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

AMBASSADOR HENRY L. KIMELMAN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is October the 29th 1993 and this is an interview with Ambassador Henry L. Kimelman and this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Mr. Ambassador I'm wondering if you could give me a little bit about your background, where'd you come from, a little about your family and early education and early experiences.

KIMELMAN: I was born in New York City, 30th St. Manhattan, right in the heart of New York City. I was raised in the New Yorkers environs, went to public school in Brooklyn, New York, worked my way through New York University, enlisted in the United States Naval Reserves shortly after Pearl Harbor while still in school. Entered into its V7 training program.

Q: 90-day wonders.

KIMELMAN: 90-day blunders we were called in those days. They sent me to Notre Dame. I had applied for a supply commission and I was sent to Line Officers school in the V7 program. The day before graduation my commission came through in the Supply Corps. I had to immediately transfer the star on my uniform to a Supply leaf. They're not used to that in South Bend, they sewed them on in the reverse way. I was not aware until somebody called my attention to it 3 weeks later. I had to have the Supply leaves resewn on my Navy uniform. In any event, I was assigned to the Boston navy yard for temporary duty. From there I was assigned to the Harvard Business School for their advanced management training program and spent 4 months at Harvard. It was a sort of half-MBA program.

Q: Oh yes, that was the one almost business school cum government administrative school.

KIMELMAN: Yes, it'd been taken over by the Navy. We lived at the dormitory with the Harvard MBA students. Upon graduation I was assigned to duty in the Aleutian area. I was attached to a construction battalion, then known as the Seabees. I spent almost a year on the island of Kodiak, returned as a Lieutenant JG. I was assigned as officer in charge of commissary store in Hingham, Massachusetts, where I served out until the end of the war. I was released to inactive duty in January 1946 and resigned in July 1950 as a reserve naval officer. I began a business career in 1946 and wound up in the Virgin Islands in 1951 on a permanent basis. Began to go there in 1948-49.

Q: What attracted you towards the Virgin Islands?

KIMELMAN: My father-in-law was the owner of a rum distillery in the Virgin Islands. In 1948 he decided to build a hotel. He was a man of great foresight but was a terrible administrator and businessman. All his business life he had a partner who looked after the business end and he was the man who was the creative aspect in his business relationships. He saw the future of the Virgin Islands as a tourist mecca and decided to build a small hotel which got larger as it went along. I came in at some point to help him because he was floundering after having invested a lot of money and not going about it in a business-like fashion. I tried to apply some of my Harvard background and business training. I graduated with a degree in Business Administration from New York University. My area of expertise is in financial matters. And so I became more and more involved until finally I left the

position I was in, Vice-President of a liquor and wine distributing firm in New York. I was living in Great Neck, Long Island with my young family. I became more and more involved with him and decided to look after the money that I had invested and to assume management--temporarily. My wife and I decided we liked St. Thomas. We opened the hotel in December 1950. I took over the management in 1951. At the same time, sort of coincidental experiences not knowing what was going to happen, the company I worked for were the exclusive distributors for the National Distillers Products Corp. Their famous brands (in those days) were Old Grand Dad, Old Taylor, Mount Vernon, Old Overholt, etc. The head of that division of National Distillers and Chemicals Company was Bev Ohlandt. Bev had taken a liking to me and telephoned me in the Virgin Islands one day. He said that he had a problem. His distributor in the Virgin Islands was not very active. All of their brands were selling about 2,000 cases a year. In terms of revenue that was probably about $40,000.00, not much for a free port. He said, "Why don't you take over the distribution for the Virgin Islands?" Not wanting to negatively affect a good relationship that I thought might be helpful in the future, but not really wanting to be in that business in the Virgin Islands, I said yes. I felt that the way it was put to me, it would be in my best interest to say yes. It is an interesting story.

I had a young brother-in-law who I invited to join me as a partner. His name is Eliot Fishman. We called it Henry Eliot Ltd. When I sold my company some 30 years later, it was the largest Virgin Island business enterprise, with sales of 30 million per year. It became a very successful business, and I had really backed into it reluctantly. I sold my company in 1980 before I became Ambassador to Haiti. By then we were the exclusive importers and distributors for SS and internationally famous brands of spirits, wines, champagnes, etc. Moet & Chandon champagnes, Hennessy cognac, Pepsi Cola, Budweiser and Miller, Guinness, Seagram, Canada Dry, Grand Marnier, Haig, Teachers, J.&B., and Chivas Regal scotches, etc. We were the exclusive distributors for all those brands.

Q: I wonder if you could give me a little feel, because as long as we're doing this, I'm trying to pick up social history as well as the diplomatic. What were the Virgin Islands like after the war? You were the new boy on the block when you arrived there, how did it develop?

KIMELMAN: That is an interesting question Mr. Kennedy. When the Virgin Island Hotel opened in December 1950, total tourism revenues were at the rate of one or two million dollars a year. Our hotel had 120 rooms. At the time it opened, it would have been the equivalent of building a 10,000-room hotel in New York. The largest hotel in NYC has 2,000 rooms. It was just as significantly out of proportion. With the revenues of our hotel, and the ancillary revenues it created, tourism revenues increased to five million in 1951. It grew 500% in one year. Today, the Virgin Islands is almost a two billion dollar a year tourist industry. And caters to almost two million tourists a year.

Q: Here you have this hotel which is almost a white elephant at that time. What started bringing in tourists, did something change?

KIMELMAN: It wasn't almost a white elephant, it was a white elephant. I became friendly with the Hilton people and met some of their executives when they opened the Caribe Hilton hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1949. It was their first international hotel. It was the year before we opened. I was invited to that opening and met Mr. Conrad Hilton. Through that relationship and a lot of assistance from the Hilton people, I was able to lease the Virgin Isle hotel to Hilton in 1960. It was renamed the Virgin Isle Hilton. I was elected a Director of Hilton International. I resigned a short period later as I was appointed Commissioner of Commerce and Industry for the Virgin Islands in 1961. So my career in public service began 19 years before I became Ambassador to Haiti. I spent three years in what was the number two position in the government of the Virgin Islands.

Q: Talking about the time you were there, how did you get the Commission, and how did the government work? What were their major interests?

