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

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM LACY SWING

Interviewed by: Robin Matthewman
Initial interview date: April 7, 2021

INTERVIEW

Note: Ambassador Swing fell ill during the Covid-19 pandemic and passed away in Kuala Lumpur on June 12, 2021, before relaying the stories of his sixth Ambassadorial posting, his time in UN peacekeeping missions, or his leadership of the International Organization for Migration. At ADST, we feel extremely proud to have known and worked with him, however briefly, interviewing him from the opposite end of the world with the benefit of modern technology. His views of public service, of championing rule of law and humane policies, and of bringing peace and security to the world are on full display in this oral history. This interview was not edited by Ambassador Swing.

Q: Good morning here and good evening in Kuala Lumpur. The date is April 7, 2021. I am Robin Matthewman and we are starting off our oral history interviews with Ambassador William Lacy Swing. May I call you Bill?

SWING: Please, please do.

Q: Very good. And so—welcome. Let's start off as we always do. Where and when were you born?

SWING: I was born September 11, 1934 in Lexington, North Carolina.

Q: Why don't you tell me a little bit about your parents, your family and your family background, if you know it?

SWING: Yes, let me start just by saying that I'm probably one of the most unlikely people ever to have entered the Foreign Service and served around the world as I did. And I'll tell you why. My father was the oldest of 13 children. His father, my grandfather, owned a dairy farm. We all grew up on that dairy farm. My father dropped out of school in order to help raise the others. And so I had no ambition higher than—it's a noble one, I

think—to follow in my grandfather and father's footsteps, and stay on the dairy farm and do what they did.

But then I came under the influence of several people. One was the pastor of my church. I'm a Protestant. The church at the time was called the Evangelical and Reformed Church with German roots, as my family name has German roots. There was a pastor named Banks J. Pillar. And, my high school history teacher, a wonderful man named Theodore Leonard, helped me enormously. And they both said to me along the way, "Look,"—at the time they called me Billy—they said, "Look, Billy, you know, while it's a noble profession, dairy farming, you can do something very different from that." We have this little church college 18 miles from Lexington in Salisbury, North Carolina called Catawba College. It was established back in 1851, or something like that. One of a number of my church's colleges around the country. And so I enrolled there, went to four years of college at Catawba college, after finishing high school in Salisbury.

I was 18 and I was interested in doing things then. I was president of the student body in high school. I was president of the student body in college. So I had a kind of sense of leadership. And I went to college, and we always had in mind that somehow or other I would become a pastor in our church. And indeed, I struck out to be that. Looking back at everything I did, studying to be a pastor, then becoming a teacher, and then joining the Foreign Service—the thin red lines through all of this was public service. And later, it became international public service after my first trip abroad, and I realized I wanted to do public service abroad. So there's the thin red line that you can see already going through this that led me up to the Foreign Service of the United States.

So I graduated from Catawba in 1956, and they said, "Well, look, why don't you go on to theological school?" And I really didn't want to go to one of our church seminaries—there was Lancaster Theological Seminary, and there was Eden Theological Seminary in Webster Groves, Missouri. I said, "No, if I'm going to go to theological school, I'd like to go to Yale or Harvard." And so I was enrolled at Yale University's Divinity School. And then the church made me an offer. I took off a year, traveled around to about 42 states around the country.

Q: What year did you start Yale?

SWING: I finally started Yale in 1958.

After being admitted, the church made me an offer to be what they call a student associate—to travel around the country visiting our various student religious groups. I went to about 42 states then. Yale agreed to keep my application open. And I finally then

entered Yale in 1958 finishing around 1961. And then I got a fellowship to continue theological education in Germany, in southwest Germany, in Baden-Württemberg, in Tübingen University. I stayed a year, and then stayed an additional year to teach school in a private school. I taught catechism and church history.

Q: Okay, let's back up a little bit. In high school, you mentioned your history teacher. So were you starting to get very interested in history at that time?

SWING: Very much. I've always been interested in history. And it was my major in both high school and college. And I continued—also with a heavy interest in church history—when I went to Yale.

Q: Was this world history in general, or was there any particular interest?

SWING: It was world history, but I also became at that point interested in China. And I became very interested in Africa. And that later led pretty much to a career in Africa in the Foreign Service.

Q: When you were president of the student governments in high school and college, were there any issues, important issues that came up during that time?

SWING: Well, the big issue that came up in college, of course, was race relations. And I was at a very segregated college in North Carolina. In fact, Catawba was totally white. And there was another church college in town that was totally black—Livingston College. So I brought on campus a man named Sam Slie—Reverend Sam Slie. I think he was from Boston University. I brought him down as the first black person ever to hold forth and speak at the college, took him in through the cafeteria line, and so forth. And that was the beginning of my own commitment to improving race relations. I went to a number of YMCA and other types of conferences throughout the country. I remember one in Kansas, and became very involved in the student movement that was at that time already focused on the issue of racial relations.

Q: What was the name of the student movement that you just talked about?

SWING: Well it was the YMCA basically. So I got involved with that. I went to one big meeting in Kansas, I remember, and brought Sam Slie on board there to speak, and began pressing on the issue itself, although I probably could have done a lot more. And I had some very good support, from both my history teacher, Dr. David Faust, and my religious teacher, a man named Reverend Lionel Whiston. He was very influential in getting me into the Divinity School at Yale.

Q: When you were growing up, did you grow up in an integrated or a segregated community?

SWING: Absolutely segregated. My whole family were very much segregationists. You know, I can't say that I did much about that. But it was very much a white/black division, totally.

Q: Right. And the churches are separate too?

SWING: Totally, totally, totally segregated.

Q: Were there any particular events that caused you to start trying to press on the issue of race relations, or was it just your general evolution?

SWING: It was really the student movement. As president of my college student body, I went to meetings. I remember the one in Kansas very well. And there we were totally mixed with black colleges and others, and I came back with my eyes much more open than before, and began moving in that direction. And of course at Yale, things at the Yale Divinity School were already fully integrated. So I moved on from that, and was able, I think, to have a bit of influence within my own church, but it took a while.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about your time at Yale?

SWING: I had wonderful professors there. I had Helmut Richard Niebuhr, who was the brother of Reinhold Niebuhr, who's still very well-known in theological circles. People like Paul Tillich from Germany, Paul Schubert—this already moved me in the direction of Germany. So that was a very important influence on me.

After Yale, I was also given a scholarship to Oxford. I got to Oxford after graduation from Yale, and I just didn't like it. The man said to me, “Look, you've got to spend your summer here. You don't know how to read Hebrew without the vowels.” And I thought, this is a silly thing for me to do. I mean, the Masoretes (Jewish scholars in the sixth to tenth centuries) put the vowels in for a specific purpose, so why should I waste my whole summer here?

I said, I excel both in Greek and Hebrew. I was a very good Hebrew student. But I said, “Why waste my time? The Masoretes put those vowels in for a reason.” And so I went off to Germany instead. I had a colleague, a Yale friend of mine, who was studying German at the Gerda Institute in Bavaria. And I sort of fell in love with Germany and I

fell in love with the German language. So you have to be very young and foolish to do what I did. I wrote Oxford and I said, “Give my scholarship to someone else. I'm staying in Germany.” I think I had $500 in my pocket at the time.

And so learning German at the Gerda Institute, you are obliged to live with a German family and I lived with a German lady, an elderly lady, who heard about what I had done. And she said to me, “Look, next weekend, my brother, who's a well-to-do German industrialist, is coming to see me. And I want you to be on your very best behavior, because I'm going to ask him to give you a scholarship to go do postgraduate work in Germany.” And sure enough, he gave me a scholarship to go to Tübingen in southwest Germany, in Baden-Württemberg. And I spent a year there, doing what I would have done at Oxford.

I had also fallen in love with a young woman in Bavaria where I was teaching. I went back and taught for a year at a private German school. I taught in the language—they turned me down as an English teacher because they said, “You don't have an Oxbridge accent.” I said, “No, I don't. I'm an American.” So they asked me, “But could you come back tomorrow and do a trial lesson in history?” So I did. And they—typical Germans—they hired me as a history teacher and hired a German with an Oxbridge accent to teach English.

Q: And were you teaching history in German or English?

SWING: I was teaching in German.

Q: Okay, so your German was quite good by now. Other than Greek and Hebrew, did you study other languages when you were in college?

SWING: I had studied some French, but you know, it was limited because of the way you learn French in American schools. You learn to read it and to write it but you don't learn, really, to speak it. But I fell in love with the German language and I really liked it. And I brought myself to the point that I could teach in the German language.

Q: That was quite fast, right?

SWING: Yeah, I learned quickly. I have a fairly good language aptitude. I picked up French later, and then I learned several African languages, languages like lingala.

Q: You also learned Afrikaans very easily, I would expect then?

SWING: I learned Afrikaans because of my German, yeah. I've forgotten a lot as I haven't used it much.

SWING: And then I learned some of the black languages in South Africa and learned lingala which is spoken in Central Africa.

Q: Okay. So I know I keep making us go backwards. I just don't want to miss anything. What were your impressions of Yale? What were your impressions of living there, working there, learning there?

SWING: I was so pleased to be at Yale and I was so impressed with the level of scholarship and the quality of their professors that I absolutely fell in love. I rarely ever went home. I mean, even on vacations, I tended to stay around New Haven, because I was so pleased with what I had found there that I really wanted to just absorb as much as I could. Now, I never would be Yalie as such, I did go down and mix and mingle a lot with the colleges there to find out as much as I could about the undergraduate life. And I went to the Battell Chapel on Sundays for the church services. We had a very famous pastor there William Sloane Coffin, who's well remembered and I got to know him and some of the others.

Q: Were you involved in sports or music or drama along the way, or anything like that?

SWING: No, other than playing tennis at the Divinity School and that sort of thing, playing with my colleagues and friends, that was about it. I didn't do much else. Yale had a very good drama school. And so I went to a lot of the plays that they put on and so forth. But I was really very taken by Yale Divinity School. We had some great professors there. And a couple of whom, one of them Paul Schubert, went on to Germany the same year I did, and he gave the same lectures in the German language I had just heard in English. So it was quite amusing.

Q: Did you have to do a dissertation?

SWING: I didn't. I did one later, when I came back to Harvard in 1976, jumping forward. In fact, I just looked it up today. I did a very interesting—for me it was an interesting—paper. This was in 1977. It was called "*U.S. African policy and the Case of South Africa: Dilemmas and Priorities.*" And it turned out, this paper caused me a lot of difficulty when I went up before the Senate for confirmation to go as ambassador to South Africa.

Senator Jesse Helms from North Carolina had gotten a copy of the paper. And he didn't like it. Because I was basically saying, you've got to get rid of apartheid as quickly as possible, move to a multiracial society, et cetera, et cetera, the usual things that you would expect.
So, I then played my North Carolina card and I went to see his staff. And I said, "Tell him about my North Carolina background, including college," et cetera. And so, the day of the hearing, his staff sort of winked at me and basically said, "It's gonna be okay."

So Senator Helms came to the hearing. And his staff had already said to me it's going to be okay, because I had played the North Carolina card. And he came in and he had his little seven year-old granddaughter at the desk with him, and he was bouncing her up and down on his knee as he questioned me. And he said, "They tell me you're from North Carolina." I said, "Yes, sir. I'm from Lexington." He said, "They tell me they make some pretty good barbecue there." I said, "Well, we think it's the best in the world." He said, "Well, I reckon we could sign an affidavit on that."

Q: Ok, let's go back to Germany. You mentioned that you were falling in love.

SWING: Yeah, I fell in love with Germany. And I fell in love with a Bavarian woman I had met there. And we got married and then came back to the states.

Q: So what was her name?

SWING: Hannah Laura Steinold. But she has passed on. We divorced after about 10 years. We have a son from that marriage. But then I remarried and oh, I've been married now for another 40 years or so, with my current wife who's Malaysian-Chinese. On the way I fell in love with Malaysia and my wonderful Chinese bride.

Q: Absolutely. And so when you went back to the United States, would you remember how old you were or what year that was?

SWING: I went back to the U.S. in about 1961 and I linked up with an old Yale friend of mine, a man named Earl G. Harrison, who eventually became the headmaster of Sidwell Friends School in Washington D.C.—well-known. Unfortunately, Earl died here about three or four years ago, but he had something called CRIS—the Council for Religion in Independent Schools. And since we both had theological backgrounds, he and I traveled around the country, visiting student religious groups and supporting them and talking to them about theology and so on.

Q: All over the world, or in the United States?

SWING: No, no, in the United States. There I think I went to some more than 40 states. And Earl and I were working very well together. So I did that until I passed the Foreign Service exam.

Q: So what made you decide to take the Foreign Service exam?

SWING: As I mentioned earlier, I think there was a thin red line running through my life and my choices, that was always leading to international public service. It started as a pastor, then a teacher, and then a Foreign Service officer. So, this is what happened. I'd never met a Foreign Service officer. I knew nothing about diplomacy or diplomats. But I was coming back on the ship with my new wife. We were of course in steerage and I looked—I saw a fella putting his car on the ship, a very fancy Mustang, nicely dressed. And of course, he was in business class, and we were in steerage. So I said to my wife, "We really should try to get to know this fella, he looks interesting." And so, at a ship reception or something I saw him, and I went over to him, and I said, "I'm sorry to bother you. But could you tell me, what do you do, what is your career?" And he stood up and he said, "I am the U.S. Consul General in the Azores islands."

Q: Very proud of it.

SWING: Very proud of it, very puffed up. And I said, "How do you become a Foreign Service officer?" And he said, "Look, on the first Saturday, in every December, there is a foreign service exam given—a written exam—and if you pass it, you go on a list, possibly to be called up for the oral exam, depending on how many numbers they have in a given year." So I went back and immediately started studying. There was actually a booklet you could get to study for the exam. So I started studying assiduously for that. And I only passed because if you could offer any language at the five-five (fluent in speaking and reading) level, they would weigh your score by an additional five points. So that just got me over the 60 mark.

Q: And it was German?

SWING: It was German, yes.

Q: Wow, that's really fast to get to a 5-5 in German.

SWING: Well, I got that and then I made a foolish mistake. I passed the oral then. And I went on a list, to be called up at some point if they had the numbers. Foolishly, in June, thinking I would be called up any day, I quit my job in New York with this Council for

Religion in Independent Schools, which means I had no more income for about three months until they called me up for the Foreign Service in September of 1963.

Q: Oh, thank goodness they did.

SWING: I should have stayed with my job.

Q: Right. So where in New York were you living?

SWING: We were living in Manhattan, on about 103rd [Street] and Riverside Drive—somewhere like that.

Q: So, in the year that you entered the Foreign Service, was there a distinction if you came in as a political officer or an economic officer? Did you know what your specialty would be?

SWING: Look, I was just so happy to get into foreign service. I remember them asking me something about, "What's your aspiration in the Foreign Service? What would you like to be?" I said, "I have very low-level aspirations." I said, "I would hope that someday, I could perhaps be a Consul or a Consul General." You know, I didn't know what else to say. They probably thought I didn't have much ambition. In any case, we had a class of about 21, I think. And then on the day, when we finished all of the orientation, they had a day where they announced your assignment. And they called up Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Vienna, et cetera. When they came to my name, they said, "Port Elizabeth." Where's Port Elizabeth? Nobody knew. I didn't know either.

