you in a position, as I think it did with a lot of people in Trinidad, of believing the saying that was very common there, but which people really believed, and that was that God was a Trini, a Trinidadian.

God must have been a Trini, because alone of all these Caribbean countries, they had this enormous resource. Therefore, they could afford to be isolated, they could afford to be running their own little two-bit society for themselves, with a lot of rules and regulations. The foreign investment laws were extremely complicated, lots of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, so in this still-relatively wealthy country, you would go to the supermarket, and there were two supermarket chains, as I recall, and the shelves would be virtually empty. What they had on the shelves were overpriced light bulbs produced in the country, and overpriced breakfast cereals produced in Trinidad, and almost no foreign products. Of course, a lot of things you can't produce in Trinidad. It's not a big enough territory, for instance, to have a beef industry, or even much of a dairy industry. There's not enough land for that, so you ate pretty much chicken and fish, because that's what you could grow and what was available. There were, of course, some wonderful fruits and vegetables that were produced, but in terms of anything that had to come from abroad, it was a pretty meager existence.

Q: Coming to this, did we have any interest in wanting to see it open up or not?

COWAL: Well, we did. If you recall, the time for this was midpoint in the Bush administration, and certainly there was interest. We talked on earlier things about NAFTA, but then there was always interest in sort of having a Free Trade of the Americas thing, which still may or may not now come into being in 2005. So they take a long time, particularly when you're talking about smaller and more fragile economies. We had had the Caribbean Basin Initiative Acts, two of them by then, which were meant to stimulate at least a sort of a *maquiladora* sector in the Caribbean.

Q: You might explain what a maquiladora is.

COWAL: A maquiladora is an offshore manufacturing facility in which the raw materials are exported from the United States, labor is performed in the foreign country, and then the finished product is exported back to the United States, and the only tax on it is the value added by the labor. So this, for a while, and certainly it was in its heyday in those years, seemed to be the answer to everything. It was going to provide a source of jobs for countries in the Caribbean and Mexico, and it was going to provide less expensive goods for the American consumer.

In the Caribbean, it was mostly textiles, although Dominican Republic had, I think, a Black & Decker plant and some small appliance manufacturing. Haiti was famous for producing soccer balls, I think. Most of the soccer balls in the world were, for a while, produced in Haiti. Trinidad never had any of that, either.

Q: It didn't subscribe to the plan?

COWAL: No, it didn't subscribe to the plan, and that was mostly because it didn't have a lot of low-wage labor, because the labor had, both through the oil industry, which provided higher-wage jobs, and then the fact that for good or for bad, and I think it turned out to be for bad, but at any rate, they were behind these high-tariff barriers, doing a lot of their own manufacturing of the bad light bulbs and the bad breakfast cereals. At least they had jobs available. They still exported some sugar cane. That was mostly an East Indian thing. The East Indians had been brought to Trinidad starting in 1836, when the British Empire outlawed slavery and the black slaves from Africa were no longer brought. Indentured labor from India and China was brought to Trinidad so that the population base still includes Indians and Chinese. And the Indians, who are much more numerous than the Chinese – in fact, they're about half of the population – were both the shop owners and the business owners, but also still the laborers in the sugar fields. So there remained a sugar industry, and a sugar quota for Trinidad, with the United States sugar quota. It was there like almost everywhere else also a failing industry, kept alive only by the small quota, but with a large price. The U.S. sugar policy, which is a whole different story that I'm sure a lot of people you've talked to know more about than I do, which seems one of those remnants of a bygone era that nonetheless continues to be our agricultural policy.

At any rate, yes, the United States had interests in Trinidad, not for any particular reason except as part of the grand scheme of things. We believed that the best government was that which interfered the least in the economy, that free trade was an idea whose time had come, that if widgets were better produced somewhere else, they ought to be produced somewhere else, and that every country would find its own thing that it could do best. Certainly I went, A, believing this myself, and, B, as U.S. ambassador, believing that this was the path that should be followed. I must say, when I first got to Trinidad, and I think we talked about this a little bit the last time, but the first racially mixed political party had managed to get enough seats in the parliament to have the prime minister, a guy named A.N.R. Robinson, from the National Alliance for Reconstruction, I think it was called, was the prime minister. He was kind of like a Ross Perot, I guess. I mean, it was a third way, a different political party, and not really so much of a political party as defectors from the two main political parties, therefore creating sort of a middle way, and something which was certainly mixed race.

I think that was terribly important in Trinidad's development, because following his government, although the majority party was once again reelected, in the elections following that, the Indian party was elected. So I think that Robinson himself was, and he's still alive, is an African Trinidadian, but it paves the way for there to be ministers who were Indians. I think that set the stage that in fact Indians could govern this country. Economically, they were more or less onboard with this program, although they didn't take dramatic steps. I think one of the things that was true about Trinidad is although the situation was not good economically, it was never bad enough to promote dramatic change.

It's an ego trip to be an ambassador and think anybody cares about your ideas, or ought to care about your ideas. I think you're there to be a faithful presenter and interpreter of the administration for which you're working.

Q: But there is a certain point where you are looking at the situation in place and taking the policy and trying to meld the two.

COWAL: Right, and I think ambassadors play a tremendously important role, don't get me wrong. But I became enormously high profile there, partly out of design and partly I think it just happened. But, at any rate, I would always be asked by the press whether I was representing the views of my government and so on, and I would say, "I'm not an uninstructed ambassador. I'm not out here on my own brief, because I think that would be doing a disservice."

Q: Had their been, essentially, a series of almost uninstructed ambassadors?

COWAL: There had.

Q: I won't say uninstructed, but you know what I mean, people who weren't really policy tuned. They were given a payoff to go out to ...

COWAL: Yes, there was, certainly with the exception of Sheldon Krys, who was a career ambassador, and I might have been only the second. I'm still only the second, as far as I know. In fact, I know that since me there has not been another career person. Sheldon, first of all, came out of the sort of security field. He was not particularly, I don't think, politically attuned. I think he did a fine job and I think some of the non-career people did a fine job, also.

Q: I've interviewed Sheldon.

COWAL: And it would be interesting. Part of what's interesting about this would be looking at his view of Trinidad versus my view of Trinidad. But Sheldon was followed by this guy named Charles Gargano, who was not career, and who had some of the right instincts, and a lot of the wrong instincts, but who was an Al D'Amato. He was put there essentially by Al D'Amato, who was then the senator from New York, and he was part of this sort of Italian American mafia in New York state.

Q: You're not referring to the criminal element. We're just talking about a cohesive ethnic group.

COWAL: A cohesive ethnic group that was very important in New York politics and in Republican Party politics, and which had been part of the election of Reagan and of Bush, and therefore got its normal payoffs. So Charles, now, I think is part of the Pataki administration, but he made a lot of money being a paving contractor or a road contractor on Long Island, so he had a lot of money. He remained very interested in politics and business in Long Island, or in New York state, so he devoted some of his time to Trinidad, but he wasn't like me. I was a 47-year-old. I had just been a deputy assistant secretary of state. I was filled with vim and vigor and beans, and this was now my new little playground, and there were things that I wanted to do.