KIMELMAN: Well, the Virgin Islands doesn't like to be known as, and the United States government doesn't like it to be known, as a colony of the U.S. Legally it is a territory, and it operates under what is called a unicameral legislature under the auspices of the Congress of the United States. But the Virgin Islands, in effect, locally elected but was then, and probably a little less so now, considered by many, particularly third world countries, as a colony of the United States. But the U.S. is now and always has been a benevolent patron. The United States contributes hundreds of millions of dollars annually. To give you an example: The Virgin Islands government budget in 1950 was approximately one million dollars a year. The only elected branch of government was the legislature. In 1954 a new organic act was passed by Congress. It increased to 15 the elected representatives. It wasn't until 1970 that Congress passed a bill for an elected Governor and an elected Lieutenant-Governor. The Virgin Islands budget is presently in excess of 400 million dollars. With a population roughly increasing in size from 50,000 in 1950 to 110,000 today. But the difference, of course, being 10,000 tourists a year to almost two million tourists a year. Yet the U.S. government still subsidizes road building, utilities, education, airport construction.

Q: So basically tourism is the thing that drives it.

KIMELMAN: Now in addition to tourism, two other major factors enhanced the economic growth of the Virgin Islands. One was the establishment of the Harvey alumina plant in Saint Croix. I, and the government, were responsible for it during the time I was Commissioner of Commerce. It subsequently was purchased by Martin Marietta. It was a 50 million dollar project, a major economic event for Saint Croix. And subsequently when I was at the Department of the Interior, Hess Oil opened on Saint Croix what is now, I believe, the largest oil refinery in the world. It is without doubt the largest oil refinery in the Western Hemisphere. The initial investment was 200 million. Today with its new cracking plant Hess' investment in Saint Croix exceeds l.5 billion dollars.

Q: Well since this side of you turns to the international sphere. What role, as you saw it, because you were there really from the post-war years to the post Cold War years now,

what role did the Virgin Islands play on the Caribbean scene? Or was it just out there? You know Puerto Rico keeps coming up as a problem in the United Nations and all but what about the Virgin Islands?

KIMELMAN: I presume the reason that the Virgin Islands does not command the attention of the U.N. is because it is so much smaller than Puerto Rico. Our population is 110,000. Puerto Rico's exceeds 3 million. But the problem does come up in the United Nations. Smaller Third World countries frequently attack the U.S. government for their colonial policies in the Virgin Islands. That causes some embarrassment but never receives the kind of publicity that Puerto Rico receives because of its enormous population in proportion to the Virgin Islands. And I said never quite got the publicity, consequently does not quite catch the attention of the American public. But at the same time, the U.S. government has been amazingly benevolent. Puerto Rico has similar economic advantages despite the fact that its legal status is different from that of the Virgin Islands. Puerto Rico is a Commonwealth. The Virgin Islands is a territory. For example Puerto Rico was granted elected governor status in 1948. Munos Marin, a prominent figure, was the first governor of Puerto Rico. The Virgin Islands did not receive that same advantage until 1970. Virgin Island residents pay their income taxes on the same 1040 form that all Americans use and at the same rates. We're subject to the same rates, adjustments up and down, as for example, in the Clinton new tax policy. However, taxes are paid into the local Virgin Islands government and retained by the Virgin Islands government and is a major portion of its budget. The Virgin Islands are also permitted to retain the excise taxes on rum produced in the Virgin Islands. It is significant. It contributes $30 million a year to the Virgin Islands government. U.S. government programs of the Department of Transportation, the Department of the Interior, the providing of roads, communications, and education spend somewhere between $150 million to $200 million each year to enhance the infrastructure of the Virgin Islands. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico enacts its own income tax laws and collects and retains all payments.

Q: While you were on the Virgin Islands as a Commissioner what was the impact of Castro? Was this starting in Cuba at the time, was there any impact there?

KIMELMAN: We benefitted tourism-wise with the advent of Castro. Cuba was the foremost tourist attraction, tourist mecca for Americans in the Caribbean for a number of reasons. Most important the fact that it was 90 miles from Florida and less than an hour by pre-jet aircraft from Miami. They had casino gambling even before Las Vegas. It had all those advantages in the late 40's, the immediate post-war era. It had great nightclubs. I visited Havana twice in 1948 and 1950. It was the fun place for an American tourist. Food was wonderful, service was very good. It was referred to by many as the Paris of the Western Hemisphere. So when Havana, which was the primary tourist destination in Cuba, was cut off, all the other Caribbean destinations benefitted. In my opinion, Puerto Rico received the most benefit. There was kind of a natural tie, both having Spanish as a primary language.

Q: As a tourist the feeling of a little exotic and all that. But also this big hotel you had was beginning to benefit by the cutoff of Cuban trade.

KIMELMAN: Well, to a smaller degree in the Virgin Islands because we did not have satisfactory airport facilities, and no direct flights. Tourists arriving by air came via San Juan, Puerto Rico. These were disadvantages that subsequently turned out to be, if not major, minor disadvantages. Somehow the tourist then and even more so today, look for the more out of the way places as destinations. Not as heavily traversed. In my opinion that accounts for the recent success of smaller Caribbean destinations--Anguilla, Nevis. Many tourists feel like getting away from it all. The trends of tourism has changed. For example, at the Virgin Isle hotel in the 50's, two nights a week were black-tie nights, formal. Ties and jackets were required for dinner in the dining room every evening. Today in some of the finest resorts in the Caribbean and in the south of France, women tend to dress a little bit more, men are very casual, open shirts, no ties. So this whole trend of what people look for in their vacations has changed to much more informality.

Q: Let's move to how you became Ambassador to Haiti.