Of course, it's in South Africa, the southernmost city in Africa. And it's a consulate, not an embassy. So I thought they were sending me some kind of a signal or something. But I happily went through the various courses and went off to Port Elizabeth, at the age of 21. It was a two-person post, a Consul and me as the Vice Consul. But you know, in retrospect, it turned out to have been, propitiously, a very positive aspect of my career. Why? Because Port Elizabeth—they've closed it now—it was a consulate, and it was established for two reasons. One, that's where all the American investment was—Ford, General Motors, General Tire, Firestone, Goodyear, et cetera. And, it was the center of all of the African National Congress leadership in the Transkei and the Ciskei (independent territories in South Africa that were designated for settlement and self-rule by Xhosa peoples) which we covered—not the embassy. And so early on, I followed the ANC. I didn't get to know Mandela, because at the time I arrived in 1963, he was already on trial and being sentenced to spend his life on Robben Island.

Q: We're going to come right back to Port Elizabeth. But let's just return to your joining the Foreign Service. That was in September. You said that you went to DC.

SWING: August or September, 1963.

Q: And so this is the time of President Kennedy, but right before the assassination. He had formed the Peace Corps and he had formed the United States Agency for International Development. And there was quite a culture of service and international service developing in the Foreign Service—there must have been a lot of idealistic people coming into government with you?

SWING: Well, let me go back and say that John F. Kennedy was my inspiration to go into public service. I remember voting for him when I was in Germany. I actually photographed my ballot before I put it in the box.

Q: That's interesting that you thought to photograph it.

SWING: I wanted to have proof that I voted for John F. Kennedy. I was so inspired by him that I decided I want to be part of his team and I want to join the Foreign Service. So I came in on the inspiration of him. And the first job I had to do in South Africa when I arrived in Port Elizabeth was to go around the townships showing this film, Years of Lightning, Day of Drums, which was about his life and his assassination and so forth, you know. So that's why I came into Foreign Service.

Q: And in your group, the 21—were there other people that also served for a long time?

SWING: I'm trying to think—there are a few, yeah, there are a number of colleagues still around. One of them is Patrick Theros who writes a good deal and appears often in the American Foreign Service Association media review. Pat Theros is still active. He had a Greek background but he was ambassador to Qatar from 1995 to 1998.

Q: Okay. And was it a long training class at that time?

SWING: No, we had what was then called and I think still called the A-100 course, a basic orientation, and then I did the consular course. Since I was going to South Africa, I didn't need to do any language training. I started in September and I went to South Africa in December already, so I didn't do a lot of training.

Q: Okay. And did they have cones then?

SWING: They did. And I, by the way, was always—even after I became an ambassador—consular cone.

I really didn't care. It didn't matter to me if it was more prestigious to be political or economic cone. And then a funny thing happened, when I was ambassador to South Africa, my long-time special senior assistant, Jane Szinka, who was with me for 27 years, she came in one day and she said, "Oh, Mr. Ambassador, look here. You've just gotten a notice. You're now in the political cone." I thought, big deal. About three days later, she got another cable telegram saying, "No, we made a mistake. He's not political cone. He's what's called a General Affairs Officer—something like that." At that point it didn't matter. I didn't care.

Q: Absolutely not. And the money was fine? You came in and there was no big shift in salary going from the private sector or from your previous employment coming into the Foreign Service?

SWING: Huge difference. I suddenly was making real money. I think I probably doubled or maybe even tripled my salary compared to what I was making in the private sector. So I was suddenly in hog heaven.

Q: So let's go now to your first posting in Port Elizabeth. So who was the consul?

SWING: The Consul was someone named Horace F. Byrne, who had come in, basically, through what was then the USAID program. He served in a lot of places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. And he had just sort of transitioned into what's the Foreign Service itself. So it was his first posting as a real diplomat? I learned a lot from him. He wasn't an easy boss. He was very demanding. But that was good for me. I learned a lot. He gave me a lot of responsibility, and allowed me to cover a lot of the areas where the current African National Congress leadership comes from—people like the Mbekis—Thabo Mbeki and his father Govan Mbeki. Thabo was the second president of South Africa and Govan was leader of the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress. People like Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, people like that.

And so this was wonderful for me. In fact, when I came back as ambassador, I'm probably the only living ambassador who was there when Mandela was arrested and sent to Robben Island. And then I was able to come back as Ambassador five months before he was released, and then took him to Washington to see president George H.W. Bush.

When I was the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and I flew directly from New York to Johannesburg to go to Mandela's funeral. So he was a very formative and transformative person in my life.

Q: So why don't you talk about South Africa at that time? By the way, I'm reading Herman Cohen's book on the evolution of U.S. policy towards Africa [U.S. Policy Toward Africa: Eight Decades of Realpolitik, 2019. This was a time of great change. A lot of the African continent was becoming independent. And there was a lot of pressure on those countries or those regions that were resisting democratic rule.

SWING: By the way, Hank Cohen was one of the best bosses—supervisors—I've ever had. I'm still in very close touch with him, you know, we've become very good friends. He and George Vest, I think, are the two, probably, main influences in terms of supervisors in my life.

Port Elizabeth in 1963—it was a horrible time. They had just put in some of the worst apartheid legislation, like, for example, the Group Areas Act, which segregated everybody. During that time there they killed Steve Biko. Horrible things were happening. It was the worst possible time—there was the assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd [Far-right Afrikaner politician, prime minister of both Union of South Africa and Republic of South Africa; assassinated in 1966], the awful apartheid prime minister. So it was just a very, very cruel, bad time. And we saw a lot of it in Port Elizabeth, because both the two—what they call "bantustans", Transkei, Ciskei—were both covered by the consulate in Port Elizabeth.

Q: What are they, the "bantustans"? What does that mean?

SWING: Well, what the white government was doing—the apartheid government—was, they were dividing the country up into black areas, about 9-10 of them. So that you had Bantustans. Transkei, Ciskei, Venda. The family of the current prime minister Cyril Ramaphosa, is from the Venda Bantustan.

Q: Were they moving people to—

SWING: Oh yeah, moving them. And they were going to be totally black enclaves. And I guess they were going to continue to have a country that was divided according to black areas and white areas. But it was a horrible idea. And we covered it all out of Port Elizabeth, which made it very, very important and very interesting for me as a first tour officer.

Q: You were doing reporting?

SWING: I was doing reporting on that. Of course, we were also covering all the U.S. commercial interests in Port Elizabeth, because that's where they assembled all the cars and then drove them north to Johannesburg in the more populous area of the country.

Q: So then if there was consular work, you were the one doing visas or visiting Americans in jail or whatever?

SWING: That's right. Exactly. In fact, the Consul, Horace Byrne, he went up into the area that declared independence as Rhodesia—Southern Rhodesia. And he was stuck there. So I ended up being in charge of the post for several months. You know, it was a good experience for me.

Q: What do you mean that he got "stuck there?"

SWING: He couldn't get back, because it just declared independence and they wouldn't let anybody out. So it took him away for a couple of months, which was good for me to get the experience of being in charge.

Q: South Africa had been a British colony?

SWING: British, yeah.

Q: And it became independent early on, before the rest of the African colonies?

SWING: Oh yeah, oh yeah. No, they'd been independent for quite a while. And I think that both the British and the Dutch were heavy—very, very heavy influences there. And the British remained the most dominant external force in the country. And still, probably still is, although the U.S. has moved in to take over a lot of it.

Q: And did people speak English or Afrikaans?

SWING: No, almost everyone—even the Afrikaners, they spoke English too, although they preferred to speak Afrikaans. I used Afrikaans in speeches, you know, just to let them know that I knew a little bit of Afrikaans and I used it in church services where I went to a different church every Sunday just to show my face and to worship—but also, just to let them know that I supported their church even though they were segregated. I went to the black churches obviously too, and occasionally they asked me to stand up and I'd say a few words and in Afrikaans, which pleased them. And I learned one of the

African languages, Xhosa, which is the dominant language for people like Mandela and Sisulu and the Mbekis. So I learned enough of that, so that I could also hold my own in a public gathering, at least to say a few sentences to let them know that I was culturally very sensitive to their beautiful language.

Q: What is that language like?

SWING: It's very methodical. It's musical. A lovely language that I've forgotten most of now. But I used to have at least enough phrases that I could use. And I learned a bit of Zulu also. Because there you had Mandela's competitor, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the Zulu who was in the Durban-Natal province area of the country, who was the big competitor with Mandela, for black leadership.

Q: And so you went to the black churches as well on Sundays. Were there a lot of political overtones when you went to those churches, or those sermons?

SWING: No, I think they appreciated the fact that I was culturally sensitive, and that I was a practicing Christian and I went to church every Sunday. I usually went to a different one each time. There was an international, almost an American-style international Church where all of the expatriates went. I'd drop in there occasionally. But it really wasn't my cup of tea. I'd rather mix with the local people, you know, much more interesting, and I think more sincere than meeting up with a bunch of expatriates every Sunday.

Q: Well it sounds like even on your very first tour in a very tiny post that you had a very clear view of being the face of America and also reporting back to the United States what was going on in a very important place at a very important time.

SWING: Yes. And you know it turned out to be a great opportunity, because with a two-person post, I mean, you know, every time the Consul General went away, I was in charge. And it was just great in terms of reporting, learning how to report—in those days you had these one-time pads where you had to encrypt everything, it was very time-consuming, and so on.

And I really got to know a lot of local people, the mayor of Port Elizabeth at the time was a man named Graham Young. His wife, Betty Young, was a former foreign service officer. So that was kind of a nice thing to have there. And some of my friends from those days—only just recently died—there was a man named Donald Woods, who was editor of the East London newspaper they called the Daily Dispatch. And Donald eventually had to escape because he became such an apartheid critic. And then finally, after I came

back as ambassador, he came back after about a dozen years, maybe 18 years, exiled in London, he came back and called on me. And that was kind of great to see him, coming back because he no longer had to stay away—you know, things had changed.

Q: You mentioned that Steven Biko was killed when you were there (and actually Donald Woods became famous for covering Biko's death). Nelson Mandela was imprisoned in Robben Island. Were you doing the reporting on those events?

SWING: I was doing some of it. But a lot of it of course came out of the embassy. Anything local—I was generally the one who visited those areas, the Transkei and the Ciskei, so I usually had independent reporting, in addition to whatever the embassy was saying. They were very preoccupied with the government and all that, and they left me a lot of free rein to report on developments in what was called the Eastern Cape. We also had a Consulate General in Cape Town, and another Consul General in Durban. So we in Port Elizabeth only had that small area of the Eastern Cape. But that in many ways was one of the more interesting areas, because it's where most of the African National Congress—Mandela and most of that leadership—came from. So we had a lot of opportunities to meet these people, to deal with them. A lot of course died later. There was a kind of a pseudo-government in the Transkei. But they were fake leaders. And our contacts were mostly with the opposition, people like Biko, Knowledge Guzana, and people like that.

Q: And so they were organizing their own self-government and their own resistance?

SWING: Yes, the opposition.

Q: So what did it look like as you were watching the African National Congress (ANC) developing? What did you see?

SWING: It was pretty obvious, even then, that they had really top-quality leadership. These were people who were serious. They were well-educated, they had been to a university called Fort Hare which at the time was the university where blacks went, and most of the black leadership had graduated from there, including Mandela. And it was a top-notch education. And some of them went on to something called the University of South Africa, which was a distance learning university where, therefore, the issue of race didn't come into play as much. And a lot of them went on to get law degrees or graduate degrees from there.

But the quality of the leadership of the blacks was very good. And, frankly, the white leadership was well-educated also. I think that, you know, in the end, both Mandela and

F.W. de Klerk [former State President of South Africa from 1989 to 1994 when apartheid was dismantled] deserve the Nobel Peace Prize that they got together. Because absent either one of them, the transition wouldn't have worked.

Q: In 1963 to 1965, at some point the U.S. government designated Mandela and the ANC as terrorists, right? I remember that, later as he became the leader of South Africa he needed a special act of Congress to not have to get a waiver repeatedly for visa purposes, because this was a designation that is permanent. Why did that happen? The ANC had started with non-violence and the teachings of Gandhi.

SWING: There was violence at this point, violence from both sides. I mean, most of it coming, frankly, from the apartheid government, who were brutal in their crackdown, absolutely brutal. And I think the whole reconciliation commission, led by Archbishop Tutu, when Mandela was freed, had to deal with all of that. There had to be a lot of forgive and forget, you know, otherwise they'd still be fighting.

Q: But this was during 1963-1965, right? This is your time there?

SWING: Right, exactly. I left in January of 1966.

Q: Okay. Anything else that you want to tell us about South Africa, at that time?

SWING: No, it was just a very bad time. Because apartheid was in full sway. More and more legislation was being passed. And in Port Elizabeth and the Eastern Cape particularly, they had a thing called the Suppression of Communism Act. And everybody they didn't like—the blacks—would be put on trial under the Suppression of Communism Act as communists—which they weren't. So that led to a series of horrible trials. A lot of killing, a lot of good people left in that period—left in exile like Donald Woods, because they were going to be themselves continually persecuted. So they had to slip out. And so when I left, I was so sickened by what I had seen, that I vowed to myself, I will never come back to this country as long as apartheid exists.

And so I then embarked upon a career in Black Africa, and didn't really set foot in South Africa again until apartheid was gone. Luckily, when George H.W. Bush nominated me to be ambassador of South Africa in July of 1989, it was clear already that Mandela would be free. Everybody knew he was coming out. It was just a question of when.

In fact, I have to make a confession: I actually went to Mobil Oil's headquarters on 42nd Street in New York City, to try to persuade them not to disinvest from South Africa. I said to them, “Look, Mr. Mandela will be a free man pretty soon, apartheid is going, so we

will need to keep American investment in South African to help the blacks." But, obviously, they asked themselves, "Who's this ambassador?" They didn't listen to me and they pulled out. And ironically, as I sit here in Malaysia—who took over? PETRONAS [Petroliam Nasional Berhad (National Petroleum Limited), a state-owned oil and gas company] from Malaysia. They still have all of the accounts today. They are the number one fuel provider in South Africa today because Mobil didn't listen—you can't blame them. "Who's this guy coming to us?"—they probably thought.

Q: So Mobil was afraid of chaos after the changes in South Africa that were happening?

SWING: Yes, and they didn't want to be contrary to what was then still U.S. policy: that you should disinvest from South Africa.

Q: How did your wife do, living so far away from home?

SWING: My wife didn't like Port Elizabeth and so she spent most of her time in Germany. And later, after our divorce, our son, Brian, would come visit me at my posts from school. He came from time to time just on vacation, which made it nice.

But I was so busy at the time. I think almost all the people—all the ambassadors, all the diplomats who were there with me then I think have long since retired or died. You know, I don't know anybody else who's still there. In fact, many of my main contacts also have died and are no longer around.

Q: Well, this was a very exciting first tour. And then how did the assignments process work then? Did you have any control over your second tour?

SWING: No, in fact—and today this could not happen today, because you'd be taken to court—an inspection of our post had occurred while my wife was visiting. And what the Foreign Service inspector said to me was—and that today they couldn't say—they recommended, "This man should be sent back to Washington for a home tour in order to Americanize his wife." Because I was doing a lot of economic reporting, they assigned me back to the Bureau of Economic Affairs in the Department of State.

Q: Were you in the trade office?

SWING: I was at a commercial office—yeah, the trade office is right.

Q: Do you remember who some of the leadership in the bureau were then?

SWING: Most of them have retired or died. My immediate boss was a man named Henry Pitts, who was a kind of a Latin American expert and an economist himself. A fella named Eugene Braderman, from the Department of Commerce, was the assistant secretary at the time. It wasn't a great tour. They gave me sort of piecemeal things to do. I, for example, had to put together the wine tasting for junior officers. I got to know all the California winemakers.

Q: But you weren't involved in any trade promotion or trade negotiation initiatives?

