Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

# AMBASSADOR SAMUEL CLIFFORD ADAMS, JR.

*Interviewed by: William J. Cunningham*
*Initial interview date: February 2, 2000*
*Copyright 2000 ADST*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background
  Born and raised in Houston, Texas
  Growing up
  Fish University
  University of Houston
  Plantation Society
  Mr. Cleveland
  Henry Ford

Norfolk Navy Yard – World War II

Saigon, Vietnam – U.S. Mission to Indochina 1952-1955
  “Adoption” by Vietnamese
  French in Hanoi
  Travels in area

Phnom Penh, Cambodia – International Cooperation Administration
 Education Office – Chief 1955-1957
  Angkor Wat
  U.S. policy
  King of Cambodia decoration

London, England – University of London 1957-1958
  Southeast Asia and African language studies

Lagos, Nigeria – AID – Chief Education Advisor 1958-1960

Bamako, Mali 1961-1963
  British
  Travels in area
  Nigeria

Rabat, Morocco – AID – Director 1965-1967

    Training of farmers
    Green Revolution
    Military

USUN – General Assembly 1967-1968

Niger – Ambassador 1968-1969
    Johnson Civil Rights Programs

State Department – AID - Africa Bureau – Director 1969-1975
    Sahel drought

Distinguished Honor Award 1972

Retirement 1975
    Houston Committee on Foreign Affairs
    Recollections
    Records accumulated
    Marguerite Johnson

## INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview has not been edited by Ambassador Adams]

*Q: Let me identify also the interviewer. I am William J. Cunningham, retired United States Foreign Service officer, now associate professor emeritus at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas. Mr. Ambassador, thank you for allowing me to interview you for the Foreign Service Oral History Project today.*

ADAMS: I am humbled that I have this opportunity.

*Q: We are grateful for your cooperation. I've studied your papers this morning. I've learned a little more about your personal history, which I was familiar with to some extent previously from the interviews that you gave to Marguerite Johnston of* The Houston Post.

ADAMS: She's a remarkable woman.

*Q: If I may say so, your story is a very important one for the history of the United States Foreign Service in the third quarter of the twentieth century. I know from studying your papers that, in many stages of your life, it was for you a personal ordeal to continue and to forge ahead.*

ADAMS: You can see also from those *Front Lines* papers that there was a recognition on the part of colleagues, friends, and others in the Foreign Service that there was something about my experience, which was a part of the heritage that the Foreign Service should be about.

*Q: Yes. There was. We are all glad for that recognition to come about. The story of how you achieved that recognition is important as a lesson for the Foreign Service as a whole as to how to improve itself and become more like America and as an inspiration to those who will follow in your path and try to give it that quality and character. That's my personal opinion.*

ADAMS: I am humbled that I have this opportunity.

*Q: The way I'd like to begin is to ask you about your life before the Foreign Service and what it was about your experiences, growing up in Texas, that made you curious about the rest of the world. In your boyhood and your early education, what was it that gave you the desire to, as you might say, get beyond the confines of life and society as you knew it in Texas at that time?*

ADAMS: Well, you see that sofa there?

*Q: Yes, Sir.*

ADAMS: That's what I slept on during all of my youth. The thing that is most characteristic about it was, regardless of what happened through the course of the day, on that sofa I saw China every night, even though I knew nothing about what Red China was.

*Q: Really.*

ADAMS: There was not a single night that China was not a part of my mind. I was fighting myself, and most of the things that were imaginary occurred there and focused in on China. What had been my day like before those nights? It was a world in which the family almost across the street from me were owners of mules. The thing that is really interesting was that the man who owned the mules, whose family it was, would pass by the side of the house in which we lived, and that became the pathway for what later became the path going out to Allen Parkway.

*Q: Ah, ha. All right, now, this is in Houston in what's now called the Fourth Ward.*

ADAMS: Yes, that's right.

*Q: And so the path going out to River Oaks is what we now call Allen Parkway.*

ADAMS: Yes, because none of that existed then. Also, as a boy, that had been a barrier mainly to keep Negroes in. The thing about it was that the only way that I knew anything about it was watching this man and his mules go through. They cut paths, which were later to be roadways and things of that sort, like Allen Parkway. When it rained and flooded, the waters would come up into the Fourth Ward. The thing that was the most important element about my growing up years was the experience of growing up amongst people whose talk, for the most part, was about what had been [the slavery] period. They talked about life in the Brazos bottoms, different parts of plantations, and things of that sort.

The other side of it was the man who my father in his later years worked for. He was a very remarkable person. When I got ready to go off to college, my parents didn't have enough money to help me buy a suit of my own, so there were Mr. Cleveland's clothes that had been cut over so I'd have a suit to wear to go off to Fisk. It was that kind of world.

*Q: Now, who was Mr. Cleveland?*

ADAMS: He was with the First International Bank.

*Q: Was he the president of the bank?*

ADAMS: I think he and his family owned it or something. They were very, very important. It was a relationship whereby he was the linkage with civilization for me in one way.