KIMELMAN: I first became involved in government during the Kennedy administration as the Commissioner of Commerce from 1961-1964. I was in charge of the industrial development, tourism and rum promotion, and airports and harbors. During that period of time I became acquainted with many of the Kennedy senior officials. Traveled to Washington frequently. The Interior Department administers territorial affairs. The Secretary of Interior is the primary individual the Virgin Islands is responsible to. Stewart Udall was Kennedy's appointee as Secretary of the Interior, and served the entire eight years of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. I got to know him quite well and developed a personal relationship with him. After I resigned as Commissioner in 1964, we kept in contact. About two years later he called me one day and offered me a job in Washington. He was having problems with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and thought that I could be helpful and wanted me to take over the Bureau of Indian Affairs. I didn't think that was a job that I could be helpful with. But I told him if he could find something for me at an Assistant Secretary's level or preferably as his personal assistant, I would be interested in coming to Washington. In 1967, his long time personal assistant Orrin Beatty, who served as his Chief-of-Staff and had been with Stewart since he was elected to Congress in 1954, was appointed to the Four Corners Commission. Stewart had arranged the appointment for Orrin. A few months earlier the position of Under Secretary became available. Stewart forwarded his recommendation of me to the White House. However Senator Scoop Jackson, chairman of the Senate Interior Committee, had his candidate.

Q: A very powerful figure.

KIMELMAN: He was a very powerful figure. I knew Scoop, and I knew that he liked me. Judge Black in the state of Washington had been a political mentor of Scoop's and had a son whom he wanted to have that job. So Scoop used his influence and Dave Black became the Under Secretary of the Interior. A very nice man. I got along very well with him. Shortly

thereafter when Orrin left, Stewart said, "I've got this job as my personal assistant. I'd like you to fill it Henry, I think you'll find it very interesting." So I went to Washington in 1967. Another key assistant by the name of Jim Officer, and I shared the Chief-of-Staff duties. Jim left a few months later. I then became Chief-of-Staff. Stewart was writing a book in 1968. Consequently I became the de facto secretary from June 1968 to January 20, 1969.

Q: What was your impression of the Department of Interior in those days?

KIMELMAN: I thought then and I still believe that Stewart Udall was one of the two best Secretaries of the Interior in our history. I don't know too much about the Harold Ickes period. It was before my time. He was Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior and considered a great Secretary. Stewart is an amazing man. He is intelligent, talented, creative, and as honest and devoted a public servant as I have ever encountered. He did a masterful job of running that department for eight years.

Q: He made quite a name. People were really aware of that, not in a controversial way, that came a little bit later.

KIMELMAN: He was a great environmentalist and a dedicated public servant as was his brother Morris Udall who took his seat when Stewart was appointed Secretary. And Moe served for 30 years. Both are very dear friends. I see Stewart from time to time. He's now living in Sante Fe, New Mexico. Moe is very ill and had to retire from the House. He has Parkinson's disease. He is a wonderful man. He was a presidential candidate in 1967.

Q: What was your impression of the professional staff of the Department of the Interior? One hears mixed stories about this.

KIMELMAN: Mine is extremely high. What troubles me, and I have this discussion frequently with friends of mine, peers of mine, successful businessmen who tend to denigrate the bureaucracy. I found that my time in Washington the career public servants, particularly the super graders, whom I would have constant contact with, were superb. Not only in the Department of the Interior but with the Department of Commerce and other departments. They were generally outstanding men and women who probably could have earned far greater sums in the private sector. In those days a super grader earned about $34,000 a year. People serving in those jobs could have been earning $75,000 a year, in my opinion, in the private sector. And they worked 60, 70, 80 hours a week, most of every week, seven days a week, perhaps only a few hours on Sunday. We were in our offices 7, 7:30 in the morning until 6, 7, 8:00 many evenings. I'm talking about not myself who did that, who was a political appointee and who didn't have to make any sacrifice salary-wise, because I had outside income from my own business. But those who make the sacrifice, who have families to raise and children to send to college; and yet worked for the government for sums much less than they could have received on the outside. I have the greatest respect for the bureaucracy. This is something I've been debating and discussing and arguing with friends of mine who have never served in government and who find it hard to believe. The American public just doesn't realize that.

Q: Well I think it's almost built-in. And I'd like to come back to this subject of when you became Ambassador. Could we talk about how you became an Ambassador?

KIMELMAN: Forgive me I hope I'm not rambling on.

Q: This is exactly, I want to catch this.

KIMELMAN: I guess you can edit out what you don't want.

Q: No, I won't edit out anything.

KIMELMAN: It's all part of my background. I went to Washington as I said in 1967. I met Senator Church in 1961 when I was Commissioner of Commerce.

Q: This is Senator Frank Church.

KIMELMAN: Frank Church, he became a close personal friend.

Q: You were saying that you had served in the government towards the end of the Johnson administration.

KIMELMAN: When I was the Commissioner of Commerce, I was also the Virgin Island's delegate to the Caribbean organization. It became defunct shortly thereafter. It was an attempt at a small United Nations for the Caribbean.

A Caribbean organization in Guyana and Cheddi Jagan was the head of government.

Q: Quite a fireband.

KIMELMAN: A fireband. Was married to a Jewish woman that he had met at the University of Chicago, both of whom were members of the Young Communist League in the mid-1930's. Arriving back from the Virgin Islands in October 1961 I had a message from the Governor that he wanted me to attend a luncheon he was hosting for Senator Church. I was seated next to Church with the Governor on the other side. Church was a member of the Senate Interior Committee, but also the Foreign Relations Committee. And foreign relations, foreign affairs was really his major interest. And Interior because he was from Idaho and had for political reasons to be on that committee. He was more interested in talking to me about Cheddi Jagan than he was in finding out what I was there for: to sell him the Virgin Islands and what he could do for us. We developed our relationship and when I came to Washington in '67, he hosted a dinner party for me to which Senator McGovern was invited. He was also a member of the Interior Committee. We became socially friendly as well as having a government relationship with both of them being members of the Senate Interior Committee. I appeared with Stewart before the Interior Committee on a number of occasions. By the time I resigned on January 20, 1969 the

Kimelman and Church families were close friends. We had boys the same age. The Church and McGovern families vacationed at our home in the Virgin Islands. And George McGovern was visiting us in Saint Thomas on July 19, 1969 which was the day of the accident off Chappaquidick.

Q: This is where Senator Kennedy was involved in an automobile accident. A woman died. It pretty well ended his political career as far as presidential.

KIMELMAN: He was considered to be the far and away nominee for 1972 if he wanted it. I hosted a small dinner party at our home in the Virgin Islands for the Senator that evening. Scotty Fitzgerald, F. Scott Fitzgerald's daughter, was visiting. We invited her to dinner, she brought the news of the tragedy of Chappaquidick. And George and I spoke about his running for President that evening. I became his finance chairman. I was also Chairman of the Board of the McGovern for President in 1972.