SWING: It was mostly promoting American products and that sort of thing. But it was not a very memorable tour. I kept saying to myself, if I can get out of this and let me go to Germany where I speak the language, I will be fine. And sure enough, after two years, I was assigned to Hamburg.

Q: In what capacity?

SWING: I was assigned to be in charge of the consular affairs, a large consular section of about 12 people. And sure enough, I knew if I could get back to Germany I would catch up, because I had been—I'd actually been, during my time in South Africa and the economics bureau, I had actually been low-ranked in my class. So I said to myself, "This is not good. If I can just get back to Germany, I can quickly catch up on my career." And they assigned me to Hamburg, and in four years I got a double promotion, which is highly unusual, because I was in charge not only of consular affairs, but I did all of the political reporting. And from Hamburg I was then-–

Q: So you were in Hamburg from 1968 to—?

SWING: 1972. Four years. I got a double promotion in that period and then was assigned back to Africa.

Q: Okay, so before we move on, what was happening in Germany in those years?

SWING: Well it's a very interesting period because this was the period when Helmut Schmidt was named Chancellor. And the mayor and I became very good friends, a fellow named Hans-Ulrich Klose, who eventually became very prominent in the Bundestag—in the parliament—and became in charge of German-American relations. There were several other countries' consul generals there, wonderful people. The consulate gave me a lot of latitude. They knew that I had pretty much bilingual German. And they let me, in addition to my consular work, do all the reporting I wanted to do, so I had contacts all over town, many of them still prominent in German politics, like Hans-Ulrich Klose, who

just retired from the Bundestag, and other people like that. So it was really the chance of my career to catch up. Because I had been, as I say, low ranked, because of this pretty meaningless job in the Economics Bureau. And I had contacts all over the place and from there I got a very good ongoing assignment. But I was there for almost five years from 1968 to 1972.

Q: Explain the role that your consular district, especially Hamburg, played in Germany and in German politics?

SWING: We had three of the German states in our district. We had not only Hamburg, which is an independent state, but we had Schleswig-Holstein, which goes up as far as the Danish border. And we had the whole Bremen area. So then we had—I'm losing my train of thought now with the names of these places. We had Lower Saxony—Niedersachsen. So we had three of Germany's most important states. So I covered all three of them. In addition to my consular work—

Q: Was there a lot of political ferment then? Was there discussion of European unity and—?

SWING: There was a lot of discussion about German reunification, all that kind of thing. A lot on involvement of Germany's own relations within Europe. It was a fairly fluid period. I of course had to be a little cautious because you had the embassy sitting there in Bonn. Reunification hadn't occurred, they weren't back in Berlin. So I covered those three states in the north for them and went down to Bonn from time to time to coordinate with the embassy there.

Q: Were relations good—there were several consulates?

SWING: Yes, you had Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Munich, Dusseldorf, Hamburg—and that was about it, because it was still divided at the time. Relations weren't really going anywhere between East Germany and West Germany. So it was an early period in that whole arrangement there. Reporting there was primarily about the developments in those three areas and how they related to the federal structure. But it was an exciting period for me. I was so pleased to finally be doing some political reporting again, which I had to do in addition to my consular work.

The consular work was very interesting because I had about 12 German staff working for me. We did a heavy workload of visas, a lot of consular activities, helping American citizens who got into difficulty or otherwise. So that was all quite good. It was, of the

consulates at the time, the second only to Frankfurt. Frankfurt was the largest, and then Hamburg, and then Munich. So we had quite a steady time.

Q: This is a pretty urban area?

SWING: Very much so. Hamburg is in many ways the least German because it's on the sea, it has a lot of influence from the U.K. and elsewhere. They're looking northward. Very, very different from what you get in a more—what should I say, a more introverted—Bavaria and Munich, you know, in the south. So it was an active posting for me.

Q: Was there a lot of foreign investment?

SWING: A lot of foreign investment, yes. There was a lot of industry there. We had a number of American firms, but a lot of it was still concentrated in the Stuttgart area with the automobile manufacturers.

Q: Were there any U.S. bases in your consul district?

SWING: No, no, they were further down on the Rhine. Places like Munich. Not many there—we had very little U.S. military influence there at all, you know.

Q: That makes for easier consular work, I would say.

SWING: Much easier, much better for me, I agree with that. I really preferred that. Though we did a lot of political reporting for the embassy there because Hamburg personalities have always played a major role in Berlin and Bonn at the time. I had two consul generals, both of whom have since died—a man named Coburn Kidd, and another one named Alexander Johnpoll. And then they allowed me to do all the reporting that I could handle without neglecting my consular for work.

Q: Did they have any dedicated reporting officers as well at the consulate?

SWING: No, it was only me. That with the consular work. I was happy to do both, I had the time. My marriage at the time was falling apart. In fact, I was divorced while I was in Hamburg. And so I had a lot of free time on my hands.

Q: So Germany's a federal state, like the United States, but it's a parliamentary system. So what did that look like in terms of—?

SWING: You know, the U.S. and others imposed this federal structure on Germany, thinking: if we can keep them from being centralized again, we can avoid the troubles that we have just had with World War II. The federal structure means that these states have a good deal of authority, which is partly the problem that Angela Merkel has right now, with the whole vaccine question and so forth. Because, you know, some of them are saying we won't wear face masks, others are saying we will—you know, so it's a little bit like the U.S. in that sense. And so I kept in close touch with the three federal states in my district. And thinking about the time. There were nine. That's before they were reunited. But I took care of Lower Saxony, Niedersachsen, Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein.

Q: What happened with your next assignment?

SWING: What I'm trying to remember now—I think what happened was, from Germany, they liked my work enough that they asked me to come back to the State Department and join the German desk. That is because I was a German speaker. There I had a wonderful boss called Elwood Williams. Elwood was suffering from—I think it was some kind of a deteriorating disease, he was in a wheelchair. A wonderful man who knew Germany very well and one of the very few people in the State Department who had ever actually seen Hitler. He'd actually seen him on a train. So I was there for two years working on Germany. I remember helping prepare to receive the new German ambassador. We did a lot with Germany in that particular period.

Q: Were you one of several Germany desk officers?

SWING: Oh, yeah, we had several. But I was the main one, working under a director and a deputy director. We received Helmut Schmidt at the time when he came to Washington, I remember that, going to the German Embassy there. We did a lot with the embassy there together. And I was able to use my German language throughout that whole period . I passed the interpreters level German course there and occasionally did some interpreting. It was quite a good, solid experience for me about a subject which I was quite enthusiastic about, and have always been, namely Germany. Because of the importance of Germany—if you look at it today, even within the European Union, they're still the number one force. And I've always had great regard for the Germans, despite all the horrible things that happened in the war.

Q: Do you remember if there were any particular policy issues that we were trying to get the Germans to work with us on? This was in the early 1970s, then?

SWING: That's right. The big issue was still of course the old question of relations between the two Germanies. I will think of other things. I'm sure I'll come back to that.

The interesting thing was that, while I was in Washington—as I probably mentioned, I liked the Far East, and I was hoping to go to China. At that time I was in my 30s, and I wanted to learn Mandarin and go to China. And they said, "Look, Mr. Swing, you are far too old to be learning Chinese. If you're going to learn Chinese, you have got to do it in your 20s when we can use you in more posts." So they didn't want to waste time with it.

So then they offered me Tokyo. And I said, "Great, I would love to go to Tokyo!" I've always been interested in the Far East. I said, "When does language training start?" They said, "Oh, no, no, no—no language training. Everybody in Tokyo speaks English"—which is an absolute lie, of course. So I said to them, "Look, as a general principle, I will not go to a country where I don't speak the language. So if you're not going to give me language training, I won't take the assignment." They said, "Are you turning the assignment down?" I said, "Yes. I'm turning it down." They said, "Well, you will have to go out and find your own assignment then." I said, "Okay, well I'll go to the African bureau. I served in South Africa. I'll go back to Africa." I went to the African Bureau and they said, "South Africa? That's not really Africa." I said, "Well, on my map it is!"

Q: I think I read in Hank's book that for a while South Africa was being covered by the European bureau in State. But you didn't want to go back to English-speaking Africa anyway.

SWING: That's right. So they said, "Okay, you go out and find your own assignment." So I went over to the Africa Bureau and presented myself and I said, "Look, I'm due for reassignment. I would love to go back to Africa." And even they said, "Well, but South Africa is not really black Africa," et cetera. I said, "Okay, but I still want to go." So they gave me a choice between Nouakchott and Bangui.

Q: Tell our readers which countries they are in.

SWING: Mauritania and the Central African Republic.

So I said, "Okay, let me go home and think about it over the weekend." It's sort of Northwestern Africa. So I made my decision to go to Bangui on the grounds that Mauritania is still very much primarily in the Arab world, and the Central African Republic (CAR) is a true black African state. So I chose Bangui. And it got me back into the African network again.

Q: What was your job there?

SWING: I went there as Deputy Chief of Mission.

Q: So these days it's a very stylized process to become a Deputy Chief of Mission. I've gone through it a few times. And you have to get on a list and get on another list by a higher level committee, and then you interview with the ambassador. Did you have to go through that process?

SWING: No, it was not that bureaucratic in those days. I don't think they had a lot of people who wanted to go be DCM in Bangui. So during my assignments to Washington I had been taking early morning French, because I didn't have French. I had high school French but actually I brought myself up to a 3-3 level. Early morning French.

I was there to make myself assignable for a French speaking country. And so I got the job, and was very excited about it.

Q: And this was in 1972?

SWING: 1972 to 1975. And the ambassador there was a man named William Dale. He was kind of tired and worn out and I think he drank too much also—but anyway, he decided after a year, he'd hang it up. He didn't like it anymore. So he retired. So that left me for one year—more than a year—in charge of this embassy.

Q: Wow. How big was the embassy?

SWING: Very small. I think we had probably more marine guards than we had staff to be very honest about it. The funny thing was that, here I am as Deputy Chief of Mission in an American embassy, and I had never served in an American embassy before then. I did Port Elizabeth then I went to Hamburg.

Q: You had been in consulates.

SWING: Only consulates. So that was the funny thing about it. So anyway, I got to be Chargé [Chargé d'affaires] there for a while.

Q: Did they have an AID mission or any other agencies? Or was it just State?

SWING: No, it was just State—it was too small, far too small. But I learned a lot there and enjoyed it a lot. Perfected my French, got to know a lot about the Central African

area where I realized only now that I was later to spend about 12 years of my career, because I served in Congo Brazzaville and Congo Kinshasa.

Q: So tell us a little bit about CAR—the country, the Central African Republic.

SWING: It's one of the poorest countries in the world, not only in Africa. It is totally landlocked, surrounded by Chad, by Sudan, by Uganda, by the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, et cetera. So, a desperately poor country. In the rainy season the rivers are too full and things flow over the banks, and in the dry season, the bridges break down. So you're totally isolated there and the country is very, very poor. No natural resources to speak of. Primarily agricultural products. You get a bit of iron ore, but a pretty hopeless little country there.

But I spent my time working with the government to try to get them to be a little more international in their outlook, do a few more things in the UN, et cetera, be a little more involved in African affairs.

I worked a lot with the diplomatic corps and with the American community. We had a lot of missionaries there—they had been there forever. And I got to know them rather well. So it was an interesting opportunity since I was the Chargé for two of my three years there, which was a great experience for me. It eventually helped me to become an ambassador after only 16 years in the Foreign Service. When I was in Washington after that working on Africa, I had a trip to Rwanda. And I got a phone call from the Assistant Secretary asking me if I would go as ambassador to Congo Brazzaville.

Q: Okay. So just to stay with the Central African Republic a little bit.

SWING: It is very tropical. Hot and humid. It's on what's called the Ubangi-Chari river. That is the boundary line between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the CAR and it flows into the Congo River. It was a former French colony. The French were still the dominant country there and, you know, tended to do what French do, which is to basically look after their colonial and postcolonial interests there as the dominant force. Very little, as I said, in the way of any minerals.

I found it interesting just running an embassy for the first time, not only as DCM, but then as Chargé d'affaires.

Q: What were the new experiences, new responsibilities that you learned how to handle?

SWING: Well, I learned to manage a mission for one thing. We had the Peace Corps. We had a small AID program. I learned how to deal with a head of state—a very difficult head of state.

Q: Who was that?

SWING: Jean-Bédel Bokassa. A very cruel man. I actually had very good relations with him. I thought that was important to keep up those relations, even though I didn't approve of most of what he did. But I tried to be something of an ameliorating influence on him as much as I could be.

Q: Was he repressive of political opposition in particular? Or were their tribal tensions?

SWING: He was repressive to both of the political opposition as well as other ethnic groups. And known to be—basically he was a killer. You know, he killed a lot of people. And even at one point, one of my local staff was accused of having tried to stage a coup against him. And he took him out and murdered him. And I could do nothing about it.

Q: And this was out of the blue?

SWING: Well, it was something that was totally, totally false. It didn't happen. My man was innocent. I did my best to try to save his life. And then Bokassa just took him out with the others, and then just shot him, killed him.

Q: How terrible. Was it a reprisal for something else?

SWING: The Bokassa group—it was the whole family. Up to his time, there had been only one family who had ruled the country as president. We did what we could to keep him in line and to try to save people's lives and all of that. But it was a very, very difficult moment there. I think now the country has sorted itself out a bit. There's still a lot of problems there, a lot of fighting going on right now. But at least Bokassa and his family are gone.

But it was a good experience for me. I mean, it wasn't a very pleasant one. But I learned a little bit about running an embassy. I got to use my language a lot more. Learned to deal with the head of state, a very difficult one. And it helped me a lot in my very next assignment in Congo Brazzaville.

Q: Did you have an acting DCM while you were Chargé?

SWING: No, I stayed Chargé the whole time. There was another very good ambassador who was assigned later, who's still very active and very well-known—Anthony Quainton. Tony Quainton is now actually teaching at American University. And Tony was a great ambassador. It was his first ambassadorship.

Q: So he was your ambassador at the end of your tour?

SWING: Yes, the end of my tour. I learned a lot from Tony Quainton. We're still very good friends. He's about my age, maybe a year or two younger. So I learned a lot from him and we got on well.

Q: And the Peace Corps. Were the Peace Corps volunteers in very difficult places?

SWING: They were. They were in a lot of very isolated, difficult places. They did a great job. They were doing fisheries, they were doing agricultural projects, teaching English, all sorts of good things. And I think that was a very successful program—one of the better ones, as a matter of fact.

Q: And then you've said you had an aid mission, but AID wasn't present.

SWING: No, we just had some aid money, but it wasn't much. And so Tony Quainton did a lot to get more Washington attention than I was able to do as a Chargé. Tony had a very strong background. He had served in India and Pakistan, places like that. He had a very strong reputation as a good leader. And I've really benefited from having him there. More so than under Bill Dale, who was kind of worn out and tired, you know.

Q: Did you go back to the United States at that point?

SWING: No, I was one of the lucky ones who was selected for senior training. And they offered me various things. In the end, they sent me to Harvard, which was great.

Q: And what did you study there?

SWING: Well, I worked mostly on African affairs. The only requirement was that they made me a fellow, so I had faculty status. And I could speak at classes. I remember I did a number of those at the lunch club. I made a number of presentations there. And my one paper that I wrote was on Africa, called *U.S. African Policy in the Case of South Africa: Priorities and Dilemmas*. And as I say, that one got me in trouble later.

It was a great year. I had asked to go to Stanford, and they sent me to Harvard instead and I'm really glad that they did. Either one would have been good. But I really enjoyed the Harvard year. Fabulous year.

Q: Where did you meet your second wife?

SWING: I met her on a blind date in Hamburg.

Q: Okay, so you're married at this point when you—

SWING: Yeah.