I believed that both an opening of the economy and doing something about taking the drug problem seriously, which was becoming an increasing problem in Trinidad, were priorities of the Bush administration. And I believed they should also be priorities for Trinidad, so I determined fairly early on that that would be what I devoted especially my public efforts toward. Of course, I was not only full of sort of vim and vigor, but I had grown up in the diplomatic service as a public affairs officer. That's what I was, so I didn't see my job as having the best-organized GSO (general services officer) section. I wanted the consular stuff to run well, and when it doesn't run well, it can always be a pain in the ass, and you needed qualified people to do those jobs. I had a pretty good team, considering that I think one of the liabilities of these small posts is also that good people generally don't find them very exciting and therefore don't want to serve in them.

I always said, also, that I never invited myself to give a speech. I was always asked to do things, and that starts out with the sort of softballs. You're invited by the Rotary Club, or you're invited by American Women's Club, or whatever it is, and so I think you build these things gradually, while you're learning what the country is all about. Also, it was a time of great change. Whereas Sheldon Kryss entered into a period of time where things had been with the same political party since independence, I was there after this dramatic change had taken place, and shortly after I got there, I think it was about three or four months.

I would say the other thing I had to deal with, almost immediately, was the fallout from the fall of Aristide, and the question as to whether or not other countries in the Caribbean would accept Haitian migrants. Once again there was this tremendous outpouring, or fear of an outpouring, of waves of refugees and migrants coming from Haiti. Of course, they weren't naturally going to come south. The question was, would countries take them? One of the things I had to deal with, one of the only things I really had to deal with the Robinson government on, because it didn't last long after my arrival, was the question of whether they would take Haitians or not. The government agreed that they would. I don't think any ever came, but they went through a long debate in parliament and so on.

I guess that was probably the first time I was noticed by the press, except of course as an American ambassador in a very small place, which has close relations with the United States, or close and sometimes difficult relations with the United States. You can't not be noticed from the day you arrive. The first time that what I was proposing on behalf of my government was controversial in the country was this proposition of whether or not Trinidad would, not as we presented it do a favor for the United States, but express a certain Caribbean solidarity and

extend an open welcome to people from Haiti who needed or felt they needed to leave Haiti. And they agreed to do that, but it was clearly at a time when unemployment was rising in Trinidad.

This oil boom was over, it was more than over, it was running on empty. Exports were dropping in oil. Nothing had really replaced oil as an export. The government was trying to do things like make breakfast cereal and run a steel mill, none of which it was doing very well. Then, in the middle of it, you come along and ask them to take, I think it was 500 or something, not a huge number of Haitian refugees, of whom there was every expectation they might never go home. After all, the countries that are sort of Haiti's more immediate neighbors, and certainly between Haiti and the United States, the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas, mostly, and Jamaica, had had large influxes, particularly the Bahamas, of Haitian refugees.

I seem to recall at the time I was deputy assistant secretary that the total of Haitian migrants in the Bahamas was something like 40,000. If you think of the size of the Bahamas, the 30 little islands or whatever they are, but most of them the size of this room, you had a large number. And they were somewhat destabilizing. I mean, if you had an economy like the Bahamas that was a tourist economy, and mostly a tourist economy catering to the European, Canadian and U.S., who wanted only a place to get a cheap beer on the beach and fun in the sun when the climate is cold in New York or Toronto, they're looking to offer the lowest common denominator and the lowest price in tourism. So if you can hire a Haitian for 40 cents a day to make the beds, rather than a Bahamian for \$4.00 or something, you're obviously offering a lower-cost product.

It was somewhat controversial that Trinidad said they would take migrants, whom I don't believe ever came. That moment passed, things went on, it evolved. But the first thing I remember having to go to the government of Robinson about, the first time I ever had to deliver a demarche as an ambassador was the question of Haitian refugees.

Q: What was our proposal? What was in it for them?

COWAL: I suppose better relations with the United States. I don't know that there was anything. In Trinidad, we were missing one of the levers that many of my fellow ambassadors had, and that was aid. We had no aid to Trinidad, no bilateral assistance, because they had passed some point of the per capita income having been \$2,500 or something, and that put them out of range for getting any aid money. So we couldn't offer anything very direct, but certainly in the Robinson government wanted a good relationship with the United States. I think we were also able to sell it on – that the Caribbean ought to somewhat shoulder the burden, take responsibility for its own defense. They couldn't totally take responsibility for their own defense, but step up to the plate, some of these things, so they agreed they would do it.

At any rate, I spent the first, I suppose, four or six months talking to people, learning, deciding what I would do, as I think all ambassadors do. I had an advantage, because I had been deputy assistant secretary for the region, so I had visited Trinidad a couple of times in that capacity. I had met several of the business leaders, as well as government leaders, on my prior visits there. I knew the issues, of course, because I had been working the portfolio. I must say, it was not terribly difficult, and I felt I had something to say and a lot of time on my hands, actually.

So I tried to learn something about the culture. One of the first things we did was take a course at the University of the West Indies on carnival judging, and carnival is a very big deal for Trinidad and Tobago. It's sort of an expression of the national culture, and it rival's Brazil's carnival in terms of the amount of money invested on it. It's a real industry, the number of people who participate in it, the fact that it sort of is a real uniting factor for the country. It provides an artistic expression. So there was a course at the University of the West Indies, a credit course, an evening course, on carnival judging that was actually one of the best things I did, because it went through really the whole history of the country, in a way, how this had come to be a phenomenon, and the great musical leaders, who were legendary in the country.

Q: As a high school kid, I think of Lord Defender and Roaring Lion. I used to have all those records.

COWAL: The Roaring Lion.

Q: It was the only time I think Trinidad ever really crossed my radar.

COWAL: And the Andrews Sisters, who made popular a song called, "Looking for the Yankee Dollar," or "Drinking Rum and Coca-Cola," which was in fact about prostitutes. There was a large Navy base at Chaguaramas, which is out on one of the points in Trinidad, because it was where we in World War II ran the net sort of on the bottom of the Caribbean, trying to catch submarines passing from the Caribbean to the Atlantic, or actually passing from the Atlantic to the Caribbean, where we were afraid that German submarines would come. So we had two big bases in Trinidad in the war, Waller Air Force Base, because it was a good jumping-off point to North Africa. So we'd fly planes from east or west coast U.S., refuel at Waller Air Force Base and then take off.

Q: I think they went to the tip of Brazil or something like that, and then onto Liberia and on their way. I mean, it was quite a network.

COWAL: It was quite a network. So there was a large Air Force base in the middle of the country, and then this Navy base out at the end. So the Andrews Sisters' song, which was actually stolen from a Trinidadian, was the "Drinking Rum and Coca-Cola," and "Looking for the Yankee Dollar." There was a lot to be learned about the whole history of the country, and in a way, the history of the relations with the United States, through learning about the carnival. But that was also something that the press found very interesting, that this American ambassador would actually want to know something about the country.