*Q: This was a transition period. Where you lived was called Freedman's Town and the historic area in Houston for people who had been freed at the time of the Emancipation settled.*

ADAMS: That was the only place they could go.

*Q: That was the only place they could go, yes.*

ADAMS: That was the kind of world it was.

*Q: That's right.*

ADAMS: The world that I knew most was two blocks long.

*Q: That was said to have been a thriving district at that time.*

ADAMS: No, it wasn't.

*Q: No? Not in those days. All right.*
ADAMS: It was nothing but a pile of mud.

*Q: What did the people who worked and lived there for the most part do?*

ADAMS: They were trying to get jobs any and every place.

*Q: Do you mean as ordinary day laborers?*

ADAMS: Yes. I only knew one person who was sophisticated enough to even be driving a truck.

*Q: Is that so?*

ADAMS: I knew one Negro truck driver.

*Q: I believe your mother was a school teacher.*

ADAMS: Yes. Even that was a story in itself. The thing about it was that all of her experiences had been ones where, in our own world, her father was white. But, in so far as Houston was concerned, he didn't exist.

*Q: I see. So she was automatically black.*

ADAMS: Yes. The odd thing about it was the peculiar relationships that emerged. I could never understand why my grandmother would say that she'd rather see her daughter dead than married to a black person.

*Q: Really.*

ADAMS: I couldn't understand what all that was about.

*Q: Did you have brothers or sisters?*

ADAMS: I had two sisters. One of them died just recently.

*Q: I see. Were they younger than you?*

ADAMS: They were younger. The thing about it, their worlds unfolded as different things began to happen to me.

*Q: I see. So, in other words, you were the pathfinder for your siblings.*

ADAMS: Yes, I was. The most remarkable thing about Mr. Cleveland, as I say, was that he provided the clothes that I wore, the suit that I had on, and the ties. My parents couldn't afford to buy me socks but the socks that I had were really the stockings left over from my mother and things like that. Anyway, that was the kind of world it was. The thing that was the most remarkable as a transition element was that everybody, even the Negroes around, thought that my parents were crazy in trying to have me go to Fisk because the kind of folks that went to Fisk weren't the category of folks that we were.

*Q: They didn't come from your surroundings and your district.*

ADAMS: The thing about it was that, in going to Fisk, the most remarkable thing happened. I came to know Robert E. Park. What it amounted to was, I was going up the stairs to the outside entrance to a building, which was a social science building at Fisk at that time. Somehow, we got to talking. I began to tell him about what my life experience had been. The thing that was really interesting was [that] he made me curious rather than just being depressed.

*Q: Oh, really? May I ask a few questions first of all? What inspired you to think about Fisk? Who was instrumental or what experience was instrumental in directing your interest toward going to Fisk and getting university experience?*

ADAMS: It was probably pretty much the teachers in my school. Also, Fisk was like the Harvard for the Negro world at that particular time.

*Q: I know.*

ADAMS: In some way, I got a scholarship because I graduated from high school high up [academically]. But, we had no money for me to go anywhere. Everybody around said I should have gone to Bishop or one of the other black colleges close by. Anyhow I met this man.

*Q: Was Park Negro, or was he white?*

ADAMS: He was the father of American sociology.

*Q: He was the father of American sociology. So he was a white professor on the faculty at Fisk?*

ADAMS: No, no. What he had done was, he was a person who had been with Booker T. Washington and helped him come discover what Tuskeegee was about. He was the one also who did a whole range of things. He was the father of American sociology at the University of Chicago. He had retired.

*Q: Did he retire from the University of Chicago?*

ADAMS: Oh, yes, but he was down there [at Fisk] as a part of nurturing students [like] Charles Johnson, who had been one of his students.

*Q: I see. Charles Johnson was president of Fisk at the time?*

ADAMS: Yes, and the thing that was really interesting was that I was telling Park something about my experience. All this was out there on the steps of this building. Somehow, he got me to be curious and wanted me to share with my mother and father what he knew about plantation worlds.

*Q: So Park was a student of the plantation worlds with Booker T. Washington, and he wanted to pursue this interest?*

ADAMS: No, all he was doing was to just be helpful to a young black boy who seemed lost.

*Q: Well, it's natural enough. Any young boy going that far away to college would seem lost.*

ADAMS: The thing that was really interesting was that he got me to share my mother's letters with him. Then, he would help me to help her to understand what the world of plantations was really about.

*Q: I see.*

ADAMS: She'd grown up there.

*Q: Your mother was a part of plantation society?*

ADAMS: Yes, she was.
*Q: Was your father a part of plantation society, also?*

ADAMS: Yes, he was.

*Q: Now when we talk about plantation society, this is after emancipation.*

ADAMS: Oh, yes.

*Q: Did the social structure of the plantation society continue beyond that time?*

ADAMS: Yes. For example, as I told you, I didn't know but one person who drove a car. I didn't know but one Negro who drove a truck. The other one I knew was the man who was the mule driver, you know, like that.

*Q: So when you were at Fisk and you met Park, he inspired you.*

ADAMS: No, he was just asking me to share with him letters from my mother. I would, in turn, take what he had told me and transmit it to her as one way of helping her to be able to understand and be able to make a transition. Do you follow?