Q: She went with you to the Central African Republic.

SWING: Yep.

Q: Okay, great. Well, I think that we should cut off here and resume next week.

Q: Well, it's April 14, 2021 with Ambassador Bill Swing. Bill, in our last session you talked a bit about being Chargé d'affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission in the Central African Republic. Is there anything you want to add about your time there?

SWING: Yes, thank you very much, I would like to. The CAR is a very landlocked country, one of the poorest in Africa, actually one of the poorest countries in the world, in a very unstable region of Africa, where I spent twelve or fifteen years of my career. You had at the time Angola with heavy Cuban influence, you had Congo, Brazzaville [later called the Republic of the Congo], A People's Republic of the Congo with a lot of Soviet influence. It was a very difficult moment for them.

I mentioned already that it was unusual to serve in an American embassy as DCM, when I had only served in consulates previously. So, it was an introduction to me to embassy life, and what it's like to manage an embassy, even though it was a very small embassy. But it was also, for me, very important, because it was my introduction to sub Saharan Africa, what they called Black Africa. I'd served only in South Africa. Little did I know at the time that that would lead to almost thirty years in Africa, which includes my United Nations experience after I retired. This was a very important assignment for me in that regard, more about me, than about the country. Our interests were very limited there, we had relatively small investments with very few Americans there. Most of the Americans there were missionaries who'd been there for many, many years, and it took a lot of time to respond to them, and take care of their issues—

Q: Do you want to talk a little bit about the missionaries? That might have been interesting for you since you started out as a theologian.

SWING: Yes, very interesting, and it gave me a lot of insight into what they did, and I think created a lot of rapport because they knew that I was a Christian, and that I had studied to be a pastor and so forth. We had an excellent relationship. They had been there for donkey's years. I don't know how many decades, but many, many years. In fact, one of the churches, very small denominations, actually had more members in the Central African Republic than in the United States. So, I thought that was very interesting.

Q: Were they very far away? Was it hard to get to them?

SWING: Yes, they were scattered throughout the country. They were in the more isolated areas. There were very few of them. They had headquarters in the capital of Bangui, but most of them were upcountry. In some ways, it was a very good thing. I'll tell you why. Because they had some of the best schools in the country. Many, many of the graduates of these missionary high schools went on to study at university in Europe, and in the States. So, in that sense, I think they contributed quite a bit. I supported them on that and encouraged them. I visited them, they caused me also to visit them a lot because they're Americans, and I wanted to go see where they were and how they lived, and so on. Fortunately, we didn't have to evacuate at any point because things were relatively stable at the time.

Q: It must have been hard to get resources, partially because of the communications, right?

SWING: It was very hard. In those days, I mean, even to get a phone call through to Washington, D.C., it was very difficult. We had what's called OTP's, one-time pads. You got a long, a very long coded cable in, and they take you an hour or two to encrypt them and to decode them. And you couldn't stop in the middle because the main action point might be the final sentence. We spent a lot of time with that. There wasn't much in the way of phone calls between us and Washington, D.C. It wasn't—don't forget this was very early on. This was 1972–1975, before my year at Harvard, so it was very isolated. Our interests were extremely limited there. We had the missionaries, and a little bit of investment, and the telephone system and things like that. And some Americans had been there for a long time.

But the economic side of it was very, very limited. Well, obviously, we were interested in their vote in the UN. That wasn't a difficult thing for them. The problem we really had was trying to manage Jean-Bedel Bokassa because he was a very strong dictator. He got rid of the Constitution immediately. It had been a family affair; the first three presidents were all from the same family. And he was a killer also, he killed a lot of people, including one member of my local staff, who was accused of taking part in a coup. He was taken out and shot. I pleaded to save his life, but it did no good. He didn't listen.

It wasn't an easy kind of relationship. I think that they were struggling to create a nation, a very poor nation, from a multitude of ethnic groupings. And with an economical low level and a landlocked isolated area, it was difficult—it was one of the four territories of

what was called French Equatorial Africa [AEF]. One of them turned into what was Congo Brazzaville, and a couple of others there who became independent at the same time.

Q: Gabon was one, right?

SWING: Gabon, right.

Q: And maybe Chad?

SWING: Yes, Chad, but of the lot the CAR was by far the least promising with the lowest economic possibilities. It was a good experience for me. Our interests were very, very limited, but it gave me a chance to cut my teeth a little bit on managing an embassy. It allowed me to get ready for what was going to be a career in African Affairs, which I hadn't expected. I was very open to assignments worldwide.

Q: So, even though it was very small, and very difficult, you enjoyed it?

SWING: I enjoyed it very much, and I learned a lot there that helped me later. It was the learning experience that helped me a lot because not long after that I became the Deputy Director, Alternate Director, they called it, for Central African Affairs. From there, I became an ambassador after sixteen years, which was a bit unusual, but very much appreciated.

Q: Okay, I think last time we talked about the Harvard experience. You finished at Harvard in 1976, and then you went on and you did two years as the Alternate Director of the Office of Central African Affairs. Can you tell us a little bit about what that job was?

SWING: Let me say a couple of things about Harvard. In addition to the paper that I wrote on U.S. African policy in the case of South Africa; they had something called the African luncheon group. I took part in that regularly and made a couple of presentations there on the CAR and other places in Africa. I met a lot of wonderful professors, one of whom I'm still in touch with is quite well known, Professor Joseph Nye, he still writes a lot for the Project Syndicate, New York Times, etc. Stanley Hoffman, a great historian, and then at the time, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, he was a professor there.

Q: That's exciting!

SWING: Yes, it really was. And then what they did, they made you a faculty associate. You could go to the faculty club and meet people there. You could offer courses, and you could give lectures and that sort of thing. Then they took us I think on one trip—they took us to Canada, which was a very good experience.

Q: So, from there you went back to Washington, D.C., right?

SWING: Yes, I went back to Washington, D.C. to be what they called Alternate Director. This was very interesting for me, and I felt honored to be given that assignment. I never particularly wanted to go to Washington, D.C., but it was always good for my career. We had the ten countries in Central Africa, DRC, Congo Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, and Equatorial Guinea. It was probably—I think it was undoubtedly the most unstable and the least developed region in all of Africa. There was heavy Cuban influence in Angola. You had the genocide in Rwanda. Congo Brazzaville was under heavy Russian influence on policy and under the French on the economy. It was kind of an interesting but very difficult—probably the most difficult of the various departments in the African Bureau.

We maintain contact with the embassies of these countries, went to their national days, of course, we helped them to credit their ambassadors. We made appointments with senior officials for them in the State Department or at the White House, as need be. I was given an additional mandate by the Under Secretary for Management to take on responsibility for increasing diversity. And I worked hard at it. I'm not sure we made much progress because we still have the same problem today. I was very committed on the issue, and did my best to make sure that minorities, including women, they called minorities at the time, blacks, Hispanics, and others, that they got a decent chance and try to—

Q: Positions in the office and in the embassies?

SWING: Yes, and I tried to make sure that we got women, at least one woman and one minority, such as a black or a Hispanic on every ambassadorial list that we put forward to the Secretary of State and the Deputy Secretary of State. I really was very dedicated to that, as I have been all of my career. In fact, when I went to be ambassador in Liberia, which we'll come to later, I was the only ambassador in the world who had an African American DCM. I had two female DCM's. Three of my ten—three of my ten were women and two of my ten were African Americans. I felt reasonably good about that. Frankly, all ten of them became ambassadors. Two of them I think shouldn't have, but they did.

Q: That's how it goes.

SWING: They weren't the minorities. They were two Caucasians, like me.

Q: You mentioned the Rwanda massacre, but that was later after your time on the desk, right?

SWING: That was after my time. I was already gone at the time that had occurred.

Q: So, what did it mean to be an Alternate Director?

SWING: Well, you see, it was a little more than being the Deputy Director, slightly more. I don't know why they made it Alternate Director, but I had a good Director who gave me

a lot of room to work and gave me a lot of responsibility. He wasn't upset when from that position I became ambassador and he as Director didn't. He never held it against me, at least he never showed it.

Q: So, ten countries in the Africa Bureau. Very often you didn't have a desk officer for each country, is that right?

SWING: No, a number of people would have several countries. I think that the one that had a full time desk officer was the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo], of course being the biggest and most powerful. They had a full-time desk officer, but the others—Congo Brazzaville, Central African Republic, and Gabon were probably under one person. Maybe Chad, I don't remember what the breakdown was. I don't know quite what the breakdown was anymore, but you're right, several countries under one officer.

Q: So, being a desk officer or running a geographic bureau office, there's a lot of nuts and bolts you learn that help for the rest of your career, right?

SWING: I had been a desk officer myself, for Germany, I was one of several desk officers. I had learnt from that, that there's a lot of responsibility involved and your superiors expect you to keep them informed, and on top of things, so that you know even what might be happening at the local embassy there, or that there's something there they ought to be aware of and concerned about. So, I gave them a lot of latitude. I had good people, I must say, I think the Foreign Service in general is made up of very good people that wouldn't be there. It's so hard to get in, both the written and the oral, and then waiting your time to get in.

Q: Do you remember who the Assistant Secretary was?

SWING: Yes, it was Chester Crocker. Yes, Chester Crocker, who to this day I'm in close touch with. He's become a wonderful friend of mine. I've kept in touch over many years with him. I've always had an enormous respect for him. In fact, I told him again and again, I said, "Chester, every time I came to see you in your office, I was trembling because you had such a way of peeling the onion back with your questions". I knew there was another question coming, and I never totally satisfied you, in terms of what you wanted to know. He has an incredible mind, and really on top of things, and he came to visit me when I was ambassador to Liberia. And we had Samuel Doe there. He came out after the meeting, he said, "let's go down the swimming pool and talk". Shattered by this foolish man, you know.

Q: At this time, you have Angola. Did you and the director split the countries or did you do more of the personnel work? Was there any division of labor between the two of you?

SWING: You know, I'm sure there was. I honestly don't remember that much from that time. Most of them probably reported to me, and I kept him informed. I suspect that's what it was.

Q: Right. Were there any particular events in one of your countries that caused a lot of NSC [National Security Council] meetings and decisions and things like that?

SWING: I think obviously, the big concern at the time was the Cuban influence in Angola. A lot of concern about that. And the Soviet Union's influence in the Congo Brazzaville. There was a lot of that. But these were not the kinds of countries—well, of course, the Democratic Republic of Congo with Mobutu [Mobutu Sese Seko, Former President of the DRC] at the time was a constant concern to them. They weren't the issues that made the NSC agenda very often. So, as a result, we didn't get that much attention from the Assistant Secretary, or higher up, obviously. Probably the most serious case we had was the DRC because of Mobutu, and the way he behaved—and he wasn't around too much longer after that.

Q: Alright. And then, while you were there, there was a coup in the Republic of the Congo? Do you want to talk about that?

SWING: Well, the thing is that there was a coup against President Marien Ngouabi, and Ngouabi had met with President Carter, I think in Bonn in Germany when the capital was still there. And that led to the reestablishment or the unsuspending, if you will, of relations with Congo Brazzaville, which led to my going there as ambassador. And Ngouabi was overthrown by one of his two deputies at the time, a man named Yhombi-Opango. I then was named to go there as ambassador and got the agrément from Yhombi-Opango. But before I arrived, he had been overthrown. And Sassou Nguesso, the current president who's still there, had seized power. So, an extremely unstable country at the time, the only stability now has been that Sassou has been in power forever.

Q: Sassou seized power in 1979. Is that right?

SWING: Right.

Q: And that was right before you went?

SWING: That's right. In fact, I was just looking at my dates here. I was actually in Rwanda on a trip when I got the phone call about going as ambassador to the Congo. I got the agreement from Yhombi-Opango who overthrew Ngouabi. And before I got there, Sassou had overthrown him, and I presented my credentials to Sassou Nguesso even though he didn't give me an agreement at the time. It's kind of strange, but anyway, that's the way things sometimes work in Africa, you know?

Q: Was Sassou from the military?

SWING: He was a colonel at the time. I've known him for so many years, he's still in power. There was a five-year period, when he lost an election. And then, unsatisfied with the election outcome at the end of five years, he stages another coup and took power back. And has won elections since then, although he's been around far too long. When I see him now—I've seen him almost every year since then, at some UN function or

otherwise. I've always reminded him when I presented credentials to you, you were in uniform. And now you have your suits made in Paris.

Q: Were there any other events that were notable during your time on the desk?

SWING: The DRC, of course, was the big concern with Mobutu, and the way he'd been in power for so long, and the way he handled things. And we had constant delegations going out there and trying to have some influence over him. But that was the main preoccupation at the time. Although many of these presidents, including in Cameroon, had been around for a long, long time. Chad was fairly unstable at the time. You had the Rwanda Burundi conflict, the Hutus and the Tutsis in both countries, with one being in the majority in one country and the other being a majority in the other country. There was all of that. Gabon was probably the most stable because of Omar Bongo [Former President of Gabon]. He didn't stay around that long till he died. We kept in contact with their embassies locally. We arranged meetings with the White House and elsewhere. It was a good background experience for me to have been the Alternate Director in the bureau before going to the Congo, which is, of course, surrounded by all of these countries, and made it a much easier start for me.

Q: So this was the first time you went up to the Congress for a confirmation?

SWING: Yes.

Q: Was that the time that Senator Jesse Helms was holding you up?

SWING: At that time, Senator Helms wasn't really stirring up controversy on South Africa. They did hold me up for a long time, though. And they held me up because one senator didn't like President Clinton's policy in Haiti. So, he held me up on that. Those were the two times I think that were probably the most difficult that I can remember. Normally these Senate Hearings are pretty mundane, frankly.

Q: They asked you if you speak the language?

SWING: Yes, that sort of thing, exactly. What's the capital of the country? And what are our interests there and so forth? Many of the senators do take it seriously. Their staffs do the background checks, they do the homework for them, and give them the series of questions that they ask. So, the questions generally are quite good, and they cause you to think. What I always felt was that I like the constitutional provision, I think it's article two, that says, "with the advice and consent of the Senate", because I consider that then there is a pact between you and the senators. In other words, you've confirmed me, I have a responsibility to keep you informed.

And I got in trouble with that because the State Department didn't like me communicating with individual senators, senators who were very interested in a particular country. But I would communicate directly with them, and send a carbon copy to the office of Congressional Relations at the State Department. They said, "no, no, cut that out, we want to have control". But it wasn't—it was actually good to have a senator who

was interested enough to want to be in touch with the ambassador, himself or herself. I liked this—I would then go back, when I was in Washington, and would call on a lot of these senators.

I came to the conclusion that ambassadors spend too much time in the State Department and at the Pentagon, and within the executive branch. You should be spending more time with the Congress, and with other agencies of government, who have people in your particular country, rather than all the time in the State Department. The Pentagon is important too, of course, and you should try to get over to the White House to see the NSC staff. So, I did a lot of that. I also called on companies and others who had constituencies in my country. I'd sometimes call on the headquarters of a missionary organization, that sort of thing. Because I thought that it showed an interest in their people. I thought that was important.

Q: You were single when you went to the Congo?

SWING: Yes. My wife and I had been divorced and I got married again later.

Q: Well, first let's talk about your time in the Republic of Congo. How big a country is it? It's pretty small, right?

SWING: It's probably a little smaller than Virginia and North Carolina together.

Q: And I think it has a lot less people, maybe?

SWING: Oh, yes, a lot fewer. I don't know what the current population is, but at the time, I think they had not more than four million. What's happened since is that they have become relatively well to do, owing to the oil reserves off the coast of the Congo Pointe-Noire. They're reasonably well to do there, and they have some oil resources on land. This has really improved the living conditions for everybody.