We had a residence in Washington in 1969. In 1976 I did the same thing for Frank Church. I was his Finance Chairman and I was Deputy Political Chairman of his campaign for the presidency. You may recall he won five primaries and went down almost to the wire with Moe Udall. Carter I had met. He knew me and asked me to be his Finance Chairman, but I had a prior commitment to Senator Church. I politely declined, but I developed somewhat of a relationship with him.

In 1979 my name was in the personnel computer at the White House. I was called by the White House to talk about a position in the administration. As it turned out, the young man who was Director of Personnel, I did not remember him, but he knew me. He had a minor role in the Church campaign, and had driven me a couple of times. He apparently liked me. It is interesting the play that happens in the bureaucracy. He told me that my name had come up for the position as an Under Secretary of the Army. Harold Brown was the Secretary of Defense and they were looking for somebody who had an administrative and financial background. The position was responsible for procurement. They believed that a number of billions of dollars could be saved annually. And that it would be an interesting position for me. I had been a Naval Lieutenant and I didn't think I'd feel comfortable being the Under Secretary of the Army. I had recalled reading in the Washington Post a few days before that the Secretary of the Navy had been promoted to Deputy Secretary of Defense and that the Secretary of the Navy position was open. I suggested that I might be interested in being the Secretary of the Navy. That was sort of more up my alley.

This young man who was White House Personnel Director had taken a liking to me. His name is Arnie Miller. He said, "Henry, if that's the job you want, fine. You've got it." I said, "What do you mean, I've got it?" He said, "I'll recommend it to the President. You go home. It's 95% certain." About a week later he called me very apologetic. Somehow the administration felt it needed someone with a Latin background for this position, politically. So a man by the name of Eduardo Hidalgo, who was then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was given the position. I knew Ed Hidalgo. He had purchased my home on California Street about a year earlier. And Mr. Hidalgo was as much Mexican-American as I was. He came

from an upper-class family whose roots were in Mexico 100 years earlier. I thought to myself, if my name had been Enrico Kimelmano instead of Henry Kimelman, I'd have been Secretary of the Navy. All I had to do was add an "o" to my name. He felt badly. He said, "What are you interested in, Henry?" I said, "All my life I had the ambition to be an Ambassador." He said, "You want to be an Ambassador?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, here's a list of six countries. Take a number from one to six. Almost that easy. Amongst these six countries, the ones that I was most interested in were Finland, Haiti and Costa Rica. Luxembourg was available. I immediately eliminated that country because I thought of Perle Mesta.

Q: Perle Mesta, "Call me Madam."

KIMELMAN: "Call me Madam," I had seen that show. And I thought, I'm from the West Indies. Haiti is a country I know and a country with tremendous problems. I believe I can make a significant contribution. So I told him that I was primarily interested in going to Haiti. About a short time after, perhaps a week or two, he called me and said that my name had been sent to the President. It had been approved by the Secretary of State, and it should come through any day. A few days later I received a call from someone in the White House. It was not Mr. Miller, telling me that my appointment had come through.

I was in Saint Thomas. I said, "I'm on my way to the States. I'd like to stop in Haiti for a few days to renew my friendship with some old acquaintances and let them know that I'll be coming, etc. Does the State Department have any objections?" He said, "You're not going to Haiti." I said, "What do you mean I'm not going to Haiti?" He said, "You're going to Luxembourg." "How did that happen?" He replied, "I don't know." Well I knew Ben Reed who was Under Secretary of State for Administration. He was a close friend of a friend of mine. I called Ben, "What happened? Why Luxembourg? I don't want to go to Luxembourg. I don't want to be thought of as a Perle Mesta." He said, "We don't know what happened because the career people were very interested in having you go to Haiti." And apparently as he related the story to me, Cy Vance was at the White House. They made the State Department appointments on a Friday morning. He had come in with a list of my appointment and perhaps others. Carter was about to sign off, looked up at Cy and said, "Why are we sending Henry Kimelman to Haiti?" Cy Vance, who barely knew me, said, "I have no idea." The President said, "I don't know Henry well. But he has had a lot of international business experience. His company has represented a number of European companies." Carter did his homework. He knew about me. He continued, "I think Luxembourg, particularly with the rotation of the European Community Presidency, and the President of Luxembourg is going to be head of the European Community this year, that's an important post. I want somebody with some international business experience." So the President crossed out Haiti, and put down Luxembourg.

Mr. Kennedy, this is going to be particularly interesting. It should be part of the record. It shows the influence of the bureaucracy. The State Department's career people apparently were upset. They had been very dissatisfied over a number of years with the problems of Haiti. They had been very dissatisfied with the career appointees to Haiti. They had

concluded that they wanted Kimelman, and although not black, he was from the Caribbean, had been the Commissioner of Commerce, had lived in the West Indies for 40 years, had been the Director of an airline, a bank, and knew the area. They were convinced that I, with my Caribbean background, was the man for Haiti at that time. Months passed and I kept calling the Department. "What's happening with my appointment? It started in late '79." "You're from the Virgin Islands. We're having problems with the FBI clearances. They're busy with others and you're far away on an island. They haven't the time to get there." I'm convinced that it was a delaying tactic by the career people who decided that they wanted me in Haiti and not Luxembourg. And after about six months, I called Ben Reed. He said, "Henry, why don't you call Hamilton Jordan. Do you know Hamilton?" I had met him, but did not know him well. Ben said, "Why don't you call Hamilton and tell him that you're having a problem with your appointment and that you really want to go to Haiti, and to see what he could do. I believe that your clearances would move at a much faster pace." He didn't say it in so many words but the inclination was abundantly clear. I called Hamilton Jordan, we chatted briefly. He put me on to Tim Kraft, who was his assistant whom I knew somewhat better. Tim said, "I'll see what I can do, Henry." About three or four days later I got called and was told that my appointment had been changed to Haiti from Luxembourg. Two weeks later all my clearances were completed. And that was how I got to Haiti.

Q: Did you have any problems with confirmation?