*Q: Yes. I follow. So Park was awakening you to contrasts.*

ADAMS: Yes, and he included the whole family. The other kind of thing was really interesting. For example, while [I was] going to Fisk, if people there at Fisk were not treating me right or something like that, Mr. Cleveland would think nothing of getting on a plane and coming to Nashville with the idea that he'd tell those folks.

*Q: Really!*

ADAMS: Oh, yes.

*Q: He was very interested in you.*

ADAMS: He was interested in me. What I knew of Christmas, I learned at the Cleveland's house.

*Q: I see.*

ADAMS: We'd go out there. They'd take us out there.

*Q: Where did they live?*

ADAMS: They lived in the most exclusive area of River Oaks.

*Q: Oh, really, in River Oaks?*

ADAMS: Yes. He was the owner of the First International Bank.

*Q: Okay, all right.*

ADAMS: I'm saying that the Christmas we got to enjoy was whatever he and his wife wanted to give us. If they wanted us to have it, we got it.

*Q: Really.*

ADAMS: Also, too, he was the first person who let my father drive a car. The thing also which is really interesting was that the experience with Park, not only linked me to the traditional plantation worlds in the South but also I got to know about China. I got to know about Africa. I got to know about all those kinds of things through him, and he exposed me to reading, reading, reading. I went to Fisk with the idea that I was going to be a musician.

*Q: Oh, really? Did you play a musical instrument?*

ADAMS: I played the piano. I was going to be [involved] in my music. The thing which was really interesting was that with Park I began to have this curiosity about all these different worlds, and I decided to change from the world of music to having a curiosity about all these things. One of the things which was dramatic in all of this was that he had me concentrate on going down to the Mississippi Delta. I can't remember the man's name now but he was collecting remnants of the changing rural South. I was sent down there to record and to copy down things about this changing world.

*Q: Were you collecting personal accounts of people living there?*

ADAMS: Yes, and this was the world where the blues began.

*Q: Now, let me ask you about music. Did you play classical, popular, jazz, or blues?*

ADAMS: I played everything. The thing which is really interesting is that, under the influence of Park, I decided to drop music. All of this occurred when I had been sent down there to collect some of these songs and stuff like that. There were old people who would be informants in passing on their history. Park asked me what had I seen and what did it mean. I said, "There's a lot of old folks." The thing which is really interesting was that he told me that I'd better go back down there.

*Q: Oh, really? You hadn't seen what he wanted you to see?*

ADAMS: No, and he told me to stay until I learned how those worlds talked to me. In going back down there, I changed from a music major to having an interest in sociology. A thing which was really interesting was that I recorded all the transitional things of the Mississippi Delta in its transition from a traditional plantation area to its becoming mechanized and all of those kind of things.

*Q: Let me ask you a couple of questions, if I may. First of all, in order for you to do what Park wanted you to do, that is to say, to reflect upon the world of your parents' plantation life and to some extent reflect upon your own life, you had to control your emotions and your passions.*

ADAMS: Yes, but also I was in a world of giants. Park was a giant. The most outstanding Negro scholar, Charles S. Johnson, was president of Fisk. Through Park, I got exposed to an even closer relationship with Johnson.

*Q: Yes, but you were learning even more about the comparison or the contrast between the white world and the Negro world.*

ADAMS: In making this transition from music to the social world, I didn't have enough money to stay in school. So, I sat down and I wrote about 30 letters to important people around the United States. It was crazy, wasn't it?

*Q: Well, it's imaginative. It was what they call creative now.*

ADAMS: Just think what happened though. One of the persons I wrote to was Henry Ford of the Ford Motor Company. The thing was that Ford wrote back and told me he'd give me a chance and to come to him any time I wanted to.

*Q: He told you to come to Detroit?*

ADAMS: Yes, and this was in the midst of the Depression.

*Q: Yes, this was the 1930s that we're talking about.*

ADAMS: The thing that I can never forget is going up there and standing in line and everybody thought I was crazy. But I had experience with Ford because he took a personal interest, and I learned all the things about the most important technology things that were a part of making a car. I operated drills and all kinds of technological things.

*Q: You became a machinist?*

ADAMS: Yes, but not just an ordinary machinist but an exceptional one.

*Q: Ah ha, a craftsman.*

ADAMS: Yes. Not only that but every time that Ford would do things for white boys there, like exposing them to Edison, I got included.

*Q: You got included.*

ADAMS: Yes, so you must admit that here was a revolution occurring. After that, I came back, got my degree from Fisk, and then went to work at the Norfolk Navy Yard. The reason for that was, World War II was breaking out, and there weren't many opportunities for Negroes at that time. So, I sat down and wrote to [Henry] Ford, he got me to write to other people, and they got me into the Norfolk Navy Yard. Going to the Norfolk Navy Yard was the weirdest thing imaginable because, on the one hand, they weren't used to anybody like me.

*Q: No, they certainly weren't.*
ADAMS: But this was, again, a whole new world.