Q: But at that time, the oil was just being developed?

SWING: Just being developed, and just being discovered, as you say. But they also had iron ore. And there was some investment in that area.

Q: And you had been there before? As part of your job in Washington, D.C.?

SWING: Yes. What happened in the Congo was that we suspended relations in 1962. Because they refused to protect us under the diplomatic immunities that we had. And we said, "we can't have our diplomats subject to that kind of treatment". So, we pulled out. And then President Carter met Mariene Ngouabi in Bonn, and that led to the reestablishment of relations in 1979. And I went almost immediately there. There was a Chargé d'affaires there, but he ran afoul of the system because when the State Department inspectors came to the Congo, he was absent. And he didn't return during the time the inspectors were there. The offices in Washington were furious about that.

He was a real Congolese expert, he spoke Lingala, which is the local language, and he was very well qualified, but he actually messed things up by being absent. And that's when they picked me to go there. I was there within a matter of a very short time after confirmation. I think I was there within probably six months, something like that. I became the first Ambassador since 1962. So, it had been about fifteen or sixteen years since we'd had an ambassador there.

Q: Had the Chargé been there long?

SWING: No, he went back in after 1979, when the two presidents met. He'd been there just a few months and that stuck with him being absent. They pulled him out. He was very well qualified, a fellow named Jay Katzen. And I knew Jay well and felt badly for him. But good for myself, of course. I had then to sort of begin reestablishing the embassy.. We had a beautiful embassy, the former Belgian bank in the Congo, a beautiful embassy right on the Congo River. It had a beautiful garden flowing out toward the sea, a wonderful embassy building. And I had to also take over the residence again and other beautiful residences for staff right on the Congo River, and redo them and get them all set up. And start rebuilding the relations; we needed to evolve from transitional relations to normal relations.

But I had a bumpy start. Within the first month the government told me they didn't want the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps director was already in the country, preparing for the first Peace Corps volunteers to arrive. That did not help me have a great start as an ambassador, I lose the Peace Corps in the first month. And we never got them back in before I left, for the Congolese's own reasons. They were just very suspicious at the time, because they were under such Soviet influence. And there was such a distrust and a suspicion about me. They were wondering, "why is he coming in?" And for both the Soviets and the French who had the major economic stake there. I was an object of great curiosity when I arrived there. But I set to work right away. I developed very close ties with Sassou. We hit it off from the beginning; I liked him. And he seemed to like me, and we developed a good rapport.

Q: Had he ever studied or lived in Europe, or anything?

SWING: No, he was totally a military man. Totally military.

Q: So, his knowledge of the rest of the world was very limited?

SWING: Well, not only that, he was from the extreme northeastern part of the Congo from a small town called Edou, and from a very small ethnic group. So, for him to come to power like that was quite unusual. And it caused him a lot of trouble because the majority ethnic groups are in the south, running from the Congo River to Pointe-Noire on the coast. And even to this day, he's never fully reconciled all of them to his style of governance and so on. He's still in power. But he should have worked a lot harder on that. I went to his town to visit. They wouldn't let me see anybody. I stayed in my hotel the

whole time. Nobody wanted to see me, I just thought it'd be a good idea to go to the town of the head of state. But apparently they didn't think it was a very good idea.

We had some small investment, I think, in the iron ore area in the extreme northwestern part of the country. I worked with them to try to support them. And I played that up as look here, you have U.S. investment in this country. And then they were developing the oil industry, as I mentioned, but I had to be creative about what I did along the way because there was such suspicion about us, such concern about what we were doing there and so forth. Well, the twentieth anniversary of independence came up, and somehow I was able to persuade the Carter administration to send Air Force One with a huge and very diverse delegation. I've forgotten who headed it up. He was a prominent banker. And we had Martin Luther King III, and we had Sarah Vaughan—

Q: Really?

SWING: Yes. She sang on the terrace of the American residents that are on the Congo River! It made a tremendous impact, even the French were surprised. And from that point on, I think that they saw us as a more normal partner, rather than a transitional partner. And I was so grateful to the Carter administration, for sending that really high level delegation. Martin Luther King III was a big hit, as you can imagine, Sarah Vaughan of course. It was an impressive group. I was so pleased.

Q: What was Brazzaville like? Did it have any modern conveniences at that time?

SWING: Brazzaville in contrast to Kinshasa in the DRC, is a very pleasant city, a nice city to live in. It's a well laid out city, a lot of conveniences, of course, being a former French colony. They have very good restaurants. They have good French food, good Congolese food. It was easy to travel. They have a railway from Brazzaville to the sea. People are very nice. I've always liked Brazzaville. I find them in some ways easier to get along with than the former Belgian Congo. That may have to do with the difference between France and Belgium. I don't know. I liked the people, I really enjoyed my time there, it was a great two years.

Q: Did the government have it set up in those years, so that they have fairly good schools, health clinics, and things like that?

SWING: Not great. I think the best schools as I mentioned before were run by the missionaries. The school system wasn't bad, but wasn't great either. And the university system wasn't that much. Although they were working on it at the time. I think their infrastructure was in many ways better than across the river in Congo Kinshasa.

Q: And did your two embassies have a lot of contact?

SWING: I spent a lot of time developing contacts, I traveled a lot. I got there and I said, "I'm going to be a traveling ambassador". And I got there and I traveled throughout the country, sometimes no arrangements had been made, I would just arrive there. And they

would always say to me, ``where is your entourage?" I would say, "I don't have an entourage". Some were shocked by that. I would go there and I would meet as many officials as I could. If it was a Sunday, I would go to church as it was a Christian country, and show my face here and there. And sometimes there'd be some preparation, and sometimes there would be none at all. In that case, I would walk around town to meet people, and ask to see the mayor or whatever. I thought it was important to get to know the country. I've always felt that you have to be a traveling diplomat to be successful.

Q: And who was your DCM?

SWING: We didn't have a DCM. Again, I had more Marine guards than staff. I had already lost the Peace Corps, and I lost one junior member of my staff who was accused of trying to look at a document on a Congolese desk while we were waiting for a meeting to start. I don't know if it's true or not. But they asked him to be removed and he left, and after that he actually left the Foreign Service.

Right near the end of my time there, after making the case with Washington that every Ambassador should have a deputy, in case they fall ill or go on leave or whatever, they gave me a DCM. She was a lovely lady, an African-American woman named Arlene Render, who herself became Ambassador later. She arrived literally in the last couple of months of my tour there. I didn't really get much benefit from her other than to be able to say I had a DCM near the end.

Q: Well, when I joined the Foreign Service about six years later, one of my classmates went to Bangui in the Central African Republic as a General Services Officer (GSO) right out of our A-100 orientation training. I learned that in African countries and small countries, very often they send out very green people to do some pretty important work.

SWING: Exactly. For me, in many ways, as I said, the significance of the CAR was more for me personally, in terms of what I learned about an embassy, and also introducing me to black Africa, which I didn't know. It stood me in good stead for many, many years. Including the UN, I spent thirty years all together in Africa.

Q: Is there anything else that you'd want to talk about on the Republic of Congo? I guess it wasn't a tumultuous time for you.

SWING: No, it was the People's Republic of Congo when I got there. It was still communist and they dropped the title a bit later. I think I more or less covered it. By the way, after I left they nationalized both the embassy chancery and the residence.

Q: Did they make you move or they just took ownership?

SWING: I was able to string it out until I left. When they said they were going to nationalize the residence, I went out and looked all along the Congo River there, and I said, "here's a very nice residence, we can swap". They said, "no, no, that is the guest house of the President". I said, "well, fine, you're taking mine". And the reason they

wanted the residence was because they were building a presidential palace above it. And they thought the American residence below would cause a security risk. I said, "who's insecure? You're looking down on me!" Later after I left, they took over both buildings. And they gave us a plot of land further out of town where we built a new chancery. And they found a less nice residence in a less nice area to give us compensation for the residence that they took.

Q: What did communist rule in Africa look like? Did they do five year plans and try to collectivize agriculture?

SWING: It looked a lot like what you'd see in Europe or elsewhere. You had a heavy Soviet influence there, and I think the Soviets were very unhappy with my arrival there. And I came to know them reasonably well. They saw that we were there for keeps. We weren't just a transitional arrangement. When I brought that delegation out with Air Force One, they stood up and recognized that this is not transitional, this is permanent. And we got a lot more respect after that. By the way, there are two residencies there, the French residence and the American residence. They were built by a famous French architect named Roger Eyrelle, he built the French residence for the French ambassador, and he built the American residence for himself. I've always heard he had his touches of his own there. I was sorry, of course, to lose it, but these things happen.

Q: Were you able to get Fulbright scholarships for any of these folks or any other kinds of public diplomacy programs?

SWING: Yes, I had at that time International Visitor Grants. I was just looking up today, a man named Henri Lopes, who's still around, I think currently—he's getting older now, but I think he's currently their ambassador to Paris. But a wonderful man and, in fact, if you look him up, it will show him Henri Lopes—he's better known as an author than as an ambassador or a politician. He was Prime Minister for a while. I knew Henri, I have great respect for him, and a wonderful man. And he authored so many books, novels, and so forth. So, Henri, and I became—he's probably the one person I still know from the Congo. The others have either died or we just fallen apart. My first post was almost forty-two years ago.

They had this funny story they would tell. They claimed that there was a monster of some sort, up in the northern part of the Congo, on the Congo River, and they called him Mokele-mbembe. And they claimed they had seen this creature and it was there and so forth, and always joked about that, no one else had ever seen it but them. It's an amazing story that they had to tell about it.

I would say that the Congo is a very good example of a phrase that I've coined called "domestic colonialism". Where your own people take you as a colony and hold you in bondage. And that's pretty much what they've been, and many countries in Africa are like that today, where one of their own takes the country and wants to stay in charge forever. You have it in Cameroon right now, a guy who's been there forever. And that's what I call

domestic colonialism because it has all the trappings of colonialism. But it's one of your own.

Q: From there did you go to Liberia?

SWING: Yes, I did. And there is actually a backstory.

Q: There had already been a coup in Liberia too, right?

SWING: That's right. What happened was that I got a phone call in Congo Brazzaville. I got a phone call from the White House. And they said, "President Reagan would like to speak to you". He's the only president by the way I've known who called you personally. It was a wonderful thing he did. That was his style. I couldn't get a good connection in those days. So, I said, "let me call you back and give me the number". So, I called them back, and they said, "President Reagan would like to speak to you". And he came on the line, and he said, "Mr. Ambassador, I wondered if you would be willing to go as my ambassador to Liberia". And I said, "First of all, Mr. President, how are you?" because he had just been shot. Do you remember?

Q: Yes, I remember very well.

SWING: He said, "Mr. Ambassador, how are you?". I said, "Mr. President, more importantly, how are you? We've been so concerned about you". And then he said, "would you be willing to go as my ambassador to Liberia?" I said, "I would be extremely honored, sir, of course". It was such a shock to hear from him. And I was filled with much emotion after that. I had mixed emotions, on the one hand, I was absolutely thrilled and honored at being asked to go to Liberia because it's the one country in all of Africa, with which America has a special connection, because of the Americo-Liberians.

I was thrilled with this prospect, and deeply honored. It's after all, our oldest friend in Africa. The Embassy is our oldest embassy in Sub-Saharan Africa, and our second largest mission in all of Africa was in Monrovia at the time. On the other hand, I sort of gulped at the enormous challenge. We just had in April, 1980, a coup d'état by the displacement of the Tubman-Tolbert regime, by these low ranking enlisted men soldiers, only one of whom has gotten to the fifth grade.

I knew that the challenge would be enormous. I still wanted to go, but I had mixed emotions because of that. And I knew that the economy was in great difficulty. The Doe government had inherited a backbreaking foreign debt at the time, in excess of 700 hundred million. World markets for their traditional products, iron ore, rubber and timber were very much depressed. New investment was not likely and it was very disappointing. I realized the challenge would be enormous. But I was very pleased and delighted and began preparing for it. The departure for Liberia to my new assignment was disrupted all of a sudden, for a simple reason. I had the Senate confirmation and all of that. But Samuel Doe had suddenly decided he would no longer be called Master Sergeant Samuel Doe. He was going to be called Commander-in-chief. They had to change my letters of

credentials. By the time I got there, he was calling himself head of state. So, it was a funny kind of thing.

Q: You arrived in 1981?

SWING: Yes. I was there from 1981–1985. It was a long assignment for an ambassador. Normally you don't stay that long. Yes, 1981–1985, four years.

Q: You arrived about a year after he and a few other drunk soldiers, I think, killed most of the cabinet as well as the president.

SWING: Yes, the killing continued after I got there, which was a problem.

Q: So, before you left Washington, you got the Senate confirmation and then you must have gone around to do consultations?

SWING: I called on the major companies like Firestone and Goodyear who were there. The rubber people.

Q: Was Assistant Secretary Crocker still in place? Do you remember? I think he said in his oral history that he visited you in Liberia.

SWING: He was. I remember though. I think I misled you. I don't think he was assistant secretary when I was in the Congo. I think I misspoke, but I don't remember who it was. Doesn't matter. But when I went to Liberia, he was the assistant secretary because he came to see me.

Q: It was a country that the United States cared about. They had a healthy assistance budget?

SWING: Very healthy. We had a lot of investment at the time. Firestone, Goodyear, Phillips Carbon Black, and others. You had big investment in the iron ore sector. I'm trying to remember the name of the company, big investment there. Two of the big products they had. We were the number one investor in Liberia at the time. A lot at stake there. And one of the first things I had to do was to try to reassure the American investment community that it was stable enough to invest in Liberia. So, what I did was I got an invitation to go to—it was in Texas, I think, in Houston. I'm just trying to find a note I had made on that.

Q: It's okay. Take your time.

SWING: It was in Houston. In any case. I was invited there to talk to a group of prospective investors. And I went there to try to reassure them that it was stable enough to keep their investment there if they were already there, or to look at investment now and outline for them the U.S. plans to increase our aid budget substantially. And I invited them to come to Liberia and to be received by me and to be accompanied around the

country if they wish. I think that did a good deal to allay some of their fears about investment, and a lot of them did come back, which was good. And there was less disinvestment than there had been before.

Q: Often it is very problematic when a coup occurs, for our own operations, because there were laws in place that required you to withdraw assistance. But the Reagan administration decided to ramp it up after a coup in Liberia. What was the reason?

SWING: Because of our special relationship with Liberia, given our history, there was a lot of support in Washington, D.C. to try to stabilize the country as quickly as possible. And to keep the investment from flowing out. They already had this heavy debt that I mentioned earlier. We had to work on that. We eventually got some relief for them on that. And we then quickly ramped up an assistance package that was I think, the second largest in the whole continent of Africa.

Q: So, this was a much bigger embassy now than you had been used to before?

SWING: Yes. I went from the smallest embassy to the second largest in Africa. We had probably four hundred people, something like that. And we had many agencies. I spent my whole career where I've gone from something very small to something very big. That happened when I went into peacekeeping, for example, I had the smallest peacekeeping mission in the world, Western Sahara. And then I went to the DRC, which was the largest in the world, the first two-billion-dollar mission. It's just the way it worked out, it's kind of funny. But it's been good for me and for my career to be able to go from the smallest to the biggest.

Q: Within the embassy was it a good management challenge, or a tough one, to have all those agencies?

SWING: No, I think it was good. It was good for me. I called them all in, I said, "look, you know your agencies and you know your work better than I ever will, as much as I'm interested in your work". You do your own thing. Just keep me informed. And let's try to work as much as we can together harmoniously. I started out the first couple months there I would have a country team meeting every day till we got used to seeing one another's face. And then after a while, I cut it back to three times a week and eventually two times a week. Because we knew one another by that time. I didn't really have problems, I don't think, with any of them at the time. I don't know how many agencies we had. Your big problem very often is USAID, quite frankly because they have the money, and money talks. They very often have contacts that you probably should know more about. That's my own prejudice.