So I began to be invited a lot, and it's a very joining kind of country, I think the way a lot of small countries are, and particularly those that have had a long British tradition. People are joiners. They volunteer for the Boy Scouts, they're Rotarians, they belong to the Kiwanis Club. They have the Sophomores, or whatever they're called. There are all kinds of little organizations, the Red Cross of this, and so on. They all have monthly meetings, and they're all looking for somebody to come and talk to them about something, so I began to be invited to do this a lot.

I accepted a lot of those invitations. It was a way to see the country. They were in various locations, including in Tobago. It was a way to meet people who were not necessarily in Port of Spain, get to know the civic society, the business leaders. Then I would need to stay something, of course, and I would say, well, you have a couple of choices here. You're invited to do something. You can accept or you can not accept. That's the first choice. So you decide you'll accept, and then you can say something or you can say nothing. If you're going to accept and you're going to give up your time, and you're going to make everybody sit there for 20 minutes and listen to you, you might as well have something to say, so I had something to say.

I was very lucky, because I had a great speechwriter, and he was not the public affairs officer. He was the political officer.

Q: Who was that?

COWAL: His name was Norm – it will come to me in a moment. Anyway, he was a political officer who was not in all ways a brilliant political officer, but he was a very good speechwriter. He could take these ideas about why it was useful to have a more open economy, why the country needed to do something about drugs. And those became the sort of recurring themes of what I talked about, mostly. People liked it, and the newspapers would cover it, and the newspapers would sometimes cover it positively and sometimes not so positively, and when they covered it not very positively, that got more people interested in it.

Mostly, when they covered it not positively was because it was believed to be an interference in the internal affairs of this country, that I would come and I would opine that the economy ought to be more open, or the fact that if you looked at the statistics, there were more hospital admissions for drugs. There were more crimes, there was more of every factor. Although there had not been large-scale drug shipments found, if it walked like a duck and it quacked like a duck, it was probably a duck. So all of the things that we saw were indications that more drugs were coming through the country, and that some of them were staying in the country, and some of them were causing corruption and some of them were causing drug addiction.

At any rate, I had an interesting three-year run. One of the sort of most controversial speeches I ever made that people quoted ever after was the same speech, basically, but it was right after the new prime minister was elected, Patrick Manning. There was a big event, and I think it was November or so a year after I'd been there. So I'd been there maybe a year and a half when he had been elected a few months before. One of the newspapers had decided to call him the man of the year, like a Time magazine "Man of the Year." So this was the Express newspaper, which also had a television station. They made him man of the year, but they asked me to give the feature address at this banquet, at which he would be honored.

So, using my wonderful political officer, whose name I still can't remember, but I will – Antical, Norm Antical. So Norm wrote a speech called, "Now is the Time," and it was all about what a wonderful man Manning was, I was honoring him, but that now was the time to do something he had been elected to the leadership role. Now was the time to get on with addressing the problems that had in fact been challenging the country for a number of years, such as the fact that the economy was running on empty. It was a praise of him, but it was at the same time a strong

speech, indicating that now was the time, that there was not much time to waste, that the indicators were all in the wrong direction.

I think it was expected that what you would say in a speech like that was, “What a wonderful man he is, how fantastic it’s been that he came back.” His party had been defeated, this NAR had come in, and he had completely sort of reorganized the party, became its leader, challenged the elections, been elected, and that you were just supposed to say what a wonderful thing that was, period. I said, “What a wonderful thing that was, now do something with it.” I think that’s what really sort of launched my career in Trinidad and made me a very controversial figure.

Q: How did you relate to the new Manning government?

COWAL: Well, I got along well with some people and not with all. Those who didn’t want to hear about these things, or if they wanted to hear about them, didn’t want to hear about them from any foreigner, let alone the American ambassador, did not have very good relations with me. The people who believed what I believed, of course, I think I got along with extremely well. Basically, I had no problems with Manning, although I don’t think he was one of my greatest boosters. It’s a difficult role. I think I did what needed to be done. I think the country changed in part because of that, or in part because that lit a spark. Obviously all you could do as the outsider was light that spark, and then see whether or not there was material there to make a fire. And there was material to make a fire, and there were enough people who wanted to do that.

There were substantive things that happened. I got an American Chamber of Commerce started. It’s something I think Sheldon Kryss had tried to start, and the only companies that had enough money were the oil companies, and they were not interested. Somehow, we got a little coalition going. There was a small AIG office there, there was a small IBM offices. The oil company personnel had changed and the Texaco guy had been part of an American Chamber of Commerce somewhere else and understood the role it could play. Around my breakfast table, we got these business leaders to come and to talk about that. They started an American Chamber, and I think there were 12 founding members. Last year, they asked me to go back and make the 10th anniversary speech to the American Chamber of Commerce, and it now has 200 members. All the Trinidadian companies also belong to it, and they have become a strong voice for supporting these changes and a more open economy.

The government did the changes, but it if it had not had a strong business community behind it, if it had still been the old protectionists holding onto their lousy light bulbs, it wouldn’t have happened. So I think forming an American Chamber that just got associated – there’s an association of American Chambers of Commerce in Latin America. Again, it helped break Trinidad out of this isolation of where they had really been.

Q: Have they felt the isolation?

COWAL: Well, no, because they had been in their little – you don’t know you’re isolated unless you know there’s something else out there, I think. I’m sure some people did. Some people went away to study, and it’s like people who can go away to study and then come home to their little town of 250 people and be very content that Sam is the druggist and Bob is the gas station owner

and Phil runs a grocery store, and it's always been that way. And it will be their children who inherit these things, and we all have our little role, and it all functions and everyone has enough to eat.

The outside currents of a much more global economy and drug trafficking made that continuing isolation impossible. Trinidad was being dragged into the 21st century, whether it liked it or not. At least by having a group of people in the country who didn't just want to put their heads down anymore and hope it would go away, but who were willing to take it forward, to confront these challenges, I think has made a tremendous amount of difference. I give this American Chamber of Commerce, which became the leading business group in the country – it totally became many more non-American companies than American companies.

Q: Which usually happens if it's successful.

COWAL: So it became enormously successful, and they began to attract foreign investment, and so to work on the laws of the country that were inhibitors to foreign investment, to look for foreign capital. I think the last year I was there they actually had something like \$5 billion in foreign investment. Now, that's tremendous for an economy of that size, and that included some pretty high-tech companies who were looking at the processes that needed to be done in an industry that could benefit by the fact that there was a cheap and ready supply of natural gas. As they began to bring the natural gas on stream, they did put a plant to liquefy natural gas and send it to the United States. They also were able to harness a lot of it at home, and therefore to do – for instance, they had an iron carbide plant. Iron carbide takes iron ore, which was coming out of Brazil, and through some kind of a heat process reduces iron ore to iron carbide, which is a sand-like thing, and therefore shipping that forward to the United States. First of all, it's not flammable, which iron ore is, and secondly, of course, its weight is much reduced. So they used their natural gas in a way to have a successful iron carbide plant.