*Q: For you it certainly was.*

ADAMS: Yes. All those kinds of things were occurring. What it amounted to was I took on this thing that Park had told me about: learning how to have worlds talk to you. It had its part there in the Navy Yard in a whole variety of things.

*Q: You learned how to let the people you associated with in the Navy Yard talk to you.*

ADAMS: Oh, yes, and to even use me. They had no idea. They didn't want any Negroes in there.

*Q: No, it was a threat to have somebody like you come along.*

ADAMS: It was especially a threat to have somebody who was educated and all that kind of business, even with a bachelor's degree and stuff like that.

*Q: Most of them didn't have bachelor's degrees, I am sure. They may have been lucky* *to have high school diplomas.*

ADAMS: It was just the idea of not having or wanting Negroes in there. When I first went in the Navy, the only thing that they would have me do was to go and get cigarettes for them, or go and get stuff from the PX.

*Q: They treated you as an errand boy even though you were a university graduate.*

ADAMS: The thing about it was that, when I kept on asking everybody to change that and let me do something else, they wouldn't. I wrote Ford about that. He offered for me to come to Dearborn, Michigan, where he'd have me do all kinds of things. But, the Navy wouldn't release me.

*Q: They would not let you go?*

ADAMS: No. That was a whole experience there. One night I had been over between Norfolk and Portsmouth and had ridden the ferry across to take bottles of beer or something of that sort to workers on one side.

*Q: It was part of this errand boy routine.*

ADAMS: I was coming back, and a Naval Intelligence person saw me as I was walking through the Navy Yard at that time. He was very, very curious about what I was doing, and it sounded very weird to him for me to be telling him that I had just come back from delivering Coca Colas or beer or something like that. He took me to the Naval Intelligence Office that night.

*Q: Really?*

ADAMS: Yes, he did.

*Q: Now didn't everybody who worked for the Navy Yard have an ID card of some kind or a pass at that time?*

ADAMS: Apparently, I must not have had what everyone needed because naval intelligence took me there.

*Q: That was pretty early in the war and things were not all together yet.*

ADAMS: Yes. Also, this whole idea of having a Negro doing the things I was doing was also very, very weird. Anyhow, I found myself there wanting to get out of the Navy Yard, and I volunteered to become a cadet. That was a sad kind of thing, too.

*Q: That was for the Army Air Corps at the time. There was a squadron that was being trained at Tuskeegee.*

ADAMS: Yes, but I ran into problems there. I was sitting out at Keister Field with the group that was sent down there after we completed the preliminaries. We were sent to the San Antonio cadet center, but they were not expecting Negroes.

*Q: Oh, they weren't?*

ADAMS: They didn't know what to do with 16 Negroes.

*Q: There were 16 of you?*

ADAMS: You see, that was another mess. There was one thing after another. Anyhow, then the thing came up during the time all of this controversy was going on about all these kind of things. Henry Ford said that he would intervene for me to get out of that and get me back to Dearborn but, in the meantime, this man who had been the protégé of Charles Johnson got a request from somebody in the White House. They were looking for somebody of color who would be able to undertake an assignment in one of the most difficult places in the world. I was the one who was selected for that. Even that experience was something extraordinary, I mean, even the day I appeared at the State Department.

*Q: Yes, the State Department was in Foggy Bottom.*

ADAMS: Yes. I went to Foggy Bottom with the idea that this was what I was supposed to be about. The guys who were interviewing me had me sitting like this, and they were above me looking down on me with spotlights.

*Q: Really?*

ADAMS: Yes. It just didn't occur to them ...

*Q: ...that it was intimidating.*

ADAMS: No. They knew what they were doing.

*Q: Oh, I see.*

ADAMS: They knew what they were doing but it didn't occur to them that a Negro was going to be doing any of these kinds of things.

*Q: I see.*

ADAMS: Anyhow, this started another thing because, with the White House being involved, it wasn't too long before I got cleared by this department in Washington, and I was dispatched to 13,000 miles away from home.

*Q: You were sent to Saigon, weren't you?*

ADAMS: Yes. It was not a full experience but it was something because there was a young white fellow likewise who was making the trip. His experiences were so grossly different from mine. He represented real class, so everywhere that we went, like when we got to Paris, our experiences were different.

*Q: You traveled together, the two of you?*

ADAMS: Yes, we did.

*Q: Were you on official orders of the Department of State as government officers?*

ADAMS: We were not officers. I don't know what we were called but anyhow, we traveled together. It was a catalytic experience. I got to stay in a hotel in Paris. Can you imagine?

*Q: Yes, and you were in the same hotel as the other fellow.*

ADAMS: Yes, I was. Anyhow, we got to Saigon and nobody could imagine that I had been sent there to do anything. That was a long story going back and forth, back and forth. The thing that was really interesting was that I resolved that finally by getting myself adopted by a Vietnamese family.

*Q: You were adopted by a Vietnamese family?*

ADAMS: Yes, I was.

*Q: I see here in the biography that you were sent out there in 1952 as an education advisor to the U.S. Special Technical and Economic Mission to Indochina.*

ADAMS: Yes, something like that.

*Q: Donald Heath was the American ambassador in Saigon at that time.*

ADAMS: All I am trying to say is that nobody knew exactly what to do with me.