KIMELMAN: That's an interesting question. My confirmation took five minutes. And this is interesting for your Oral History Program. It shows you the play of politics in government. Frank Church was out of town campaigning. He was, early in 1980, up for reelection as was Senator McGovern. Frank was Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, George was Chairman of a Subcommittee. He chaired my confirmation hearings. Jesse Helms was holding up all career and non-career State Department appointments. I appeared, not knowing what problems I would encounter. I made a brief opening statement. George McGovern, who had by now become a close personal friend, knew quite a number of people in the audience. He went on extolling my virtues and said that Henry only has one major problem. Everybody looked up. He has a penchant for backing political losers in campaigns. He said, aside from that, I think he'll be a great Ambassador to Haiti. And everybody laughed. At that point Jesse Helms, just visualize this, probably one of the most liberal Senators and certainly the most conservative at the time, a man I had never met, began to extol my virtues, telling the audience that he thought I was a perfect choice for Haiti and that I was very experienced, background in government, etc. I had the perfect wife for the job, I forget his exact words, but this was coming from a man I had never met. There was not a voice of contrary opinion. Tom Foley happened to be in the audience because, I forget the man's name who was up for confirmation as Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs and had some problem. He has been Ambassador to Columbia and Tom came to oppose his confirmation.

Q: Diego Asencio.

KIMELMAN: That's his name. To testify against him. Apparently some woman from the state of Washington's son had been kidnapped and he had not given the mother the kind of comfort and security she had wanted when she was in Columbia. Tom saw that I was up for confirmation. He was on the House Interior Committee. I had known Tom for years. He arose to say that Henry's a fine fellow and would make a great Ambassador. I was confirmed unanimously. It took no more than ten minutes. As we walked down the Senate corridor afterwards, Jesse Helms congratulated both of us. We were walking along the corridor, behind the confirmations hearing room, Jesse Helms turned to my wife and said, "You're going to be a great Ambassador's wife, and your husband's going to be a great Ambassador." We thanked him. I have not seen Jesse Helms since. I looked at George, and he said, "Well, I guess I owe Jesse one."

Q: The situation in Haiti, in the first place did you go with either from the State Department or in your own mind, what you wanted to accomplish and what was the situation in Haiti at the time?

KIMELMAN: Haiti under Duvalier.

Q: This was Papa Doc Senior.

KIMELMAN: No, this was Baby Doc. Jean Claude who had been president for about nine years. Part of the problem in terms of our government's relationship with Haiti, was that Jean Claude became president, designated by his father on his death, at the age of 19. He had had nine meetings in nine years as President with three predecessor Ambassadors. An average of one a year. This is not to level criticism at my predecessors. Jean Claude was and is, in my opinion, one of the shyest and most introverted men I've ever met. Obese, quite obese, probably weighing in excess of over 250 pounds. And he was thought to be dull. All of this came through in the memoranda of conversations that the Ambassadors reported back to the State Department. All of which I read and digested carefully. Starting out with almost, to put it simply and not to be critical, this 19 year-old President seeming impolite. The Ambassador said in not so many words, you be a good boy and "Uncle Daddy" will look after you. It was that type of relationship. Things came through in all the memcoms, he was considered rude, for example. He would never arise to greet the Ambassador when he came into his office. He would always sit behind his desk. Well, having read that, I decided that I wanted my first meeting with him not to be in the presidential palace under those auspices. By a stroke of good fortune, I had met his personal assistant a week after my arrival. It was at a dinner that my staff did not want me to attend. It was held for a group of Miami businessmen and the Haitian American Chamber of Commerce. I had not yet presented my credentials. I felt I should attend, Haiti problems were mostly economic. Here was a group of Haitian and American businessmen. But I would attend unofficially, and not to be on a dais and not to be called upon. I did attend, and they did seat me on the dais despite their agreement not to. Seated on my right was a young man who was a school chum of President Duvalier. He had been his private secretary all the nine years of his presidency. It was through him that I developed a relationship with Duvalier. He had an interest in art. I had asked Yankel Ginsburg, an Israeli artist whose home we're sitting in

now, to help with the art at the Embassy program. There was no art on the walls. Yankel and my wife were waiting for me. He heard about that and the next day we went on a tour of galleries, it was Saturday morning. And I asked this young Ambassador-at-Large, private secretary, Claude Augusten Douton, to arrange my first meeting with the President after I presented my credentials at the Villa D'Acceuil which was the government guest house and was contiguous to the U.S. Embassy, in an informal setting and I wanted Duvalier's wife present and my wife. Douton arranged it. He was suppose to attend the meeting to act as interpreter if we needed one. I would not bring an interpreter. So it would be an informal first meeting. About two days before the meeting Ambassador Douton called and said that he had to go to France for some reason for the President. And he could not attend. Did I want to bring along an interpreter? I said no, he speaks English, I speak enough French, I think, perhaps to get by so we will understand each other. I think it'd be best if we just met, the four of us, and we did. None, none of his meetings had ever lasted beyond 35 or 40 minutes with my predecessors.

We arrived at the Villa d'Acceuil, Duvalier and his wife were waiting for us. We had a rum punch. He talked about the Virgin Islands. He wanted to know about my family, background, business, a lot of it. It was sort of a very warm and cozy informal chat which lasted about 45 minutes. Prior to this meeting I had called in the Country Team to solicit their advice as to what they thought I should take up and to how I should conduct this meeting with him. I give full credit to my DCM, my Deputy Chief of Mission, Alf Bergeson. A wonderful man. Al said, "Henry, why don't you try, saying to him at some point, Mr. President, what do you think our country can do for you? How can we help you?" He said, "I don't think young Duvalier has ever heard that from an American Ambassador." After 45 minutes engaged in the business end of our meeting, I leaned back and recalling Alf's suggestion, said that to the President. He was seemingly elated. His face lit up. And he went into telling me some of the problems he had with my predecessor, Ambassador Jones. Do you know him? Jones is a black man. I believe it's wrong to appoint a black Ambassador to a black republic. They feel that it's tokenism. For some reason, he disliked Jones who was a very capable man. He had been there for three years, but Duvalier's complaint was that he associated only with a few very rich families who were sending their money off the island--the Haitian elite, etc. And he and his wife kept interrupting, bubbling over with all the problems of what they felt Uncle Sam had done wrong, and what they felt we could do, etc. It literally went on for 15 minutes without my being able to say a word. But it further eased the atmosphere.