Nucor Steel came in, which is one of the only successful steel companies in the United States, out of North Carolina, and they began to produce a competitively priced steel in Trinidad. So things with foreign investment began to work as sort of cutting-edge, or if not cutting-edge, at least modern, technology, and Trinidad did very well at attracting those kinds of companies. Now, I say, God still is a Trini, because it's enormously blessed by having these huge natural resources, but it also began to do a better job at exploiting them.

I think in the long run, again, the economy is doing quite well. I don't think it's the third-largest per capita income, but it's not bad, and even though the government no longer runs all of this stuff, the benefits, because the tax base is higher, are in fact in some meaningful degree, I think, helping the people. They also began to do a little bit of tourist exploitation, tourist industry, not on Trinidad, but on Tobago, which is a beautiful Caribbean island. Trinidad has some pretty things, but wouldn't compete with the rest of the Caribbean, but Tobago certainly does compete. It's got those beautiful reefs where it's wonderful for scuba diving and snorkeling, and gorgeous beaches. When I arrived, there wasn't one international resort on Tobago, and now there's a Hilton and there are several others. Again, there was just no incentive to do it. Nobody wanted to do it, and the opening up and the changing of the foreign investment regime meant that that changed.

Q: Was there a Trinidadian immigrant establishment in the United States, and did this play any particular role?

COWAL: Very small. I used to say, “There’s poverty here, but there’s no misery,” and that was pretty much true. More or less, everybody could find enough to eat, and there were not wonderful schools, but some schooling available, primary and secondary schooling. There was primary healthcare available. So I think compared to poorer countries like Guyana or Jamaica, there were some Trinidadian expats, but that was not a huge factor. There were more, I think, in Canada and the UK than there ever were in the United States. There were a couple of very famous ones, of course, V.S. Naipaul being one.

Q: Tell me, did he win the Nobel Prize or not?

COWAL: He won the Nobel Prize. Another, not a Trinidadian by birth, but by longtime residence until he went to England also, was Derek Walcott, who won the Nobel Prize a couple of years before Naipaul, an Afro Trinidadian who writes magnificent lyric poetry, absolutely astounding. He won the Nobel Prize in 1992, and then Naipaul in 2001.

Q: Did you have any connection with these people?

COWAL: I met Naipaul. I never met Walcott. They were both living outside the country. I was quite close to Naipaul’s family. He had two sisters who remained in the country, and now one of his nephews, who is in Canada, who is the son of one of these sisters whom I know, is becoming a very well-known Canadian writer. So it runs in the family. One of the sisters whom I knew wrote absolutely magnificently – never published, as far as I know, but wrote a family memoir that is truly an amazing piece of writing. Shiva Naipaul was their brother, who wrote extensively and was published a lot by The New Yorker and he died at a very early age. But four children, two boys and two girls, and amazingly talented as writers.

Of course, Naipaul was a caustic observer of this society, and of all societies, really. It’s just whether it’s the American South or the Muslim world or India.

Q: He went back to India and did not go there in a rosy mood.

COWAL: No, actually, his first book on India was called An Area of Darkness, and it was one of the first things I read before going to India. Somebody recommended it to me and said, “Well, if you take this to India, take it in a brown paper wrapper.” I thought he had a lot of things right about India, particularly India of the ‘50s and ‘60s, which was what he was writing about. His Bend in the River is magnificent, essentially African colonial societies. What he’s really talking about, I think more than anything else, is these colonial and post-colonial societies, whether he’s talking about the Southern United States or Africa or the Caribbean. He’s a very sharp observer of these little societies, sometimes humorous, sometimes less so, but he’s got the characters down quite well, I think.

Q: What were you doing? You keep mentioning the drug trafficking. What was the situation, and where did Trinidad fit in, and where did you fit in?

COWAL: Well, if you look at it, there are two ways for drugs to get to the United States from South America, where they are produced. One is through Mexico and the other is through the Caribbean. At the time I was there, we were in a better period with Mexico. This was still in the Salinas government. We were getting along pretty well with Salinas on a number of things, and one of them is not a crackdown, per se, but certainly I think it was more difficult for drug traffickers to use Mexico than before – Colombia, mostly.

So we began to see evidence of increasing drug trafficking through the Caribbean, not particularly through Trinidad, not Trinidad more than the others. I think the tendency was to come from Colombia and sort of come up the chain, or hit places that seemed to be more open. In some ways, Trinidad was a better place than a lot of the Eastern Caribbean because it was bigger. If you're trying to run drugs through Saint Christopher and Nevis, with a population of 100,000, or 70,000, whatever it is. At least Port of Spain has a population of a half a million to a million, I suppose.

Q: So you don't stick out.

COWAL: You don't stick out quite as much. As we promoted more openness and more trade, we were also aware of the fact that that very opening of things could lead to more openness for drug trafficking. We began to look at the statistics of what was happening. We had various ways we intersected with it. First of all, using a lot of mules, drug traffickers, and they would often be young American women, many of them African American, not always African American. They would meet a guy in Brooklyn or a guy somewhere who said, "Gee, a free vacation in the Caribbean if you'll only carry back this suitcase." I think some of them knew what they were doing, and some of them probably didn't, but they were the easy targets. They were the easy pickings, and the drug traffickers didn't care whether four of them got caught, because one of them got through.

We had something like 30 or 40 Americans in jail in Trinidad on pretty long sentences, so that was a consular function for us, and we wanted to generally keep that from happening. The defense forces of Trinidad consisted of a coast guard and a regiment, an army regiment, neither of which was particularly well trained, nor numerous. You had a police force, a totally unarmed police force, in which there was also a lot of petty corruption. You had a British system of judiciary, so there was the Department of Public Prosecutions, and a DPP who had to prosecute all these things, and they were years behind on the cases. I think some of it was corruption and a lot of it was just inefficiency, just horrendously inefficient.

So, despite the fact that we didn't give bilateral assistance, we did begin to help out with assistance to the military and to the judicial system to try to become more efficient at catching criminals and at prosecuting, hoping that that would be a disincentive to using Trinidad as a jumping-off place for the drug trafficking. We worked a lot with the British on that, and there was a whole Scotland Yard report on why the whole system was broken and why it didn't work and what would need to be done in order to fix it. Then I think the British and the American

governments – and the Canadian government, to a certain extent – I was very close to my British and my Canadian counterparts, both the high commissioners. I think the three of us, more so than most of the diplomatic corps – there were 18, I think, representatives in Trinidad. So it was a very tiny diplomatic corps, and you saw each other sort of all the time, because there was always some function to which you would always have to go and stand in line and stand in order. I think I had the French guy on one side and I don't remember who was on the other, because you were always in the order in which you had presented credentials.