*Q: I was in Saigon at the AID [United States Agency for International Development] mission. I reported for duty there in September of 1952.*

ADAMS: Then we were there at the same time.

*Q: We were there at the same time, and I was a general services assistant, a very low level FSS-10 in the American embassy. The point is that the AID mission was very sizeable in those days. It had a separate building. In fact, it had a building that was more impressive than the building that the embassy was in.*

ADAMS: It was because they were the ones who were supposed to be linked to the French army.

*Q: That's right. So, you got yourself adopted by a Vietnamese family. What do you mean by that?*

ADAMS: Literally, every spare moment I had, I spent with them. I learned the language.

*Q: How did you pick them out?*

ADAMS: There was this man who was kind.

*Q: Yes, but how did you meet him? Was he an employee of the mission?*

ADAMS: He was an employee.

*Q: He was a Vietnamese employee of the USAID mission in Saigon who took you under his wing.*

ADAMS: I just literally got myself adopted by him. When he took his family and they went to, say, the temple for praying and they bowed down and hit the floor, I did the same thing. Do you follow?

*Q: Yes. They were Buddhist.*

ADAMS: Yes, but the thing about it, the whole routine of my life was about them.

*Q: Oh, you lived with them as a member of the family?*

ADAMS: No, they would come pick me up.

*Q: I see, so you had your own government quarters.*

ADAMS: Yes, it was something like a hotel room. That was my whole routine but it meant that I knew more about what the Vietnamese people did than the officials.

*Q: Many of the people in the mission in those days spoke French. Had you mastered French by then?*

ADAMS: Yes, I had.

*Q: And you said you learned Vietnamese in addition?*

ADAMS: Yes, I did.

*Q: Now, that was very rare. Very few people spoke Vietnamese.*

ADAMS: Nobody could get around like I could get around. For example, things like this would occur. I'd get to go to Hanoi. I remember being a guide in Hanoi because I could talk with the people. Do you follow?

*Q: Sure, of course, I know what you are talking about.*

ADAMS: Well, I was not worried at all, even when Dien Bien Phu fell.

*Q: Why were you not worried?*

ADAMS: I was up there in North Vietnam.

*Q: Do you mean in Hanoi?*

ADAMS: I watched the French general go through an act, which was also his last portrayal of his dominance. He was running around on the streets of Hanoi in his car with the horn blowing, the siren blowing, and things of that sort.

*Q: I see, he was making the grand gesture.*

ADAMS: Yes. I was the one who knew the Vietnamese personally. I knew not only the one at the hotel but the one who ran the restaurant or did whatever. I knew a whole round of things, but can you imagine somebody having complete freedom to go?

*Q: I was there at the time, and I remember the atmosphere very well, but how did your colleagues in the mission regard that? Did they welcome this, did they make use of it, or were you, in effect, somewhat suspect of being too close to the Vietnamese?*

ADAMS: I was and am suspect even now.

*Q: Really.*

ADAMS: It is because they couldn't see how I could travel all over the place on my own.

*Q: They could not do it themselves.*

ADAMS: No. They even gave me a Jeep.

*Q: The mission did.*

ADAMS: Yes. I didn't have a chauffeur, and it was nothing for me to drive myself from Saigon to, say, Phnom Penh.

*Q: Really? That was not always safe in those days.*

ADAMS: Yes, but it was safe for me.

*Q: Did you have someone from the Vietnamese community with you when you were going out?*

ADAMS: Sometimes I did but the first five Americans to see Angkor Wat were with me. They'd never seen it before.

*Q: Did you have a Vietnamese escort?*

ADAMS: No. I was by myself.

*Q: You went by yourself. In other words, you talked your way through whatever situation you ran into.*

ADAMS: Also, the people knew me. Also, too, after a certain time I got to the point where I was arranging for a Vietnamese to go to the Philippines, to go here, or to go there.

*Q: Was it for advanced education or practical training?*

ADAMS: I ran teacher training activities and things to offset, what do you call this when you are taking advantage of people?

*Q: Well, colonialism or the colonial experience?*

ADAMS: Yes. All I am saying is, I had access to not only the Philippines but to all of Indochina, Singapore, Hong Kong, and all that. Can you imagine?

*Q: Well, I can imagine it. Yes.*

ADAMS: This is what life was about.

*Q: Were you debriefed frequently by officers in the embassy or in the mission as to what knowledge you had of things going on in the Vietnamese community at that time?*

ADAMS: Sometimes, yes, but not all the time. For example, the first time I went to Angkor Wat, there wasn't any curiosity at all even though I took six people.

*Q: You took six people from the mission?*

ADAMS: Yes. They were not persons way up there. They were all white but we sat on the steps of Angkor Wat, the first Americans who got to go through it.

*Q: Really.*

ADAMS: They didn't know what Angkor Wat was about. You see what I am talking about?

*Q: Yes. It was just emerging from the jungles in those days.*

ADAMS: You also had the possibility of the Viet Minh attacking, or different things of that sort.

*Q: You had no fear of that at all?*

ADAMS: No. I had no fear.