Unfortunately, a day before my meeting an American of Cuban descent who was working for an American telephone company, had been arrested entering Cape Haitian. We had received reports that he had been beaten in jail. I was instructed by the Department to demarche the President on this issue. I recall being upset that this had to happen the day before my first meeting. And here I had to come with something I would have preferred not to have happened certainly before our first meeting. Our meeting had lasted an hour and a half, twice as long as he had met with any other Ambassador. We had come to a point where I thought I should wrap this up. And I saved the best or the worst, depending on how you want to look at it, for last. I said, "Mr. President I have this obligation to inform you

about this incident that happened at Cape Haitian. And he looked at me after I explained and said, "Mr. Ambassador, do you think I ordered that? Do you think I knew about it?" Well, I'm sure he must have known about it. He said, "You know, I've just had a satellite installed on the palace, and I now bring in TV from the states. I was watching a program from Texas the other night." I don't know if he invented this or it actually happened. He said, "It showed a scene of three white jailers beating up a black man in a jail in Houston." "Do I think that the Governor of the state of Texas ordered that beating? Do I believe that the President of the United States knew about or ordered that beating?" He continued, "It happens in your country. If you tell me it happened, I accept your word that it happened. You know, I pay my jailers $100.00 a month. That does not attract educated people to those positions." And then he hit me with what I thought was kind of a low blow. "You know besides which my people were trained by your marines when they occupied the country." Our occupation ended in 1934. Fifty-six years had passed. Touche, I thought.

When I wrote my memcon of that meeting, I was the first Ambassador who reported to the Department that we were not dealing with somebody with a low IQ, or who was semi-retarded. He may not be the smartest man in the world, but he sure isn't dumb. And the way he handled that incident; he finessed me beautifully and diplomatically. Our first meeting established a relationship for the period I was in Haiti. I met with him an average of once a month. We had a huge problem with refugees at the time. My meetings with him were always, except for one meeting, at the Villa d'Acceuil.

On one occasion, the Ambassador in Charge of the Refugee Program and a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, visited Haiti for a full-blown meeting on the refugee problem. The meeting was held at the President's official palace. I had never been in that office. It was an office approximately 25 feet long by 14 feet wide. We approached through the far end of the room. His desk was in front of a window and he sat behind a large formidable looking desk. He wore a safari suit. There were four chairs lined up side by side facing the President for the three of us and the interpreter. As we approached, I said, "Bonjour, Monsieur President." He shyly acknowledged our presence. I walked up to the ornate desk, leaned across and greeted him by shaking his hand, while he remained seated in his chair. I'd read my predecessor's memcons of other meetings. He had never, my predecessors said, gotten out of his chair to greet them. As I shook his hand, apparently and subconsciously, I did not let it go. And as I pulled away slowly, I pulled him up. He arose from his chair, looked stunned and then a big smile came on his face. He then walked around from behind the desk, greeted us warmly and shook hands with the Assistant Secretary and the other Ambassador.

I remember telling this story after our meeting. I said it wasn't anything conscious. I believe what had happened previously was that this man was just so painfully shy and so introverted that it was against his nature. It was not an insult to my predecessor Ambassadors. And when I subconsciously pulled him out of his chair, he was fine.

Q: Tell me, what were our major issues with Haiti while you were there.

KIMELMAN: Our AID program was of course a major issue. Our desire to democratize Haiti. But it's interesting as a liberal democrat appointed by Carter, the policies that we moved towards establishing while I was there, and I was only there a short time, we came to the realization that Duvalier was the best for Haiti at that particular time. I also came to the realization, and my staff agreed with me, that if something were to happen to Duvalier or if he were to move to democratize too fast, there would have been a military takeover of the government, a coup. We would have had a more repressive government. I also learned, not only because I was there, and not for any special talent that I have, that a country that has a 90% to 95% illiteracy rate with a population of six million, cannot have democracy imposed. Our government's best interest was served by moving Haiti slowly toward democratization. And not taking the chance of moving too fast even if we could have moved faster. I'm not sure we should have. I believed it was not the right approach. And if a military took over, we'd have a much more repressive government in Haiti. I was able to sell that policy to the Department. I received a cable on January 22, 1981, two days after Reagan's inauguration. Haig had been designated Secretary of State but had not been confirmed. David Newsom, who was the number three man in the Department, was Acting Secretary of State.

Q: He was Under Secretary for Political Affairs.

KIMELMAN: Political Affairs, and acting Secretary. The cable was from Newsom adopting all the policy goals and objectives that we had sent up. We had been working on them for a couple of months. Keep up the good work, looking forward to working with you in the future, etc. Bergeson told me he had never seen a cable like that from the Secretary in his 37 years in the Foreign Service. Seven days later I received a cable from Haig telling me that my services were no longer needed. So here I was, a democratic appointee, recommending and adopting a policy for Haiti. That was probably what the Reagan administration would have done or maybe to the right of Reagan administration policy. About two months after I had left, sometime in March or April, the Department sent Vernon Walters to Haiti. Alf Bergeson was Chargé. Alf called me after the meeting. He said, "I want you to know Mr. Ambassador (we had developed a warm and friendly relationship) that General Walters has sent back a cable to the Department saying that he had completed his study and that all the policies and goals and objectives that had been established by the previous Ambassador should be kept in force." I felt pretty good about that as did Alf. And he had played a major role.

Now an interesting part of my termination was that the career people, and I say this not as Henry Kimelman but as Henry Kimelman who was a West Indian, who had lived in the West Indies for 30 years at that time, had been known in the West Indies, had prior government experience and business experience, was known to the Haitian business community. Was an appointment that was very happily accepted by Duvalier and the business community in Haiti. I suppose primarily because some of the businessmen who knew me, and who were close to Duvalier, told him I was a logical and a good appointee. As you know, normally the career people in the Department are not happy with non-career

appointees. I don't know whether I should say this, I'm certain they're not too happy with non-career appointees who are Jewish.

Q: I'm not sure.