A whole lot of them were there just to sort of stand around, or because they had one particular thing. There was an Indian high commissioner, for instance, because there was such a huge Indian community, but he didn't really have any other interest. There was a Japanese ambassador because I think there was a little Nissan assembly plant in Trinidad. They were assembling cars for the local market. Again, this is where this silly little economy of 1 million had gotten themselves to, is they were manufacturing cars for the local market. They were also importing a lot of Toyotas and so on, so he was there in a commercial function. There was a Nigerian, for what reason, I never figured out. There was a papal nuncio, because the largest number of Christians were Catholic. There was a Venezuelan because that was the next-door country. There was a Brazilian whom I never figured out why he was there.

At any rate, I would say the three most active countries were Canada, the UK and the U.S. and I think the three of us were a pretty good team in terms of we would often meet together and we would discuss how we saw the situation. I think we would reinforce each other's positions with the government, and just provide good intelligence sharing, and I don't even mean of such classified intelligence. Just information sharing, "How do you see what's going on? How do you see what's going on? What do you think of so and so or such and such?"

So we were active. Again, that was in the drug-trafficking thing. That was very controversial. There were some people who wanted to deny that there was a drug problem at all. There were probably some people in the U.S. government who were too ready to see more happening than might have been happening.

I think the fear was always that there was enough big stuff in Trinidad that if they ever figured out a way to get in, it could become a big transshipment point. I mean, for instance, I think the biggest shipment we ever helped to bring down, a pretty good-sized cocaine shipment, was loaded aboard a methane tanker. When you get into stuff like methane tankers, those are big ships. Trinidad produced methane and various other – natural gas derivatives were produced there, and I was encouraging that all this stuff be done. But if the drug traffickers had ever been able to corrupt enough of that industry, then Trinidad could have really become a significant drug trafficking point. They produced a little marijuana, which was pretty much consumed at home, and there was some marijuana shipment through there and some cocaine.

Q: What about the Clinton changeover in – it would have been '93. Did that have any effect on you all?

COWAL: Not much. You submit your resignation and then they decide whether or not they want to accept it. In the case of most career people, they decide not to accept it unless they have, I

guess, some political appointee who's really dying to go there, or some particular point of disagreement with the career ambassador who happens to be in place. In my case, they didn't, so it didn't much affect my life in terms of Trinidad. It meant a change in personnel in ARA and a change in personnel in the State Department, and I think that was a little difficult for me. Since I had been part of the team when I went to Trinidad, of course, I knew everybody quite well. When they all changed over, I didn't know them anymore. And when you're not a friend of the president's, but you're also not particularly well connected with your bureau or with the State Department, you feel a little bit like you're out at the end of a long rope that nobody's much tugging on.

Q: Well, the whole time you were there, how did you find the role of sort of the explosion of easy communications and all this with Washington. Did that make much of a change?

COWAL: Yes, I think it does. I think the role of the ambassador remains extremely important. It's not just that people know about things maybe before you do, know about what's happening in the country as soon as you do, because CNN or something picks it up. I must say, when you're in a place where it doesn't have big news coverage, that's probably less so. But, certainly, coming from the United States, again, when I was there there was not yet much satellite TV or even cable TV. There was some, but I suppose I didn't see the real impact. I certainly was there before the Internet, so I suppose it's harder all the time to say, "Wait a minute, you may not understand what you're looking at."

I think the ambassador is in a position – or the whole team, not just the ambassador – the whole embassy is in a position to be the interpreter of one to the other. The more there's on the airwaves, the more you really need to do that. The Trinidadians were generally enthusiastic about the election of Clinton, more than I was. I think he might have even visited some time long after I left. I'm not sure he did, but he may have. Certainly Madeleine Albright did, and I never had the visit of a secretary of state, so maybe that was justified, that they were more enthusiastic about it.

I think we could end today there, maybe. And we're about done, aren't we?

Q: Well, let's see. You left there in '94. What did you do?

COWAL: I left there in '94 without a job. A year before I was due to leave, sort of as Clinton came in and as the new team came in, they had initially thought maybe I should go to El Salvador. In other words, I think the reaction was that I was probably, and I don't mean to be an egotist, but I had more to offer than Trinidad, that I had sort of done my thing in Trinidad. I'd been an ambassador for a couple of years. I had obviously been a pretty good ambassador for a couple of years. We had managed to get a lot accomplished, and I think there was some desire that it was probably too easy a job for me. By then I was 49, I guess, that I should go to a bigger post, something that was more challenging. Although I loved Trinidad, I thought that was fine.

JOHN ALLEN CUSHING

Chief, Political Section
Port-of-Spain (2007-2009)

Mr. Cushing was born in New York City and raised in New York and Hawaii. He graduated from Reed College and continued studies at a variety of institutions in the US and abroad. After service in the Peace Corps, he held a number of positions as English language instructor before joining the Foreign Service in 1988. Mr. Cushing served abroad, variously as Consular, Political, Economic or Public Affairs Officer, in the Dominican Republic, Korea, Benin, Papua New Guinea, and Trinidad & Tobago. In Washington, Mr. Cushing served as Korean Desk Officer. Mr. Cushing was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: Then what?

CUSHING: My final post was Port of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago, and that was interesting. It was tough because that was the first place I went without my wife and we had a long period of separation that finally ended in divorce.

Trinidad and Tobago has considerable importance as being sort of the economic powerhouse of the southern Caribbean. It has liquid natural gas, it has petroleum reserves. About 70 % of the liquid natural gas that is supplied to the United States comes from Trinidad. It is comparatively well developed; they have shopping malls there and a cinema multiplex and restaurants and apartment buildings. It is a curious mixture because it has a lot of first world aspects but it also has a lot of rural poverty and bad roads and crime and corruption, so it's kind of a mix.

The other interesting thing about Trinidad and Tobago is you have the racial division. Formerly there was sugar and coffee and a lot of the agricultural work was performed by African slaves, until slavery was abolished in Britain and then the slaves were freed and they needed people to work in agriculture, so they finally concluded that indentured servants from India would be the best bet. In the 1850's, they brought in a number of Indians and more and more boatloads of Indians came over, so it is partly analogous to Fiji in the Pacific in that the population is about 40 % of African origin, 40 % of East Indian origin and there is an amalgam of mixed race; Syrians, Lebanese, French, Venezuelan, Chinese.

The two major political parties tended to form on the basis of race. The People's National Movement predominated in politics. They had been in power most of the time there. The United National Congress had power for a while, but there was a deadlock in Parliament and the president decided that the leader of the People's National Movement would be a more appropriate prime minister, so they named him the prime minister and he's had power ever since.

The leader of the United National Congress, Basdeo Panday, was a former labor leader and a very flamboyant fellow, but getting on in years. They added five seats to Parliament, so it used to be 21 for the People's National Movement and 16 for the Congress of the People, but then they added five more seats. But this just resulted in more gains for the People's National Movement. I believe there are now 26 PNM seats to 15 for the United National Congress.