Q: I'm an economic officer so that is a familiar issue for me.

SWING: You will retire in April, 2022?

Q: That's right.

SWING: You got a big plan?

Q: No, not yet. One more year—

SWING: Give yourself breathing room. Why not think about the UN?

Q: Well, I'm going to be listening very carefully as we go through this interview on your experiences there. And back in 2015–2016, we had a lot of contact with IOM [International Organization for Migration] relative to the migration of people coming from South America up through Central America, as well as Mexico and Haitians. Before that, Cubans and then Haitians, we had two waves. You are probably pretty aware of what was going on then.

SWING: Some of them even coming from Africa.

Q: That's right. Okay, you arrived in Liberia, was it in the summer?

SWING: I think it was in July, or somewhere between July and August *in 1981*.

Q: And to whom did you present your credentials?

SWING: Samuel Doe, yes.

Q: And what was he like?

SWING: Well he was a master sergeant. He was selected because he had the most education of any of the ones who staged the coup, he got to the fifth grade. He was able to at least write, and very often when I called on him, he would have his radio on listening to a soccer match. And he wouldn't even turn it down when I went in there, and he would say, "Swing!" He was a very rude guy, and sometimes he called me in at midnight, and we'd stay till four or five in the morning. He's a weird guy. I don't want to get into that just yet. When I eventually took him to the states to Washington, D.C., the first thing he wanted to do was to go to Fort Bragg, to see all of the military people who had trained him.

Q: They had trained him in Liberia or had he been in the United States before?

SWING: No. He trained in Liberia. We had training programs at the time. They became good enough apparently that they could stage a coup.

Q: Were they able to put together a cabinet and a government of any educated people?

SWING: They did. They had some good people, a fellow called Baccus Matthews who was very well educated. Initially when I was nominated, he said to me, "I don't know that Swing is qualified, he's only had one ambassadorship to the small country of Congo". He

was a bit arrogant, but he was smart. And he was good, and they did have some other good people in the cabinet, I must say, I suppose they were probably forced upon him. Doe probably didn't know who they were or what they were like. But they had a reasonable cabinet, it wasn't bad at all. And we worked well with them because we had to, coming in with a much larger aid program, it was very important. We had Peace Corps volunteers in the country that needed protection. It was a shaky beginning, but we got through it all right.

The day after I presented credentials, I got word that Doe was going to kill his deputy, his deputy head of state, a guy named Weh Syen. So, I went in around midnight to what they called the Executive Mansion to see him. I saw the Archbishop coming out, who had made the same "day march" I was going to make. And I talked to Doe from after midnight, until about five in the morning pleading for the life of this man. And around two thirty, he got a phone call. And I only discovered later that the phone call was to tell him that the deed had been done, they had killed him. And he kept me there still to five o'clock. And it's only after I went back home that I realized that, in fact, he had killed this guy. Like a fool, I had to sit there another two and a half hours. That's the kind of guy he was—

Q: Pretty sadistic.

SWING: —that was one day after I presented my credentials. So, it wasn't only the people he killed on the beach. He was continuing to kill people. I had to deal with that at the outset. He was a killer. He knew the gun. And eventually, we had to work with him, he's all we had at the time. And we had a heavy interest there. Probably against my better judgment, I persuaded Washington, D.C. that it would be good if he visited the United States and saw the President. The other ambassadors in Monrovia thought I was crazy. But along the way, they wanted him to make a stop in their country on the way.

We got him over there, and he saw President Reagan at the White House, in the Oval Office. And Reagan took him out into the Rose Garden. And Reagan at that time was quite elderly. He made a mistake when he introduced him. He said, "I want to introduce you to Chairman Moe". Well, that was the only thing that the newspapers talked about, for the rest of the time he was there, Chairman Moe rather than Head of State Doe. Reagan was very, very nice to him. In fact, when he went to Los Angeles, he stayed in President Reagan's suite at whatever that famous hotel is there. I don't know, the Grand Hyatt or whatever. So, he was very good to him. I went with Doe throughout the United States. He wanted to go to Fort Bragg to see the guys who trained him. And then I took him to West Point, so he could meet and see the cadets and what we do about real, proper military training. We did what we had to do at the time.

Q: Did it expand his horizons?

SWING: Not really, I don't think so. In fact, after that he became very negative toward me. At one point, he asked Washington to remove me. And Washington basically said, "If you want him removed, you have to declare him persona non-grata". And he backed

away. I had a difficult time from there on in, even though I had produced the Washington, D.C. trip for him, and the meeting with the President. I stuck it out. And they had a ceremony to rub it in with me. They had a ceremony, and they presented an honor, a ribbon and the whole thing that you get to the Chinese, French and one other ambassador, I don't remember the name. And of course, who had done basically nothing for the country.

And here we had the largest aid program, he had just visited Washington, D.C. And he did it basically to rub it in with me, that you don't count here for much. Finally, the last week before I left the country, a Foreign Minister called me up and said, "we're doing a ceremony for you this evening at the large hotel and we would like to present you with our honors", and they gave then the same decoration they had given these other three ambassadors who'd done nothing. Anyway, those sorts of things happen. You can't take them too seriously.

Q: Do you know why he got negative right after the trip?

SWING: Because we were pushing him. In fact, we were pushing them on the aid we were giving because we were determined that it not be wasted or used on projects that didn't deserve it. In fact, I asked Washington, D.C. to grant me joint check signing authority. They turned me down flatly. Then about two years later, when I was back in Washington, D.C. I learned in fact they themselves came around to that conclusion that you needed to keep control of this guy. It was a huge aid program, and a lot of the aid was to help build housing for the soldiers, so they wouldn't have to stage a coup again. We did well by the military then, and Doe I think, to some degree, appreciated it. But our relationship really never improved very much before I left. I was there for about a year and a half. And frankly, I knew that I had done my best to help him and help our relations.

Q: In addition to housing, what other types of projects did USAID do?

SWING: We did a lot to help them in agriculture, which is still big in that country. That was very important. And growing some crops that they badly needed, including corn, et cetera. We did a lot of educational grants to build up a better cadre of people with proper education. We did a lot of that.

Q: The government speaks English, right? But a lot of the population, do they speak native languages? Are they English speakers?

SWING: I think you find—no matter how isolated you are in the country; you will find somebody in every town or village who speaks English. But a lot of them speak their local languages. English is very widespread. And they're proud of it. There is such influence in Liberia, a lot of towns, Monrovia, of course, named for James Monroe, the U.S. president, and a lot of the towns are named for places in Kentucky and Tennessee and elsewhere in the south, where a lot of them came from. Heavy, heavy American influence there.

Q: And you had good DCMs?

SWING: In Liberia, yes. I had an excellent DCM. A man named Edward Perkins, who went on to be ambassador to Liberia, eventually. He was ambassador to Australia and ambassador to the UN

Q: He just passed away recently.

SWING: He passed away recently. Ed was a great DCM and a great ambassador, a great person, and our families knew one another well. Their daughters Kathy and Sarah, I was in touch with them at the time of his death. It was very sad—in fact, Kathy is actually in the State Department. Her husband is in the legal department. She's civil service, I think, she's not Foreign Service.

Q: What else did you do—a lot of public diplomacy?

SWING: I did a lot of public speaking. I did a lot of high school and university graduation speeches. I kept in close touch with the American women's group and the American business association. I responded to many, many requests. I was very active; I have a whole folder of the speeches I did when I was in Liberia. I was surprised the other day going through them how many I had actually done. I like to speak in public and I find it's a good means of communicating. And it was important that people understood what our interests were and what we were trying to do, that there were no nefarious motives there. This was an old friend. We were trying to be good partners with them. And this was our vision for what the new Liberia could be under the control of the more native Liberians rather than the Americo-Liberians, which is what the coup was all about.

Q: Samuel Doe himself was an Americo-Liberian?

SWING: No, no, he was native. He was an ethnic. A Liberian who never left. For us, doing this in a manner that also protected the rights of the Americo-Liberians was in some ways the tricky part. Because they're all Liberians, it's just that the majority took over in the coup. Even if it was the wrong group of ethnic Liberians who took over, it would have been much better if Tolbert and Tubman could have paved the way for that transition. But they didn't do any preparations for it. And so, the soldiers living in these terrible lodgings looked up at the executive mansion and said, "look at that wealth up there". And they took it over.

That was really a sad thing. Doe killed so many people, and I went to see him. He had just put his soldiers on the campus of the University of Liberia, which was right across the street from the Executive Mansion, where he lived and had his offices. I went to see him, and we walked out on the terrace. And I said, "Mr. Head of State, one of these days you will put your troops on the campus and they will refuse to go. Why? Because their children are students at the University of Liberia". He thought I was a fool or something. If I had been a six-digit consultant that told him that he probably would have listened, but

because it was me, he thought here he comes again, putting pressure on me to do something I don't want to do. But it's true, the soldiers were all working so they could put their children into the university and have better prospects.

Q: I think I read that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had been the Minister of Finance under Tolbert but she did keep working under Samuel Doe for a while. Did you know her?

SWING: Yes, I knew her well, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is a very, very capable, very professional economist. And she's worked in various places. I think she worked at the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. And at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). She's been in various positions, very senior positions. She's very well regarded. By the way, Johnson and Sirleaf are both Americo-Liberian names, as you might suspect. And she came back at one point, she went back into the government. I don't know if it was under Doe. At some point, she came back in—

Q: And then she was elected president, eventually?

SWING: —yes, exactly. And she is very capable, very highly regarded by everyone. I don't know the current guy George Weah who's in power, a former athlete, I don't know. A soccer player? I don't know what he's doing. Ellen Johnson was good.

Q: But she was around while you were ambassador?

SWING: We had a lot of contact with her. She gave very good advice, but couldn't do much under Doe, which is too bad. Some of the Tubman family was still around in those days. You had Shad Tubman, the son of a former president, who I think is living now in Long Island or Connecticut, and Shad was there. You had another Tubman who became part of the government for a while. And then you had Winston Tubman who I think was a nephew. And Winston Tubman came back into the government to try to help out. He was Minister of Justice for a while. A very good lawyer. And I think in the end he couldn't take it either. He gave up and he's back in the states now as far as I know. I've lost contact with him. In fact, after this I'll make a point of trying.

Q: So, four years, a long time. It was a tough assignment. You're getting a lot of experience working with thugs.

SWING: My career has been a career of basically dealing with dictators or autocrats. You had that and you had the DRC, Congo Brazzaville, Liberia— South Africa, of course, was a different story. Although I was there initially under Verwoerd, an autocrat who was eventually assassinated. But then I came back, of course, under de Klerk. In Haiti, a coup again with the military in power.

Q: It does sound like Doe was particularly disrespectful of you. But even in your previous ambassadorship, you hadn't been able to save the life of your local employee. It must have been very wearing, I think. Did you feel like you were picking up any tips or tools of the trade of how to work with these guys? They were so brutal.

SWING: You just have to have determination and patience. A willingness to tell it like it is and try to reason with them. It's diplomacy basically, a dialogue, what we're trained to do. And not get discouraged when it doesn't work. I'm not sure how much punishment works like sanctions; I think sanctions are really sui generis. It works in some cases. I think it worked in Haiti eventually. Probably hasn't worked in some other places. It worked in South Africa, for sure. Because it convinced people there that the West was serious about getting rid of apartheid. And FW de Klerk recognized it.

But it varies from country to country. I think we did it in Haiti knowing it wouldn't work, but Madeleine Albright as UN Ambassador needed to go to the Security Council and say, look, we have tried sanctions, it didn't work, now we have to use force. And I think that was a good use of sanctions. Even though she knew it wouldn't work, but to eliminate that as an alternative. When I called my wife from Haiti—I got a call from Secretary Albright's office one day from one of her assistants saying, "President Clinton is so pleased that you've been willing to stay on a fourth year and then maybe even a fifth year in Haiti". Did I tell you this before?

Q: No, no. I was just wondering whether or not you actually had agreed when she said that?

SWING: I was happy to stay on in Haiti; I love that country. I saw some progress being made there. And the President really liked to do something for you. Give us a list of a few places you'd like to go and I said, "okay, I'd like to go as ambassador to India or to Germany", where I speak the language. I mentioned a couple of others, and I got a call back a couple of weeks later, saying the president would like you to be his ambassador to Nigeria. I said, "well, I've already been ambassador to Nigeria". They hadn't even looked at my bio. They went back to the drawing boards and then they called me back and said, "the president would like you to go to the DRC".

Q: That was your thank you for all those years of working in tough environments!

SWING: I've enjoyed all these assignments. I found them very fulfilling and was glad to take them all on.

Q: But before we leave Liberia, were there any particular moments—I don't know, Sarah Vaughan moments, or difficult moments that you wanted to mention? Especially working with people and trying to get some development projects put in place.

SWING: You know what I found interesting about Liberia was that here was a country that was basically taken over by the Americo-Liberians, the Tubmans and the Tolberts. And the ethnic Liberians had never really—they hadn't really brought them into the mainstream as much as they should have. Although the wrong group took power, obviously, the soldiers were not the right group. But what you had to get started then was an effort to create a new national identity using ethnic languages, keeping English, of course. Beginning to become African to wear African clothes rather than Western

Americo- Liberian clothes, suit and tie and all of that. To get a new national anthem, to basically become African, which they really weren't. They tried to be. That was fascinating to watch that process,

Q: The ethnic groups were not competing; they were sort of working together to create a national identity?

SWING: Exactly. To be really an African country, rather than this pseudo Liberian-American entity.

That I think was—it's something that is still in process. And I think they've done it reasonably well. I see now when they go to the UN and elsewhere, they very often are in African dress. In fact, Samuel Doe—when I took him to Washington, D.C. to see President George H. W. Bush. I said to him, "Mr. Head of State, wear your African robes, wear your Afro, be African. Don't try to be something you're not". And sure enough he followed my advice. And it looks so good to see him with the president, looking like a real African. He went down to Fort Bragg to visit his mentors there and had his robes and Afro all very present. It was a good thing. And he really was an ethnic Liberian. He wasn't a Western Americo-Liberian at all. That was the beginning of a real process, which I've watched continue to grow. What else could I say about Liberia?

Q: The economy, did the economy improve during your four years?

SWING: It did come back, and it came back partly because of the very large aid program. We had the second largest aid program in Africa. I think that helped put them on the road to recovery. Part of the purpose of getting him to come to Washington, D.C. and my going there earlier, two years earlier, to talk to the business people in Houston. And getting him to go to Washington, D.C. was to see that he stabilized the country. He's received by the President of the United States. He was received by President Chirac in France, and the Belgian king in Brussels and so forth. And people began to say, this country must be stable now, look at this.

I think that was a political element that led to some economic stability and increase in investment. A good thing overall. I love the Liberians—I think I went over virtually every kilometer in the country. I showed my face and went around, I preached the gospel, so to speak, of our vision of stable, wealthy Liberia living in peace with its neighbors. I don't want to take too much credit for it, but I think that was an element of stability at the time.

Q: Right. Very, very good. I think I read that Vice President Nixon in the 1950s visited Liberia. But the infrastructure was very bad compared to the rest of Africa, and he came back. And he said, "We have to do something about that". Maybe that was the genesis of the large assistance program. How was the infrastructure when you were there?