KIMELMAN: Let me finish. That would be a second strike. And particularly if they were non-career, Jewish and had been born in New York, then a third strike. The career people wanted me in Haiti and I had the total support of the Department. I think I would not have had it if I had been posted to Denmark, which I would have liked because I had a lot of business contacts in Denmark. Same thing if I had gone to Luxembourg. It would have been considered just another political hack who had been a Finance Chairman, had been paid off. But the career people wanted me in Haiti. They were happy with me there. And I am told that Bill Bowdler who was Assistant Secretary of State and John Bushnell who was his Deputy and worked on Haitian affairs, went to Haig and got Haig to go to the White House with a special appeal to keep me on. Now I understood that I was political, and I understood the administration wanting to make a change. But I believe the Reagan administration made changes that were not in our country's best interests. Carter had the least amount of non-career Ambassadors. There were 29, if memory serves me right, serving at the time of Reagan's election. I am told by the career people at the Department that 28 of the 29 received cables on the 28th of January, (the only exception was Mike Mansfield who stayed on in Japan), telling them to wind up their affairs.

Q: Well I think, particularly in ARA which is American Republics, the changeover was bloody. I mean they almost bloodied the corridors. And the other ones, Near Eastern Affairs it was sort of the normal thing. But you almost had the ideologues of the extreme right, Jesse Helms people to a certain extent, took over ARA when it was particularly well-known among the Foreign Service. This was really a nasty.

KIMELMAN: Well I'll tell you where I think the mistake was made, Mr. Kennedy. We had a threatened takeover, it didn't amount to anything, but our intelligence indicated a threatened takeover of the Embassy on January 15th, a week before the inauguration. The Iran hostages were still in custody. Haiti was one of five countries on the critical countries list at that time. I understand replacing an Ambassador, and particularly somebody who was as political as I, who was identified with democratic candidates. But I believe when a new administration assumes power it should be done in the best interest of our government. I believe I could have served and helped Haiti. And I think we would have a better position in Haiti today if I had stayed on. But I think an ambassador, particularly in a country like Haiti, should at least be asked to stay on until a successor is in place. A Third World country doesn't like having a Chargé. The Liberian Ambassador in Haiti was a two-man Embassy, the Ambassador and his chauffeur. The United States had 200 people in Haiti, between State Department staff and the 120 in our AID mission. The most important Embassy by far in Haiti. When you have a Chargé he is in the protocol ranking below all other Ambassadors in the host country. The Liberian Ambassador and his driver outranked the American Chargé. Protocol and face is important to most Third World countries.

Q: It's important also to the operation.

KIMELMAN: It is important to the proper operation. What happened was that when I received my orders, I had two weeks, which took me to February 10 or 11. I did not receive orders by 12th, 13th, 14th. On February 15 I telephoned the Department. They were trying to delay it. I didn't know at the time, they had gotten Haig to go to the White House with a special appeal to keep me on, at least for some period of time. I didn't know Secretary Haig, but apparently he did it on the advice of Bowdler and John Bushnell. About the 15th or the 16th I was getting a bit nervous. My godson was being married in New York on February 22, and I was going to fly to New York for the Washington's birthday weekend to be at my godson's wedding, not knowing that plans were made to replace me. I thought there's no point flying to New York City and returning to Haiti only to leave permanently two days later. I finally called the Department on the 19th of February and said, "I can afford to pay my own transportation. If you don't send me travel orders, I'm leaving anyway on February 21. You told me I'm terminated in two weeks, it's now almost four weeks." I finally received orders.

I left on February 21 after my formal diplomatic farewells. On February 22 or 21 I was debriefed by the new Under Secretary of Political Affairs, Walter Stoessel, who had been Ambassador to Germany. While he was Ambassador to Germany, in the protocol ranking by terms of arrival, he sat next to the Haitian Ambassador, Francisque. While I was in Haiti he had been appointed by Duvalier to be Foreign Minister. We had little intelligence on Monsieur Francisque. I called Ambassador Walter Stoessel in Bonn whom I did not know. We had three or four telephone conversations. We got to know each other. Apparently he was interested in Haiti having known Francisque. And so when I came for my debriefing, he greeted me warmly, "I don't know what you're doing here, Mr. Ambassador. We need you back in Haiti. Would you return for four or five months, or until we can get another Ambassador in place?" I said, "Well, unfortunately, I can't. I've accepted a partnership in a Wall Street Investment Banking firm. I sold my company before leaving for Haiti." I was beginning on April 1st. He said, "Well, think it over, see what you can do." And they kept me on the payroll. Finally on March 29th, I came to Washington, visited the Department, and said, "Look, my resignation was effective February 21." I would have felt foolish returning, but if they had asked me before I left to remain temporarily for convenience of the government, would you at least stay on until we can get an Ambassador appointed and confirmed, I would have done so. I think it was a mistake.

Q: Well it is. Tell me, back at the time that you were there. Did you say you were essentially, after examining the scene and all felt that we could not try to move things too rapidly in Haiti? I might add for the record, we're talking about things right now where there's a blockade around Haiti. I mean it's a very nasty situation. So Haiti has not gone away. Haiti has been with us for a long time as one of the major foreign affairs problems of 1993. But, did you tangle with the Human Rights bureau, Pat Derian. Because they were pushing very hard for things which were of a major motif of the Carter administration.

KIMELMAN: You know that's interesting. I knew Pat, not well, but I was able to convince Pat, I think, because she never set any road blocks for me. I had, I guess an official meeting and one or two conversations with Pat - that we would try to move in the right direction. I honestly believe, and I'm not trying to make a saint out of young Duvalier, that he was far from being his father. As a matter of fact, I'm convinced that he was traumatized by the violence of his father. Because going back to that incident when I mentioned the beating up of one of our American citizens of Cuban descent, I noticed a sort of frightened expression on his face. A look on his face that said to me, maybe only my interpretation, I may be wrong, that this man abhors violence. And I reached the conclusion from that and a few other incidents that he had been traumatized by the violence of his father. I think Duvalier's principal problem, and that was responsible for his downfall, were the excesses of his wife. I believed I had convinced him, in a vague manner, that our government would not look to the past at his Swiss bank accounts accumulated by his father, perhaps some under his regime. This was the time for him to do something for the people of Haiti. And interestingly enough, our intelligence showed at the time that if there had been a free and open election, monitored by the international community, that Duvalier would have received between 80 and 85% of the vote. We were convinced of that. So I was trying to convince him to give up the title of the President-for-life and hold free elections. You know it was a short period of time, but we were moving slowly in what I and the administration felt was in the right direction. And it's sad because I think we could have avoided being faced with the problems we have today.