There was an upstart party in the 2007 elections. The Congress of the People was a new party that came in and they attempted to draw off middle class voters, people who wanted a new approach, establish post-ethnic politics and so forth and they got 23% of the vote but no seats just because of the way the votes were distributed.

There is a great deal of crime there based on narcotics smuggling. It is only seven miles from Venezuela, so a lot of narcotics come over by boat at night. So you have cocaine and so forth arriving for transshipment to Europe. Put it on a plane there, send it off to Europe.

Weapons; lots of illegal firearms brought in and sold. There are some neighborhoods in Port of Spain where you simply don't want to go. The people who live there can go there if they roll the windows of their car down and go in very slowly because they have sentries at all the streets that enter and sometimes there are gangs at war from neighborhoods who are very close to each other, so the people who live in one neighborhood, sometimes they cannot go a few blocks down the street because that territory is controlled by a different gang or sometimes they can't cross the street because the block on the other side of the street is controlled by a different gang. Sometimes people are killed simply for being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

There used to be a lot of kidnapping for ransom. Primarily East Indian businessmen would be kidnapped and held for ransom. There was a period when a number of them sent their families out of the country and stayed by themselves. An American citizen was kidnapped and killed about three years ago and so the FBI got involved, broke up that gang so the number of kidnappings went down considerably. I think there was exactly one Syrian kidnapped, once. The Syrians got to the kidnapers before the police did and chopped them up into little pieces and mailed the pieces to the other gangs and said "This is what happens when you kidnap a Syrian." That was the end of that.

There was a fair amount of work at the embassy trying to fight crime. We have the Drug Enforcement Agency down there; we have a legal attaché from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They were also working with Guyana, the neighbor of Venezuela, which is also a very lawless place. I never got over to Guyana; I guess it is a pretty wild place.

Trinidad was a small island, but there was a fair amount to do. There was excellent bird watching and you could see the leatherback turtles come up on the beach to lay their eggs and you could go to the swamp and see the Scarlet Ibis flying in, and so forth.

I joined a choral group there; we would rehearse in the evenings twice a week and give concerts in the summer and at Christmas. That was good.

The big thing that happened there was that Trinidad and Tobago hosted the Summit of the Americas in April of 2009, so that was a tremendous undertaking because we had the new president come down, the secretary of state, a number of congressional delegations decided they would come along too and so, logistically, Embassy Port of Spain is a comparatively small post and we were swamped. We had a tremendous amount of work to do. They sent a huge number of temporary people to help us and, of course, we had a presidential advance team and we had to

scout out all the sites and get permission from the local government to photograph the sites and lay out the floor plans and everything. It was a tremendous undertaking. It went off successfully.

The government tends to be disorganized unless something is really important to them. The most important thing for anybody down there is carnival time, where right before Lent they have several days of carnival where they buy these exotic costumes and they all march in groups. They've got a sound truck with an enormous bunch of speakers blasting away. People dance in the streets for two days and two nights. Carnival is a big deal.

I was talking to a fellow from Venezuela who said, "Well, the only way Summit of the Americas will come off without a hitch is if it is as important to them as carnival is because that is the only thing that starts on time." There is a very laid back attitude toward doing anything on time, starting something on time.

The government suffers from a fair amount of disorganization and corruption. There is a middle class. There is a lot of poverty out in the country because the government tends to neglect areas that are going to vote for the United National Congress which is the opposition, so there is a fair amount of discontent.

They are trying to revive parts of agriculture. They closed down the sugar industry not that long ago. They are trying to get coffee and chocolate revived but they are essentially a one resource economy. They have their liquid natural gas and there is still petroleum that they are extracting.

In terms of foreign policy, they have this Caribbean Economic Community, CARICOM, so they tend to vote with CARICOM and they try to strike an independent line from the United States. Trinidad and Tobago actually voted with the United States only about 18% of the time in the United Nations. Still, relations are good.

There is a British high commission and a Canadian high commission and an Australian high commission because, being a former British colony and a Commonwealth country, they still have strong relations with other Commonwealth countries. And there is a Japanese embassy and a small Korean embassy and then various South American countries; Mexico, Venezuela and some of the other smaller South and Central American countries have embassies there also.

It is a very nice setting. It is on the Gulf of Paria and it has hills, fairly tall, steep hills in the background so some of the residential neighborhoods go up into the valleys and so forth. It was interesting.

Q: Do we have any installations there; airplanes or ships?

CUSHING: No, it was very important during the Second World War. There use to be a number of airfields there, because of the German U-boats in the Caribbean. They have pretty much all been closed down. The northwestern part of the island used to be totally controlled by the United States. I guess they leased it and they held onto it until the early 1960s when it was finally returned.

What we had a couple of times were ship visits where the United States navy has hospital ships that are designed primarily for goodwill visits so they would come and they would have a team of doctors, dentists, various specialists. They would go out and establish temporary clinics in traditionally underserved parts of the island and they got a very good response because, for all its wealth, the public health system there is not very good.

The prime minister himself, whenever he has a medical problem, flies to Cuba. He had a pacemaker installed in Cuba, he had artificial valves installed in Cuba and he had cancer of the kidney last December, flew to Cuba to get his cancerous kidney removed.

So people are always saying, “OK, if the public system here is so good, how is it that any time the Prime Minister has a health problem, he flies off to Cuba?” In the interests of Caribbean solidarity, they don’t charge him there. They just fly him there and fix whatever is going on and then bring him back.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CUSHING: Our ambassador was Dr. Roy Austin. Dr. Austin was originally from the island of St. Vincent and he studied in the United States and became a professor there. St. Vincent is not too far from Trinidad and Tobago. You’ve got St. Vincent and the Grenadines, just north of Grenada. He got a scholarship to study in the United States and, as is traditional for people who get scholarships there, he deferred his study for a few years so he could work and save up some money for personal expenses. He ended up going to Yale at the same time as George W. Bush. I believe they were either roommates or in the same fraternity. He is a personal friend of George W. Bush. He was named ambassador in 2001, I believe, so he was there for an extended period of time. He was there until January 20 of 2009 when our new president was inaugurated, so he had quite a long run as an ambassador. He was a professor of criminology at Penn State when he was asked to be the ambassador. He was able to relate to the people very well, so he got along quite well.

The prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago had been a member of Parliament for a long time. I think he was first elected in 1972 and he was the leader of the party after they had a couple of setbacks, but they are now in a comfortable majority.

I guess the other thing worth mentioning was there was a coup by a radical Muslim group in Port of Spain in 1990. They took over the Parliament and held the members of Parliament hostage and a police station in Port of Spain was burned down and there was widespread looting and disorder for about three or four days until the army finally restored order and the leaders of this coup surrendered.