*Q: What is your opinion of the U.S. policy toward Vietnam in the final days of the French empire there?*

ADAMS: The whole thing was a big tragedy. Have you talked with our friend here who was in Laos?

*Q: I don't know who that is.*

ADAMS: He is a member of the Houston Committee on Foreign Affairs. It is embarrassing that I can't remember his name.

*Q: That's all right. I can't come up with names that I want to remember all the time either.*

ADAMS: He also taught over here at the university.

*Q: He taught at the University of Houston?*

ADAMS: No, there's another one. There's a Catholic university.

*Q: Do you mean at Saint Thomas?*

ADAMS: Yes. His name was Cunningham. Do you know who I'm talking about?

*Q: Yes. I do, right.*

ADAMS: The thing about it, I had a Jeep, which I could use to travel around different places on my own. I could get gas for it and things like that. That's what life was about.

*Q: Now, of the people whom you helped to go on to advanced education at that time, have you any recollection or knowledge of what happened to them? Did they come back to Vietnam eventually and go into official positions or leadership positions of some kind, or have you ever been in touch with any of them subsequently?*

ADAMS: There's a thing [for which] the King of Cambodia decorated me.

*Q: Oh, really!*

ADAMS: I was the first American to be so honored. What I did had the single most influence on Cambodian education. All of this was a different posture than most Americans experienced with the Cambodians at that time.

*Q: Yes, it was.*

ADAMS: I remember the first time that I was accompanied by fellow Americans. I was making a trip to Phnom Penh that was an entirely different experience.

*Q: Do you mean for the Cambodians?*

ADAMS: Yes, because one thing about it, the attitude of the Americans for the Cambodians, was not very respectful, you know. The Americans thought the Cambodians were doing things wrong. But, I got decorated by the Cambodians. I was the single most important influence on Cambodian education and that kind of stuff.

*Q: Let me see here. You continued on in Indochina beyond the time of Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Agreements, and into the period of independence you went to Cambodia.*

ADAMS: I was just there helping them do things, then I went to London, I think. I spent a year in London, and the thing that was important about that was that I studied the languages of Southeast Asia and also African languages, as I recall.

*Q: You studied at the London School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS], right?*

ADAMS: Yes, and I had anthropology there, too. I got, for example, the person who had been responsible for certain activities of the British in say different places. I got exposed to those persons.

*Q: In other words, you met people of the British Colonial Service.*

ADAMS: Yes, I did. I got to know some of them unusually well, say for example, the wife of one of the men [who] was a famous senior [officer]. I'd be finding myself invited out to their house.

*Q: Now this was before Britain had relinquished control of any of its colonies in Africa. It was just about the time Ghana became independent and Nkrumah was the first president. Ghana was at the prelude of the de-colonization, which was the beginning of the independence movement in all of Africa.*

ADAMS: I was there before Nkrumah got to be.

*Q: Were you in London or in Ghana before Ghana's independence?*

ADAMS: I remember sitting with Nkrumah on the edge of a wall, and two or three people were along with him.

*Q: What did you think of Nkrumah?*

ADAMS: I was amazed by all of it. Of course, the only thing I knew about it was stuff I'd heard from Winston Park, and that was about the Congo and also about Liberia. It was that kind of world.

*Q: So there was the beginning of your career in Africa, that year at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and then from there?*

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

*Q: Is that so?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

ADAMS: Then, I went to Bamako, didn't I?

*Q: Then you went to Bamako from 1961 to 1962.*

ADAMS: We were concerned about the spirit of Communism and role of the Russians.

*Q: That's right. Were the Russians active there at that time?*

ADAMS: What's the place that was next to...there was the Ivory Coast, which was under the French.

*Q: Yes, that's right. Do you mean Mali?*

ADAMS: I'm talking about the initial period

*Q: You must mean Guinea.*

ADAMS: Yes, that's right.

*Q: Sékou Touré was the first president after independence.*

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

*Q: You say it was difficult?*

ADAMS: It was not for me.

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

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

*Q: That was in Biafra.*

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

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

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

*Q: Were you attached to him?*

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

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

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

*Q: Yes, of course.*

ADAMS: I don't know exactly what was the reason why, for example, I went to Liberia. I don't know what we were doing in Liberia but for some reason I was up there at the time when there were members of the U.S. Congress doing something. It was that kind of stuff. I got exposure to the Ivory Coast, too. What's the man's name who used to be head of the Congo?

*Q: Do you mean Mobutu?*

ADAMS: Yes, I knew him personally.

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

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

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

ADAMS: Sure. He used to come to Washington.

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

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

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

ADAMS: What about Morocco?

*Q: Morocco comes a little bit later, yes.*

ADAMS: I thought I left Mali to come to Washington.

*Q: You did come from Morocco to the General Assembly in 1967. You were a member of the Fifth Special Session of the General Assembly in New York in 1967. You were on the U.S. delegation there. How did that develop?*

ADAMS: I don't know. There were a lot of weird things, like somebody having three people sit down and look down on top of you in the beginning, you know. It was inconceivable that somebody would ask me to go to the General Assembly, but someway it happened. The thing which was fortunate in going up there, I found out that I ran across people that I had known in different places, not in the United States at all.