SWING: Well, not very good. It was very deteriorated. And most places you wanted to get to in Liberia—I mean you could get there by road, but which roads? The roads were

horrible. I never went anywhere without a four-wheel drive vehicle because thirty miles out of town, the road pretty much disappears. Very hard to get around. I had an air attaché who flew me around a lot, which was good. It was a small Beechcraft, which was perfect for flying around a country like this without long distances. We got around quite a bit in that. And we're able to take visitors around. We had a few visitors from Washington, D.C. in this period. They became interested and that helped a lot also. But not as many as I had in South Africa when, of course, someone like Mandela was released, and you had everybody wanting to come here.

Q: Very good. Were there any members of Congress that were particularly interested in Liberia?

SWING: Very much. The Congressional Black Caucus, of course, was very much interested. And Doe met with them when I took him to Washington, D.C. I don't remember names right now, but there were people like Randall Robinson from TransAfrica. People like Jesse Jackson and others who were keenly interested in this. Some of the black institutions, in Atlanta and elsewhere. Some of the universities got interested in like the black universities in Atlanta, Georgia and Tuskegee, Alabama, and places like that. But it developed over time. After I left, of course, things continued to improve overall. But lots of problems remain. He wasn't a great success story during my time.

Q: And then from there, you went back to Washington, D.C.? Do you want to talk about that next time or do you want to continue? I think that in 1985, you started working on personnel issues. You became the director of the personnel office (known as CDA).

SWING: That's right. I became director and then became deputy to the director general. We can start out there next time.

Q: Alright.

SWING: And from there I went to South Africa.

Q: It's April 21, 2021, and we are continuing our oral history interviews with Ambassador Bill Swing. So, Bill, we left you in Liberia ready to come back to the United States to start four years of working in personnel. So, was there anything else in Liberia you want to talk about?

SWING: No, I think we've more or less covered that. I think that it was a critical transitional moment. And unfortunately, the leadership that caused it to happen was really not up to the task. Frankly, it was a bunch of soldiers. And so they basically put what they call the country people, or the Liberians who never left Liberia, who overthrew the so called America Liberians who came back from the States and basically, domestically colonized the country. The fact of who was in the leadership that made it happen was unfortunate, but the transition had to happen. And it's unfortunate that President Tubman

and President Tolbert didn't themselves lead the country in that direction, because it was quite clear that ultimately, the majority of population in Liberia, the indigenous Liberians, the country people, that they had to at some point, as the majority population, be in charge of the country, in some form or another, even if it's in a coalition arrangement there. So I have spent most of my career in what I would call transitional societies. Congo, Brazzaville was a transition from a Socialist Republic, to a more democratic one. DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo] was a transition from a longtime dictator, to others who became dictators also, but who at least were trying to lead the country in a different direction. And then Liberia, obviously, the country's people came to power. Now on coming back to Washington.

Q: That was 1985 to 1989. I think.

SWING: Yes. I don't know why I was chosen. I didn't know Ambassador George Vest, I don't think he knew me. I think I had a rather good reputation as someone who had generally, always had high morale in the two embassies where I had been ambassador, the Congo and Liberia. I had a reputation for looking after the professional development of my staff. In fact, all ten of my DCMs became ambassador.

So I had that sort of reputation of being a modest person who tried to look after the professional career development of our people. And perhaps that's what interested George Vest. And I think he also was taken by my career pattern, namely, of being a real African hand, having served not only in South Africa, but having had two more posts in black Africa, the Congo and Liberia and headed toward more posts in Africa. So for whatever reason, he asked me to be his deputy, I saluted and said absolutely, of course.

At first, I went back not to be his deputy but to be the director of what was then FCA, foreign career assignments and development. And I went to that posting, frankly, actually very pleased to go there. Because I thought it was a chance to make a contribution. I think that I chaired weekly meetings. On one side of the table. We had the career development officers who represented individual officers and on the other side of the table we had a regional assignments officer who represented the bureaus. So the two of them would fight it out over this person wants to go to X country, and then the bureau maybe didn't want them. So there was a back and forth and I very much enjoyed these meetings. It was quite a struggle with the career officers representing their candidates and the bureaus wanting certain officers rather than others. So I enjoyed that and we had weekly meetings or more often as necessary. And that meant that I had a lot of contact with the bureaus because they wanted to influence me to get the kind of people that they wanted there. So it was a great assignment. I absolutely loved it.

Q: It's a pretty big office, right? What they now call CDA, career development.

SWING: Yes. It's a big office.

Q: And it covers all foreign service officers, right?

SWING: All foreign service officers, we don't do civilian staff, but all FSO's come through that office now, CDA or CEO. What's it called?

Q: Yes, CDA. And they are divided into entry level, mid-level and senior level. And then the people, the assignment officers that have large swaths of the Foreign Service to care for are called CDOs [Career Development officers]. So I wanted to ask you about the context. You started in the summer of 1985, just five years after the Foreign Service Act of 1980 had been enacted, and it changed a lot about the Foreign Service, about how we were organized. Do you want to talk a little bit about what those big changes were and how it affected your office?

SWING: Well it was controversial. A lot of officers didn't like it. It was basically closer to the military system, up or out. You had a certain period of time, in which you had to be promoted. To be tenured as a junior officer, five years. And then you had another period, I think, to be promoted in rank and a finite amount of time to be promoted to the senior foreign service. And a lot of people didn't like that, because a number of them, obviously, weren't going to make the cut. I think, frankly, the up or out system was good. We had people in the service who, for whatever reason, weren't performing to the level the department required and so it was good to have a cutoff somewhere there. And the cut off generally was, they would be selected out at a time when they were still young enough to find another career. So I think it was more like the military system, but I think it was necessary. It gave the department a lot more credibility within Washington to show that it was an up or out system, and that you had to perform or you'd be out. So I had no qualms about supervising the up or out system. And I think it worked okay. But it was controversial. We didn't have that before.

Q: Right. It was new and there were some growing pains, I think. One of the growing pains was that you go up through the level that is equivalent to Colonel, and then to get to the general rank (the senior foreign service) it was harder to get promoted. They weren't doing too much culling of numbers of people in the senior ranks. So people were going up to the O1 level and then they were getting stuck because there weren't enough vacant positions in the senior Foreign Service. So did you find that there was a lot of distress around that for those more senior people?

SWING: There was, and a number of these people who were selected out were friends of mine. Either I'd come into foreign service with them or we had served together in overseas postings. It was not an easy thing to do, and not something that you like to do. But there it was and what else could you do? And I think in the end, it probably was a good thing, the Foreign Service Act of 1980. I don't know where we stand now with up or out. But I'm sure we've moved on to even more restrictions probably.

Q: George Vest says in his oral history that when he arrived, there were two hundred Senior Foreign Service officers without jobs, so that's a lot. And that was clogging up the system for the 01s. So he said one of his tasks was to correct that. That was not fun but he did it. That work, with the evaluations and the decisions on promotion or selection, was probably in another office.

SWING: That's right. We did the assignments and the counseling. I think George Vest was probably the best supervisor, the best boss I've ever had. You know, he's a hundred and two now.

George Vest was born on Christmas Day. And he told me, he said, "You know, it was terrible as a boy, we were a poor family growing up in Virginia." He has a lot of red Indian stock in him, by the way. And so George, a very strong person, physically. Did a lot of gardening and all. And he said to me, "you know, being born on Christmas Day, which is my Christmas present? Which is my birthday present? you know, which is it?" Maybe I told you that before, but he said, one year his mother brought him home two boxes, he thought, "Oh, I'm getting two presents this time." And one was the left shoe and the other was the right shoe.

Q: No, we haven't talked about it before. It's just I know other people who have had that problem, born around that time.

SWING: He's a wonderful man. He didn't know me, he phoned me when I was ambassador in Liberia. And, said to me, he'd like me to come back and head up FCA. And of course, obviously, I saluted and said yes, and I'll be your, your humble servant. And I did that. And then we became closer together, then he got to know my work, and I got to know him better. And then he asked me to come upstairs and be his principal deputy.

And that was a wonderful opportunity for me because then I had direct access to him. The thing about the Washington assignment, I never liked to go back to Washington, but every time I did, it was really good for my career because of the range of people who get to know you and who you get to know. When you're stuck in one post in the field, you

only know those people and the people in Washington you deal with. So this was a great opportunity for me. And I was so pleased to do it.

Q: This was a time that there were lawsuits by women and minorities (underrepresented groups). This reflected a lot of concern about recruitment, promotion, retention, some of those things and a desire to change the situation. Instead of asking for reform, they were actually bringing lawsuits against the department. So can you talk a little bit about any of the involvement you might have had either in the lawsuits or in the reforms?

SWING: Well, the women, of course, took the State Department to court and won and got, I think, a fairly handsome payout financially, which was a good thing, because it forced the department to begin taking their female staff much more seriously than before.

Q: Was this the Palmer suit, or was it something else?

SWING: There's Palmer, and there was a class action suit, I don't remember exactly. But it happened about the time I arrived on the scene. And I thought it was a very good thing. Because after that, we had stricter requirements about the entry, assignment, and promotion processes. That we had to make sure that women were included fairly. I know I had an instruction from Deputy Secretary John Whitehead, who's passed on unfortunately. Whitehead told me "don't ever send me an ambassadorial list that doesn't have at least one woman and one person of color ." And I stuck to that the whole time. And we eventually got up to a fairly substantial number of women ambassadors, and I think we were supposed to be getting up to around the 50% range, I don't think we've ever gotten there. But it's pushed a lot higher than it was before. So I was under pressure to try to make sure that we increase the percentage of these –

Q: And also with deputy chiefs of mission, right?

SWING: And deputy chiefs of mission, and other assignments that would lead one to further career development, with the prospect of becoming a DCM or an ambassador. So that was a very good program. I worked hard at that, and really enjoyed it because I was personally very committed to the proposition. At the time I came back for this posting, I was the only ambassador in the world who had an African American DCM. Ted Perkins, who became director general Foreign Service.

A great ambassador and a great Director General. He unfortunately died here about a year ago. I know his daughter, our families were very close, because Sarah, and the other one whose name I've forgotten now who's actually in the State Department now. They both grew up with our children.

Q: And while you were in Washington, he was in South Africa, right?

SWING: That's right, and I succeeded him.

Q: And he was I think the first African American Ambassador to South Africa.

SWING: In South Africa, that's right. And I succeeded him then and then he succeeded me in Liberia, by the way. We bounced around a lot.

Q: What do you think the reason was that women and minorities were being held back from these positions? Was it unconscious bias, or was it conscious decisions?

SWING: I think it was unconscious bias that led to conscious decisions. I don't think anybody would admit to prejudice or bias. But that's clearly what it was. And some of these class action suits helped ensure that if you don't do the right thing, the law will make you do the right thing. I think it has helped a lot in the State Department. But we're still, as you know, everybody's struggling with the issue of how do you ensure equity for women, and African American and Hispanic Americans? The problem is still there. I've made an effort. I've had political counselors—and, four of my ten DCMs have been women. Five or six of them have been either African American or Hispanic. I don't seek any praise for that, I should have done a lot better than that. But at least I was making the effort at the time. I got good people, they were all good, and as I said, every one of them became an ambassador.

Q: And do you agree that means it's not just recruiting, it's not just assigning, it's also mentoring and professional development?

SWING: Mentoring and helping get them promoted to a level where they can be considered, all of that. It all ties in together.

Q: With African Americans, there appears to have been both recruitment problems and also retention problems. Were there any things that you all were able to do to try to mitigate some of those problems?

SWING: First of all, there has to be a sufficient intake of minority officers to have enough people to develop. So the first thing is the entry problem.

I think also mid-level entry is another way to go. If you take someone who's tried and true in another area of government or business or wherever, and bring them in at sort of

the mid-levels. That helps a bit too. And then the assignment question, getting the right assignments, you know, because if you don't get proper assignments, you're not going to be promoted. And some of the mid-level entries are not given the best assignments for that. For that development. It would be my point of view.

I think that we put a lot of things in what was then the FCA office, initiatives that we took, in terms of the meetings that I chaired, we tried to make sure that the minorities were given equal attention, at least. The list of ambassadors always included minorities, as I said, and I give John Whitehead Deputy Secretary a lot of credit for that, because he was pushing on that all the time. And I think others did as well.

Q: I think that was also done in the DCM committee. I don't know how deputy chiefs of missions were chosen previously, but it sounds like with the creation of the Deputy Chief of Mission panel process, the committee could watch over any unconscious bias among the bureaus.

SWING: I think that came after my time. I don't think I can take any credit for that at all. But it's true that in the old days, whoever the ambassador wanted, they got, which was a way of perpetuating the old boy network. So I think it's a good thing, the DCM committees are very important, I think they still give an ambassador a list of two or three right?

Q: Well it can be up to six, and the committee can actually add to the list although they don't do that that often. Ambassador Vest also talked about how he tried to develop a small section within the HR world that would watch out for African American recruits that came in at the mid-level and make sure that they got the assignments that would help them integrate into the system. I don't know if that was something you worked on.

SWING: Right. What you had to watch out for was not to put one of the minority candidates in a position where they're doomed to failure, because that simply reconfirms the bias and a stereotype that people have say, "Oh, you see black, that's why he couldn't succeed." So one needs to be very careful about that. That it is the right position.

One of the other initiatives that we took during my time in personnel was on hardship assignments. We put in a rule that if you hadn't had a hardship assignment in, I forget how many years, the last three assignments or four, that you would be considered only for hardship assignment. We got more and more people to take hardship assignments, although a couple of them resigned. They just simply said, "No, I will not go to Ouagadougou or Tunisia, and they just left the service. But we proved the point there, that hardship has to be shared. I had a whole career of hardship posts, and I never thought

they were hardship at all, I loved them. For me, the only hardship post was Washington but I had to do it. So that was, I think, a good initiative and showed people how to show their mettle a bit more. I thought that was something very worth doing.

And then a tutoring/mentoring process. It's the one that Mr. Vest talked about. That was also something that was very important. Someone takes you under their wing for a short while, at least, from whom you can learn and I think most people welcome that, you know. So that was important.

Q: Did you find when you became principal deputy secretary that it expanded your sense of how to manage?

SWING: You get a lot of pressure there. You get pressure from individual officers. You get a lot of pressure from the bureaus. "Why did I not get so and so? I had asked them to post me to this job or that and so on." But you know, it's all manageable. And George Vest, he was a wonderful man, he had his way, people would come into his office and complain saying, "why have I not become an ambassador? I'm nearing the end of my career." George would say, probably a bit softer but the message was: "Well, you know, in life, we have sheep, and we have goats. And you're a goat." He would actually say it to them that way. He commanded such respect, and people had such regard for him, he put it in a softer way than that, but that's more or less what he would say to them. Basically, go ahead and take this assignment, you're probably not going to become an ambassador this round. And I think that it's better to tell them straight like that than to mislead them and string them along you know, and George was, I think, very good at doing just that.

I loved working for him. And I was so happy when I went upstairs to be his principal DAS because I learned a lot from him. you would always know when he came in the morning, because the hallways would be filled with his whistling. He loved to whistle coming to work. Great gardener and all that.

Q: Okay. How did the ambassadorship to South Africa come about?

SWING: Well, I can tell you how it came about. I think George Vest was the driving force. He appreciated my work so much. I think the bureau's choice, the African Bureau's choice, was probably Princeton Lyman. And when they had the ambassadorial committee meeting, George Vest just simply argued and said, "No, Bill Swing is the person to do this job. He started his career there. He's an African hand. He's been all over black Africa. This is a critical moment. Mr. Mandela is still in prison. He was there when Mandela went to prison. And I think he's the man for the job." And he held the day. And then of course, Princeton, who's a great friend of mine, Princeton succeeded me there. He had

hoped to go to South Africa that year, in 1989. But he had to wait his time. And I think he went as ambassador to Nigeria or to Kenya, I've forgotten which, and then he did succeed me immediately when I left.