The person who led the coup is still free. Apparently, one of the agreements they had for freeing the hostages was that there would be an amnesty. So he is free and he runs an Islamic school in Port of Spain and he is allegedly involved in illegal quarrying. Quarrying is big business because there is still a fair amount of construction there; they are digging up the hillsides for gravel. They have a significant problem with flooding when it rains. The streets in Port of Spain tend to fill up

with water because the drains are clogged with plastic bottles and other refuse that people toss into the drains.

One of the other issues is Chinese foreign workers. A lot of the big government construction projects now are being built by Chinese labor. There will be a private contracting group that will work something out with the government and then bring in a whole bunch of Chinese construction workers, house them in fairly basic conditions and have them do the construction work. People complain that these construction jobs should be going to local people but the retort of the local contractors trying to get the construction done is, "Well, the local people won't work a full day." If you hire a person from Trinidad, he will find a big piece of hollow pipe and go in there and start taking a nap or something. It is really difficult to get people to work.

They had a couple of make-work projects that were also subject to corruption. There was CEPEP, which was the Community Environmental Protection and Economic Preservation program, where they would get people who were traditionally unemployed, they would hire them to do a weed whacking job on the side of the road or rake up things or clean out the drains, but it was mostly a matter of signing in and doing a minimal amount of work and getting paid and then leaving before noon and going out and doing whatever else they wanted to do.

Then there was the URP, the Unemployment Relief Program, which tended to be taken over by the gang leaders. The prime minister had the idea that if he turned these gang leaders into "community leaders" and entrepreneurs that they would leave their life of crime, and so what happened there was they would take a lump sum of money and then they would put together a list of phantom employees, all of whom would be paid but the gang leader who was now this community entrepreneur would dole out a little bit of money to each person who signed up as a ghost employee and some to his two or three followers and keep most of it for himself. There was a lot of corruption in that.

A lot of areas where these supposed community improvement projects were taking place were so dangerous that government inspectors would not even go up there. They didn't even want to go up there and have a look at what was going on. This was one reason a lot of gang leaders were getting killed, was because someone else would want to be the person in charge of getting these large sums of money connected to a contract, and so they would kill the leader and take his place.

The murder rate was extremely high. The population is about 1.3 million and I believe in 2008 there were something like 550 murders, which is extremely high. It is maybe not quite as high as Jamaica, but it is high.

Q: Were these mostly gang murders?

CUSHING: Mostly turf wars, gang leaders killing each other, people caught in the crossfire.

There was a case where a little ten year old girl was found strangled and stuffed under an abandoned house and the story going around was that her mother was using her as a courier running cash for drug deals; she didn't know what was going on but she would have a lunchbox

full of cash and they'd tell her, "Take this down the street and give it to the man who says hello to you on the corner." At some point she took the money down and either it wasn't enough money or someone stole the money and murdered this little girl. Every now and then there is a child killed, either caught in crossfire or abducted and killed, or something like that. There is a big hue and cry for a couple of days and then everything goes back to normal.

The national culture is based on loud music, alcohol and fornication. That's pretty much it, which of course has its apex at carnival. People are always partying. They are famous for the steel drums. During the war they got these oil drums and converted them into musical instruments, so that's considered an integral part of their culture.

Q: And the songs, too.

CUSHING: Oh, the calypso.

Q: I remember as a kid during World War II there was a famous song, Drinking Rum and Coca Cola. Bing Crosby and the Andrews sisters.

In a culture based on fornication was there anything you could contribute to that as far as the USIA public diplomacy point of view?

CUSHING: Not really. I was the chief of the political section so I had one junior officer and two assistants working with me. We put a lot of effort into INL, international narcotics and law enforcement. We had a certain pot of money, so we would work with the government of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of training. We had people come down to train people on financial crimes, money laundering, and the Drug Enforcement Agency was extremely active also. They were not allowed to participate operationally but they would do a lot of intelligence sharing with the law enforcement authorities. I think, as in most countries, the quantities of drugs interdicted and people arrested were just a small, small percentage of the amount that was getting through.

Q: I would have thought this would have been a place as a senior officer you would have been concerned about your junior officers getting into trouble in crime things or inadvertently or what have you.

CUSHING: No, the junior officers, a lot of them were already married, even the consular officers. I had a very good junior officer; he was already married and had two daughters, a very hard worker and his wife was the community liaison officer so she organized cultural excursions and trips and things like that.

Because of the mix of cultures, the East Indian and the African based culture, there were a lot of things to do; a lot of interesting arts and crafts and music and dance and so forth, and they actually had a pretty good national museum that traced the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the Spanish settlement, the petroleum industry, the Second World War, and they had a huge section on carnival costumes also, because that's where a lot of the creativity came in was designing these costumes for carnival.

Q: Did you get involved or did he go there, Naipaul or what was his name?

CUSHING: V.S. Naipaul was born there. Then left on a scholarship to England. He wrote a couple of his books about Trinidad. He is kind of considered an ungrateful native son because when he got his Nobel Prize for Literature, he didn't mention Trinidad once. In his memoirs, he talks about how he couldn't wait to get out of there, how his father was a reporter for the Guardian newspaper but never had a particularly successful career. Naipaul referred to Trinidad as a small island for small men with small dreams.

Q: You were there from when to when?

CUSHING: Kind of off and on; I was there from June of 2007 through July of this year, 2009, but I was medically evacuated for four months. I had some medical issues so I was medically evacuated to the States at the end of June, 2008 and then I spent some time in hospital in Miami and then I went out to San Francisco and spent a fair amount of time waiting for surgery there. I eventually had the surgery in early September and recuperated and got back there in early November. So I guess July, August, September, October, four months I was out of there on medical evacuation status and fortunately, my junior officer was a very capable fellow and just filled in and did what needed to be done. We also had very good local staff; we had a Trinidadian woman who used to work in the office of the president and she knew all the major people in politics, economics, business, the police, and we had another woman who had extensive experience in international narcotics and law enforcement, so she worked very well with the junior officer on that.

There was a lot of budget and fiscal work and program monitoring and checking on the status of the equipment that we had loaned to them and so forth. We had things like patrol aircraft and patrol boats and so forth. We had a kind of combined approach because from the Department of State we had this international narcotics and law enforcement program which also included sending police and military officers up to the United States for training, and then we had the Drug Enforcement Agency, then we had the Federal Bureau of Investigation and we also had someone from the United States Customs working with the customs department of Trinidad and Tobago, helping them out with custom, as well as a Military Liaison Officer. We did a fair amount of good work down there.

The corridors for shipping drugs would shift back and forth. If you put pressure on the west, if you tried to shut down the area from Colombia up to, say, Haiti or the Dominican Republic, it would shift eastward and it has gotten to the point now where there are some aircraft that fly from Colombia all the way to West Africa and they don't bother to try to get the aircraft back. They just land it somewhere and offload the drugs and maybe set the aircraft on fire or just leave it there. Narcotics were a big problem.

Q: You were there and it still continues with the advent of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and particularly as he developed, it turned things around as far as our relations with that country. Today they are not good. Did the Chavez regime impact at all on Trinidad and your work?