Q: Before we come to this after Haiti business. One last question I'd like to ask you about while you were in Haiti. The problem of Haitian refugees has been with us for a long time, what was the situation when you were there, what was our policy and how were things developing?

KIMELMAN: It's pretty hard to explain because our policy was in flux then as it is now.

Q: But we're talking about the time you were there.

KIMELMAN: Yes, I'm talking about it. It's the large question of whether Haitian boat people were political refugees or economic refugees. And nobody could get a handle on it. While feeling empathy for the boat people, I believe the vast majority were economic refugees under our definition of our laws. This, of course, was a big political problem because the members of the black caucus of the Congress were constantly on the back of the administration, saying that you're treating the Haitian people differently from the way you're treating the Cuban people. And for only one reason. Because they are black. This was a political problem. There were many Haitians seeking refugee status at that time. Many Haitians were leaving on boats, becoming refugees. It was a tragic situation because many were drowning at sea. The conditions under which they traveled were beyond comprehension. Sometimes 40, 50, 60 people and more on a 30-foot craft that was put together with spit and polish. And so we had, as I said in an earlier part of this interview, one meeting with our Ambassador for Refugees, the Deputy Assistant Secretary and myself, with Duvalier to see how we could jointly deal with this problem. The American

viewpoint hoping that we could get the Haitians to help us to stop them from leaving Haiti and how to best do this. So that it doesn't become a problem from the U.S. viewpoint. And that was what we tried to do. Cut them off at the source. The Duvalier government indicated support for our position, but in my opinion, did nothing to stop their people from leaving. That was the position in February 1981 when I left.

Q: Were you sending out officers to keep monitoring what happened to people when they returned, or did that come later?

KIMELMAN: I don't know whether you notice that I'm smiling. It has to do with our American bureaucracy. I remember arriving at my office one morning, about 6:30 before most of the people arrived and I found all the air conditioning units on in the Chancery. I asked to see our electric bill. It was approximately $7,000 per month. Being a businessman who met a payroll each Friday, this bothered me. I established a policy of turning off the air conditioning at night. We cut the air conditioning bill almost in half and saved the government about $40,000 a year. We were also receiving I don't know how many copies of the New York Times and Miami Herald. The DCM had one copy of each and I received one. I said, why can't we share one each day. There were three papers flown in daily, the Time, the Miami Herald and the Wall Street Journal. I said, let's get one for the two of us and cut in half our orders for the other departments. We probably saved a few thousand dollars a year on newspapers. I bring that up because in answer to your question, we had a report on some problems with some returning boat people in Cape Haitien. I called in my political officer and I said I wanted to send somebody to Cape Haitien to look into this matter. He said we had no money in our transportation budget to send an officer to Cape Haitien. What is it going to cost? We're talking about $50.00, $100.00? Yes, but the budget's used up for the year. I said, it doesn't matter, can't we take some money out of savings on newspapers? Or out of money I saved in the electric bill? Well no, you can't do that. Somehow he solved the problem, I forget how he did it. But I remember reading recently that it's been recommended that we give Ambassadors a blanket budget. I read this somewhere in the last month or two. Hopefully there's been some progress.

Q: It's one of those efforts to try to make it make sense.

KIMELMAN: Well you know, it just doesn't make sense. Here was an important problem, and we didn't have $50.00 or $100.00 to send an officer to Cape Haitien to check on this report about some returning refugees being mistreated.
Q: What were they finding?

KIMELMAN: As I recall, we never found any evidence of any serious maltreatment. Some minor things but nothing ever severe, never under threat of life, or serious harm.

Q: I wonder if you could tell me, because we talked about your experiences afterwards with Duvalier and Haiti.

KIMELMAN: Well, as I explained earlier and I'll try to be brief. We had felt and I felt that Duvalier was the best we had. Sometimes you make do with the best if you can't get better. And we'd have more repressive regimes if something happened to Duvalier. Well, as the years passed, I maintained some contact with the government. I revisited Haiti. I brought a group of business people. The President gave us a reception. In 1986 when things became unbearable in terms of Duvalier's leadership, there was a move to oust Duvalier from power, and it looked like it was about to succeed. I received a call from Ambassador Douton, his private secretary. Ambassador Cineas, who at the time was the Ambassador in Washington. They wanted to meet with me. We met in Miami and as briefly as possible I explained to them that I didn't think I could help at this time because I was a Democrat and the Reagan administration was highly political. There were two things that I knew were anathema to the American people and to the American government. That was Duvalier's carrying the title of "President for Life" and the fact that there were no open and free elections in Haiti. And that if Duvalier would agree to doing something about both perhaps something could be done. Perhaps the administration would listen. In any event, they telephoned him. I spoke to Duvalier. He agreed to give up the title "President for Life" if the American government would help him to retain power and also agreed to free elections. He wanted to negotiate, but insisted that I be part of the U.S. negotiating team. I agreed. I placed a call from this safe house through the White House switchboard to Senator Pell. It was a Saturday afternoon. Pell was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I told Claiborne what had transpired. I informed him that I did not initiate these conversations. I suggested that he call Secretary Shultz. I thought a solution could be reached that could be in our government's interest. I certainly thought it should be explored, at the very least. I left for Palm Beach. On my arrival I received a call from Assistant Secretary Abrams. I explained all that had transpired. I told him I was not looking for glory or a job, and that my name could be kept out of it, but that I would be pleased to be of assistance. Duvalier insisted that I be part of the U.S. negotiating team. He would not meet with U.S. officials if I was not present. I suggested that I thought it was in our government's interest to explore the possibilities. And that I would be pleased to fly to Haiti with him or anyone he designated, the following day if necessary, to see what could be done. State mulled the possibility for a few days, and decided not to do anything. In my opinion, the decision was made on the basis of the fact that I was a Democrat appointee, much as I dislike saying that. I believe that if I had been an earlier Republican appointee say in the Nixon administration, they would have at least explored the possibility that had been opened. They did not. Duvalier left Haiti under American auspices in a jet that our government provided. I assisted in the planning. And Haiti has had three military regimes since, each one more repressive if possible than the Duvalier regime.

End of interview