*Q: You met acquaintances from overseas.*

ADAMS: Yes, I did. They had me make the speech. I can't see what they expected to get out of that.

*Q: You addressed that Special Session of the General Assembly?*

ADAMS: Yes, I did.

*Q: What was the subject of it?*

ADAMS: I don't remember but the whole thing was odd.

*Q: Well, I don't think there was anything odd about it. You were an experienced official by that time.*

ADAMS: I had a Ph.D. and all that kind of mess.

*Q: By that time you had been in government service with AID for fifteen years. From there you went to Morocco as director of the AID mission from 1965 to 1968.*

ADAMS: That was an unusual experience, too.

*Q: What was unusual about that?*

ADAMS: One thing about it, we were trying to do something about Morocco's needing wheat or something. In some kind of way, I learned about Rockefeller having done experiments in Latin America, I guess, which made it possible for us to get seed. Then we found a way to train Moroccans almost overnight in the planting of this particular seed. It was the first time that television was used in education.

*Q: Is that so?*

ADAMS: What was really interesting, we hired a television crew to prepare the planting instructions, based upon the Latin American experience, and used that as a training thing for the Moroccans.

*Q: The planting instructions were for the Moroccan farmers?*

ADAMS: Yes, and we had a select group of Moroccan farmers.

*Q: What do you mean by select? Were they educated and literate?*

ADAMS: No, no. I mean that they had to be selected on the basis of military service and also had to have the endorsement of King Hassan. What I am saying is, it didn't take in all of the Moroccan farmers at all. But the television group who was responsible for the training worked out, and the Moroccans got enough wheat almost overnight.

*Q: So in other words, there was a group hand picked by the government, I suppose.*

ADAMS: Also, too, the thing about it, they had certain places where they were trained.

*Q: Oh, it was not just in one location but all over the country?*

ADAMS: No, it was in - what do you call it - not cubicles, but in counties or something.

*Q: Oh, I see, it was in different districts.*

ADAMS: The farmers were brought together almost under the military.

*Q: Really. How long did this training take? Did it take a day or a couple of days or a week?*

ADAMS: It took longer than that because it was for the entire country.

*Q: Was each session for each group of farmers fairly short?*

ADAMS: I imagine so but I've forgotten now. All of these kinds of things gave me a reputation [that] was unheard of. The idea that you are going to use a television group in New York to devise training [films] for growing wheat in Morocco was unheard of.

*Q: Was that your idea?*

ADAMS: Yes, it was.

*Q: So that was innovation at the time to use very modern technology for educational purposes in a developing country.*

ADAMS: Yes. Nobody ever heard of it. It was a desperate thing because on the one hand we had certain air rights.

*Q: Yes, we had. The Moroccans made air fields available to our military.*

ADAMS: It was something very, very important, I know that. Money was no cost. What a life.

*Q: So in other words, improving the agriculture of Morocco generated goodwill and gratitude on the part of the Moroccan government that, in turn, facilitated our access to military air fields.*

ADAMS: No, no. We already had the access. It was a matter of them surviving. The French gave up or something of that sort, I don't know what it was.

*Q: We came in to help with this desperate agriculture problem. What about the results of it? Did you see the results in the actual harvest and yield?*

ADAMS: All of it worked out. It was a miracle. The idea of taking what had been a very costly and successful experience in Latin America and to transfer that experience all the way across to North Africa was revolutionary.

*Q: So in other words, this was the Green Revolution. You brought the Green Revolution to Morocco.*

ADAMS: Yes, that's right.

*Q: It involved also not only the planting techniques but also irrigation.*

ADAMS: It was a whole round of things because also you had control [by] the military. The military was assigned to make sure certain things took place at certain areas.

*Q: Well, it was a massive coordinating operation then. After Morocco, you were named ambassador to Niger in 1968. You were there about a year.*

ADAMS: Yes. That was a political thing.

*Q: It was? This was 1968, Lyndon Johnson's last year as president. Did you ever have anything to do with Lyndon Johnson?*

ADAMS: I had contact with all of them at one point, and there should be pictures of us when I was sitting down with a group of Negroes who were supposed to be benefitting from his program, whatever it was.

*Q: Well, there was the civil rights movement, the Great Society, and all that sort of thing. After all, you were from Texas and Johnson, a president of the United States, was from Texas.*

ADAMS: My career had nothing to do with Texas.

*Q: You don't think so.*

ADAMS: It had to do with the politics of things.

*Q: How did your tour in Niger work out for you?*

ADAMS: It was a good one.

*Q: Were there any significant developments during that period of time?*

ADAMS: It's hard to remember all these places.

*Q: Donald Easum said one time you had something to do with getting truck convoys* *going to bring needed food supplies up there. Niger is a landlocked country with no access to the sea.*

ADAMS: What's this other fellow's name that was in the Cameroons?

*Q: Do you mean Hoffacker?*

ADAMS: Yes, do you know him?

*Q: Yes, I do.*

ADAMS: He must have a first-hand recollection of this era.