CUSHING: Their foreign policy is based primarily on not upsetting Venezuela. They have to be careful because they are so close, and they have some shared cross-border gas fields. The liquid natural gas is all under the sea, and Venezuela had this ALBA free trade program of its own, but Trinidad and Tobago decided to stick with FTAA, Free Trade Area of the Americas, and the various programs with CARICOM. They don't qualify for a lot of the trade benefits because they are considered an advanced country, since they have a comparatively high gross domestic product per capita. There was a little bit of a falling out. I think Prime Minister Patrick Manning visited Caracas one time and announced that he was sticking with the Free Trade Area of the Americas instead of joining with ALBA.

Also, there is another program that Venezuela has, Petrocaribe, where they sell petroleum products to small Caribbean nation island states at very concessionary rates, give them a loan to buy the petroleum, and charge very low interest and so forth.

Chavez has thrown a lot of money around in the Caribbean and in other Central American countries trying to set up this anti-American axis, working with Bolivia and Ecuador and so forth. He had been on the outs with Colombia for quite a while.

The major foreign policy initiative of Trinidad and Tobago is not to upset Venezuela. They have to live with them as neighbors. You can see Venezuela from Trinidad and Tobago. Not to sound like Sarah Palin, but you can see Venezuela from there.

Q: Were there sort of Venezuelan agents prowling around?

CUSHING: Probably. They had a big embassy. I got along pretty well with the Venezuelans. The Venezuelans have a cultural center where they give free Spanish language lessons and some of our people took advantage of that.

We had a couple of incidents where a patrol plane flew into Venezuelan air space inadvertently one time, so there was a little bit of a tiff about that and Chavez expelled the United States ambassador to Venezuela at one time, so the Venezuelan ambassador was sent out of the United States. Now they are back.

The thing is, Chavez just keeps stomping out one democratic institution after another; he revokes the broadcasting licenses for independent radio and television stations and clamps down on the media, clamps down on businesses and so forth. He appears to be making a total hash of the economy. PDVSA, the state petroleum company, their production is falling because they haven't kept up with the latest technology and maintenance and so forth and Chavez has sort of set up a parallel economy, but there are shortages of basic food items and so forth.

They have people keeping an eye on things in Trinidad and Tobago, but there is not a great deal of tension. There is a large Venezuelan embassy there and people get along OK.

Q: How about Cuba?

CUSHING: Really small. The Cuban embassy is located above an auto parts store. There is an auto parts store and the second floor is the Cuban embassy, and I guess there are an ambassador and maybe two other people. Trinidad and Tobago has a trade promotion center in Cuba and also an embassy there. But very few people in Trinidad and Tobago speak Spanish, a very small number considering how close they are. It just never really caught on. They say the rule of thumb there is the lower a person's social status is, the more likely he is to know Spanish because the fishermen get involved with the Venezuelan navy and coast guard from time to time because they crossed over the maritime boundary, so they know some Spanish and the smugglers who bring in the drugs and the guns and also transport people, primarily young ladies for the entertainment industry, also know Spanish, but the higher classes pride themselves on speaking impeccable British English and not knowing a word of Spanish.

Actually, I was doing a report on Venezuelan influence and I asked around about how many Venezuelans there are in Trinidad Tobago and a lot of the Trinidadians would say, "Too many." There are Venezuelans working with some of the oil companies in Trinidad and Tobago. There are various businesses there and there are a lot of people with Hispanic surnames because at one point they brought people over from Venezuela, I think to revive the chocolate industry to try to get them to plant cacao and so forth. They had fairly healthy industries in cacao and coffee, but after the discovery of petroleum and the fact that petroleum kind of took over everything, the roads were allowed to deteriorate and younger people don't want to work in agriculture very much, so it kind of died out.

The traditional split now, although there are some people of Venezuelan descent, people of French descent and so forth, is about 40% African descent and 40% Indian and the way it kind of falls out is that the Indians, the Syrians and the Lebanese are large players in business and industry and so forth. The Indians tend to be professionals, maybe in finance, attorneys, doctors, communications and so forth and the people of African descent tend to gravitate more toward the government. They will be the backbone of the police, the military, the government bureaucracy and so forth.

In our embassy we had people of African descent and Indian descent working together. You will find that in many businesses. Between individuals, there is no overt hostility, but I think when it is time to socialize, they tend to stick with their own groups.

Q: Is there a split between Trinidad and Tobago?

CUSHING: A little bit. Tobago was kind of added to the federation rather late. It belonged to the French and the Dutch, various people and it is more oriented toward tourism. It's a much smaller island, doesn't have much petroleum or anything and it has partially autonomous status in that there is a Tobago House of Assembly so they have a little bit of say over local laws and legislation and so forth but anything involving taxation, finance, defense, foreign affairs, they have to defer to Trinidad. Tobago has about 6% of the total population. Its major sources of income are transfers of government money from Trinidad and a certain amount of tourism. The beaches are better on Tobago.

Q: Did you have any big cruise ships come in?

CUSHING: Cruise ships come in to Port of Spain. Tobago is more package tours from England and Germany and so forth; an international flight will fly directly into the airport in Tobago and offload.

The cruise ships that come in to Port of Spain tend to come in during the day and the people go and look around Port of Spain and so forth and then hop on the ship that night and then they sail away either that night or the next morning.

Trinidad itself does not have much tourism, except for carnival; the diaspora in Canada and the U.S. and England comes back for carnival. You've got a fair amount of foreign tourists for carnival but apart from that, it's got some great hiking in the mountains, it's got a very good nature center which has good bird watching but it doesn't seem to have wide appeal for tourists. You get these very small niches; serious bird watchers will come down to this nature center which is a converted cocoa plantation which is up in the mountains where there is a large number of birds and people will come up there and stay for several days and they'll come from China, Germany, U.S., any number of places if they are really dedicated bird watchers. Other than that, people if they are in the country, will do things like go on the swamp boat tour to see the scarlet ibis or they will go out to the beach to watch the leatherback turtles coming in to lay their eggs. That's pretty much it. The preponderance of the tourism is on Tobago and they also say that they probably should be doing more to be competitive with a lot of the other Caribbean islands.

Q: You left there quite recently?

CUSHING: I did, yes.

Q: So what are you going to do?

CUSHING: I took the retirement seminar and the jobs search program. I am wrapping up the job search program and my plan now is to move out to Albuquerque, New Mexico. I established contact with an old friend there. We are planning to build a house out there in the desert next spring. She will be retiring at the end of December and we are going to build a house and I am hoping to start a big vegetable garden. I am also looking for some work but it sort of depends on what sort of work and whether I can do it from out there.

Q: Sounds great. Well, thank you very much. This has been very interesting. You certainly moved around.

CUSHING: That I have. I never really established a home bureau.

Q: That's always a problem but at the same time it means you get to see things.

CUSHING: This is true.

End of reader