*Q: Yes, he would.*

ADAMS: He was a very reliable person.

*Q: Then after Niger, you came back to Washington and you were director of the African Bureau in AID in Washington for about six years.*

ADAMS: It almost seems like a century ago now.

*Q: This was during the period of the Nixon administration, Watergate, and all that.*

ADAMS: Yes. I'm trying to remember. You have accounts of all this.

*Q: Yes, it's in your papers there. There are accounts of that.*

ADAMS: I remember there was a severe drought but I can't remember if it was in that period.

*Q: You must be referring to the Sahel.*

ADAMS: Yes, I am.

*Q: I believe it was during that period.*

ADAMS: That was when we had a range of relationships with European countries.

*Q: Then, you retired in 1975 when your mother died.*

ADAMS: I had promised her that if anything ever happened to her or she needed me, I'd drop whatever I was doing and come home. That was another whole experience. Coming back to Houston, I couldn't get a job doing anything. The best job I ever was offered was as a rat catcher.

*Q: As a rat catcher?*

ADAMS: Yes, that's right.

*Q: What do you mean by that?*

ADAMS: That's what it was.

*Q: Do you mean an offer by the city?*

ADAMS: Yes. I'm not kidding.

*Q: Really. That's Houston in the mid-1970s.*

ADAMS: That was as rat catcher and, even as late as that though, if it hadn't been for a whole range of things...what's this lady's name that you said that you knew who...

*Q: ...Marguerite Johnston?*

ADAMS: Yes. I was trying to think of people like her who opened up ways. Lew Hoffacker got me into the Houston Committee on Foreign Relations. Even as late as that, there were no Negroes in that. There was a very special effort.

*Q: Only in the last few years have they had any women members of it.*

ADAMS: Oh, really?

*Q: It was exclusively male for a long time. I notice here that you were a member of the U.S. Zimbabwe Advisory Group on a special task force on Africa from the late 1970s to the early 1980s.*

ADAMS: I'm trying to remember what that was about.

*Q: That was at the time Zimbabwe was finally gaining independence.*

ADAMS: I am a complete blank on that. Do you remember anything about that period?

*Q: No, only that Zimbabwe was gaining independence and the U.S. was very active in it. Andrew Young was the permanent representative to the U.N. at that time in the Carter administration, and one of his goals was to finally bring about the independence of Zimbabwe. In a sense, it was already independent under Ian Smith, the unilateral declaration of independence, but it was not recognized by the rest of the world, and it was a transition from Smith to Mugabe going on at that time.*

ADAMS: You are right.

*Q: Anyway, thank you for the interview. Is there anything that you'd like to say in* *conclusion?*

ADAMS: No, not unless you are looking through anything and come across anything that needs explanation or something like that.

*Q: We should note in conclusion that you have an extensive collection of personal papers and journals, which you've kept over a lifetime.*

ADAMS: Some of it is very valuable to me.

*Q: Yes, I know it is.*

ADAMS: When, for example, I headed the study on...what was that man's name who was our secretary of state when there was the place in Central Africa?...

*Q: Do you mean the Congo?*

ADAMS: He was the one who was called to negotiate all of that.

*Q: Do you mean at the time of the Suez crisis? Are you talking about Dulles?*

ADAMS: This shows you how time goes.

*Q: Yes.*

ADAMS: All these records here are priceless.

*Q: That would have been Donald McHenry, perhaps, during that period of time.*

ADAMS: I did all the studies for that whole transition. I doubt if the State Department is in any kind of order that it has all of the documents, which were a part of that transition. We involved ten or fifteen universities, and all that stuff is just piled up there. What are you going to do with all that kind of stuff?

*Q: Well, are you willing to make it available to researchers or to the international archives, if they are interested in it?*

ADAMS: I'd agree to anything to have them properly used. The only thing about it, it serves no purpose sitting there.

*Q: You've got about twenty years of detailed records on the modern history of Africa there.*

ADAMS: The boxes contain not only the things that the scholars would research but, even newspaper articles covering the area at that time are in there from *The New York Times* to the foreign papers.

*Q: Right.*

ADAMS: We had people from ten or fifteen universities doing studies.

*Q: Do you have their monographs?*

ADAMS: All of it is there. It seems like a waste for it to just sit there. If I give that to Fisk, it will amount to nothing. I was a supporter, for example, of the attitude of the University of Houston about its willingness to use materials like this to update their program of African Studies. They got about a million dollars to update their program of African Studies. But I'm not exactly certain that they would really be able to do anything about improving the quality of study by taking something that old. Now Marguerite Johnston had more of a curiosity about some of this kind of stuff than a lot of the people. What is she doing now?

*Q: She is fully retired now.*

ADAMS: She was a dear.

*Q: Yes, I agree.*

ADAMS: What happened to her book?

*Q: Her book was published.*

ADAMS: Does it still have any coverage at all?

*Q: I think it has probably sold out. I'm not sure. She was going to work on a second edition but I don't know whether she has done that or not.*

ADAMS: She was a remarkable human being. At least, I found her to be.

*End of interview*