So I had the chance to be there at the historical moment of Mr. Mandela's release, and I'm probably the only living diplomat who was on his first assignment in South Africa, when Mandela was arrested and sent to Robben Island. And who came back 27 years later, as ambassador to welcome him back to freedom.

And I don't know if I told you, but I had a phone call from the White House, saying that President Bush, George H.W. Bush, wants to be the first head of state to speak to Mr. Mandela. Could you arrange that Mr. Ambassador? And I was flummoxed. What do I do to make that happen? You know, I said I'll try. And so I call my neighbor and friend, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and he was usually friendly but he said in a gruff voice "I'll tell you, but don't you tell anyone else, he staying with me." And I gave the While House Tutu's phone number right away. And that's how George H.W. Bush was the first president to speak to him and the first president to receive him, on a visit abroad.

Q: This is a really important period of history. So if you don't mind, we're going to dig in a little bit. We'll start from the beginning. So when you went, this was in the George Bush administration and the Secretary of State was Baker, right?

SWING: It was Baker, yes.

Q: Right. And then the Assistant Secretary of the bureau at this point was no longer Crocker.

SWING: I think it was Hank Cohen.

Q: And you mentioned that you knew before going out to South Africa, that apartheid was on its way out, because you had made that promise to yourself that you wouldn't go back until it was abolished. So how did you know that? What did we know then? What was happening in South Africa that we knew that this was going to happen?

SWING: It wasn't just what was happening in South Africa, it was what was happening in the region and the world. You had the Portuguese withdrawal from Angola and Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. You had the independence of those countries and you had the independence of Namibia.

Q: And South Africa was controlling Namibia.

SWING: That's right. South West Africa.

Q: And so the South African government finally decided to go ahead and let them become independent.

SWING: Well, the South Africa regime was under great pressure in the late 1980s. Angola and Mozambique had just become independent. You had the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. You had the growing European Union, Portuguese withdrawal from its colonies in Africa, you had a lot of things going on there that helped awaken a sense that maybe apartheid needs to come to an end. And, of course, the real key to it all was Nelson Mandela's release. And once he was released, then the other prisoners came out: Walter Sisulu and Thabo Mbeki, and all the others. Then it was quite clear that things were about to change.

I give a lot of credit to F.W. De Klerk. Why do I say that? De Klerk was a member, as all Afrikaners were, of what they call the Dutch Reformed Church. But he was from the most conservative wing of the church. They were called doppers. And they're the sort of people if you turn them in the right direction, they will go. I was the first ambassador to present credentials to him, because he had just been elected.

Q: So this is 1989. And you arrived in August? I think.

SWING: That's right.

Q: And in previous years, he had been the Minister of Education. Right?

SWING: That's right.

Q: And then in February of 1989, I believe he became head of the party, was the elected head.

SWING: Head of the party. And then I think in August, about the time I arrived there, he became the State President.

Q: Right, which is what they called the president of the country?

SWING: That's right.

Q: Okay. And the previous president for many years had been?

SWING: P.W. Botha. He was elderly and ill. He had come in after Hendrik Verwoerd was assassinated right before I left in 1966. I had a whole series of things like that happen in my Africa postings. P.W. Botha, had been around for a long time. And then this fellow F.W. De Klerk comes along. He's in his mid-50s at that point, as was I, and I think I'm three or four years older than he is. He's about 83. I checked him today. And so he became the president. And I became the first ambassador to present credentials to him.

Q: So when an ambassador comes in and presents credentials, usually they'll go first to the foreign minister, I think and then there's quite a ceremony where you go to the head of state, but in both cases, there's time for a chat, right?

SWING: For certain, and the foreign minister was Pik Botha which means pikkewyn which is penguin in Afrikaans, and he had that reputation. His back is very bad. He stoops over a lot and so they called him Pikkewyn, Pik for short. I had a long meeting with him. And he talked to me about the visits that F.W. De Klerk had already made to other African heads of state. And that was very interesting for me to get that take from him. And it was clear that here was a man, F.W. De Klerk, who was going to be interested in other African countries, which is already a change from what we've had before where South Africans were kind of isolated from the rest of Africa. So when I got to see F.W. De Klerk, they had this whole costume tradition. I just took out a photo to show my wife the other day, with top hat and tails.

Q: Both of you were wearing them?

SWING: Both of us were.

Q: And did you go in a carriage or in a car?

SWING: No, we went in a government car there and got out with troops lined up and all of that whole thing. And De Klerk clearly was very uncomfortable with all of this. And as we sat around drinking tea after this, he said to me, "Mr. Ambassador, you are the last ambassador who will be received like this." And in fact, they held up the credential ceremony for several ambassadors, until he could change the whole protocol. He was fed up with it. The night before I was going through this thing, where I put on my top hat, what I do with my gloves, rather than thinking about what I'm going to say to the man.

Q: De Klerk had a vision, right? Because changing the country to be in the right direction was a really big job. Can you talk a little bit about what his vision was?

SWING: Well, he is a pragmatist. His brother, Wimpie De Klerk, who was a professor and a PhD and all of that; a scholar, a writer of books and so on. He wrote a biography of F.W. De Klerk that came out right after De Klerk became president. And in the book, I may have mentioned this before. He said that F.W., his brother F.W. De Klerk had a Damascus Road conversion.

F.W. was furious. He said, "I didn't have a Damascus Road conversion. I'm a Christian, it's not that. What I discovered was the billions that it's costing us to circumvent the sanctions. With that money, we could educate every black in Soweto." So as an economist, he saw things very pragmatically. He believe that apartheid, while it may have served a purpose at some time, was costing too much now. He said "and it's also costing us politically, we're not in the UN. We're not in the African Union. And so we need to get rid of this." Now, he never ever said it was wrong. He never apologized for it. He simply said, "it doesn't work anymore." That's the kind of pragmatist he was. And I have to say that I was so pleased that both Mandela and De Klerk got the Nobel Prize. They deserve it together. It couldn't have happened with just one of them, there would have been much more bloodshed.

Q: So Mandela had been moved from Robben Island to a house arrest at some point?

SWING: Rural Paarl was where he's held.

Q: And there were a lot of meetings going on, about what the future could look like, right? And this was happening for another six months after you got there.

SWING: Yeah, they were preparing the terrain for Mandela's release, everybody knew he's going to be released at some point. But they wanted to make sure that it was done with as little damage to the country as possible. And with the best prospects for some kind of a negotiated solution, which they carefully prepared, to give them a lot of credit for it. Mandela was sort of in and out of this confinement area for negotiating sessions, even before he was released, and everybody knew it was going to happen but not when exactly. And I knew a journalist who was well connected and who told me that I will phone you before he's released, so that you will know. Sure enough, I was playing tennis on the weekend and I got a call about three o'clock in the afternoon. I didn't play any more tennis for months after that, because I knew this is it, he's coming out.

Q: Going back to August-September '89, De Klerk, one thing he could do without negotiating was to start moving the government away from apartheid policies. They had to change laws. Do you remember some of the many restrictions that made up apartheid that they were able to change in that period?

SWING: Well, they had all sorts of things like the Group Areas Act, which restricted you if you were living in the Eastern Cape, there's no way you could move to Cape Town in the Western Cape. They had a Population Act that kept you basically where you were. They had the Bantustan policy which had created these seven or eight Bantustans throughout the country, Transkei, Ciskei, Venda, all over the place. At that time they had this idea that they could fence the Africans, the black Africans, off into these Bantustans and then they, the whites, could go on enjoying the rest of the country, which was a ridiculous idea from the beginning. But it only occurred to them later that this is not going to work. And most of the leaders like Mandela and the Mbeki's and Walter Sisulu and all these other people from the African National Congress. Almost all of them were from the Transkei and the Ciskei, or Venda or Bophuthatswana. The current president was a Vendi from the Venda Bantustan. My first assignment, 1963 to 1966, was next door to the Transkei, the Ciskei in the Eastern Cape. And so I covered all of that, at that time. It was very real to me, when I came back there, to see that this is a policy that was going to now be abandoned, it had to be. So they had a sense that this was the end of apartheid. So they began moving already, getting rid of some of the worst legislation and beginning—

Q: Having to have a pass in order to enter a city?

SWING: That's right. So you can move around more freely and all that. So that all began to happen before Mandela actually came out. And then of course, that whole thing blossomed after that. And keep in mind that once he was out, everybody wanted to come to South Africa, see Mandela, get a glimpse of him, get a handshake, get an autograph, get a photo. And I mean, we had so many people, movie stars, Whoopi Goldberg, Paul Simon the musician, you had Randall Robinson brought out, Jesse Jackson, and all kinds of people. Everybody wanted to come see Mandela. So that itself began to open up South Africa. We began to look at the elimination of the cultural boycott, the sports boycott, all of that. In Washington, they began looking at how do we begin to lift sanctions? And of course, the Congressional Black Caucus was very reluctant. They were saying "No, no, we have to see more change first." And I think they were right, to a large extent, because it was too soon to start lifting all this. And we did it in the end very, very gradually. I remember giving a reception for Whoopi Goldberg in the garden of our residence in Pretoria, and I invited about 500 people; I think about 800 showed up.

Q: Just a small detail, South Africa is one of those countries that moves its capital every six months back and forth. Is that right?

SWING: Yes. Between Pretoria and Cape Town. They moved to Cape Town around Christmas time. Which is more or less summer there. And they stay until the following May or June, something like that. They really follow the best weather patterns because Cape Town's wintertime is not very pleasant.

Q: And the embassy too, we move with them?

SWING: Not the whole embassy. We have a Consulate General in Cape Town. And they have a section reserved for the ambassador and I used to take about eight people with me and would leave the rest of them in Pretoria because there is still a lot of work to be done there. And I didn't need more than that there in Cape Town. And of course, the Consul General was always pleased when we would leave, sorry to see us come, because it complicates his or her life. But they've changed that now, I don't think they move to Cape Town anymore.

Q: And so I think Mandela was released in early 1990, something like that. But at that point, the negotiations were starting to really form in a more formal way over what the new government would look like. Were you involved?

SWING: No, we really didn't get involved. I think he was released on February 11, 1990. And they began almost immediately to form a negotiations commission. And the negotiations took place at the World Trade Center, which is out near the airport in Johannesburg. We would be invited over there. We could sort of talk to them, if they were having a coffee break, we could then buttonhole some of them and talk to them and try to get some idea of how it was going. There was a big opening, obviously, we were all invited for the big show, when it started. But then it was all pretty much private, sealed off from us. But we had a pretty good idea of how it was going, you know.

And one story I want to mention to you, perhaps I told you before, but during one of the pauses when they were having a tea or coffee break, I saw Mr. Mandela go over to the bar where they were serving soft drinks and so on. And he put his hands on the shoulder of a guy and they talked and shook hands and laughed after that. And it was one of his former jailers. That's the kind of man he was, who believed in reconciliation, forgiveness, and moving ahead and bearing no malice.

Q: Reconciliation was a really big part of how De Klerk was able to move forward with the white South Africans, because there would have been a lot of fear of retribution. What were they putting in place in order to limit retribution? Political scientists and sociologists say you do need some reckoning if people have been abused and mistreated for many years like this; to just ignore it is often more detrimental to the stability of the

country later. But at the same time, they needed to have the whole country agree on how to go forward without bloodshed afterwards. What did they put in place to be able to achieve reconciliation?

SWING: Well, they had the negotiations commission to start with, and then later they had the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was about the time I was leaving. And that was basically Archbishop Tutu. Now, the great contribution of De Klerk, people don't realize or don't give him enough credit for, was that he faced enormous resistance from the Afrikaner community, a very conservative crowd. And they saw him basically as a traitor. He really had to bring them along. They had very conservative voices there, constantly trying to undermine him. The interesting dynamic here was how Mandela and De Klerk helped one another. When Mandela would be seen by the black community as moving too slowly. De Klerk found a way to cut him some slack. And when De Klerk was in trouble with the Afrikaner community, the very conservative crowd, Mandela would find a way to cut him some slack and to help him either by what he said or what they did and so on. But the dynamic between those two was really quite remarkable. They never became friends, and they never would. But they were practical men who recognized they needed one another. And they had to help one another with each other's constituency, or it wasn't going to work, to succeed.

Q: They must have trusted each other a lot because, from my reading, we, the U.S. government, was asking to be part of it, to mediate it. Usually, countries jump at that but in this case, they said no, this has to be a South African solution. Is that right?

SWING: They didn't want any part of it, and I think they were right in the end. It shouldn't be something brokered by a foreign power. You let these two groups do it together. It's their country and they were looking ahead. They were already looking ahead at things like the economy, the debt profile, and how a negotiated settlement would bring more investment in. Because De Klerk was really distraught when he opened up the books, and saw the amount of money it was costing to circumvent the sanctions, the amount of debt they had incurred and all that. He was, I think, so taken by that basically he said, "we're in trouble. We've got to do something about apartheid." So I'm glad that the two of them were recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize.

Q: Were there other key negotiators? On both sides?

SWING: Yes, there were. The whole ANC, African National Congress, a whole range of people there. I just made a list the other day. As I was thinking about our talk here, names that I had kind of forgotten. I'll see if I can find them now. But a whole bunch. You had the Mbeki's, of course. You had Walter Sisulu.

Q: And the Mbekis and Walter Sisulu. Were they in prison with Mandela?

SWING: Well, Thabo Mbeki was not because he fled the country. And he was in London; he was in Zambia and various other places. But you had Oliver Tambo, who was the head of the ANC, he became desperately ill. Walter and Albertina Sisulu, you had Young Turks like a guy named Terra Lakota. He's named Terra because of his antics on the soccer pitch. You had Kathrada, Popo Molefe.

And then you had a lot of white South Africans who were helping the ANC. And I have to give a lot of credit, most of them were Jewish, Zachary De Beer, you had Tertius Myburgh, a number of them there. This was mostly the Johannesburg Jewish community. They were very strong supporters of the ANC. So they have a lot of white support there. You had the Oppenheimers. You had a hero of mine, a woman named Helen Suzman, who's dead now unfortunately. And they finally brought around some of the leading Afrikaners. They had Anton Rupert who owned so many things, not only in the tobacco field, but he, I think, was a very rich man. You had Julian Ogilvie Thompson from Anglo American. So eventually the whole CEO/economic crowd came around to support the negotiations. And that helped a lot.

Q: Were they negotiating what the constitution would look like and what the government would look like?

SWING: Constitution, transitional arrangements, because they couldn't immediately go to a Mandela government. It was kind of a joint government there for quite a while. And then Mandela didn't go for a second term. He only did the one term. And then keep in mind too, that not all of the black African community supported Mandela. He had competitors like Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the Inkatha Freedom Party from the Natal, which is a different ethnic group, the Zulus as opposed to Mandela's group, which is Xhosa from the Eastern Cape. So there were rivalries within the black community, not everybody was thrilled with his release.

Q: Were the Zulus and others part of the negotiations? I think that I read that Buthezeli was an original founder of the ANC but that he felt he was being marginalized.

SWING: He broke away because he was basically like a Zulu King, and he was so ethnically restricted because of being the head of the Zulu ethnic group. I don't remember because I left before the negotiation started. I think they brought them in, or they found a way to keep them informed. Because they had to include them. Otherwise, it wouldn't have worked.

Q: So you were there for about 18 months of these negotiations, I think?

SWING: I was there from 1989 to 1992. I left in the summer of 92. There was one more massacre that happened while I was still there, I went with Archbishop Tutu, down to where this whole thing happened.

Q: What was that, what caused that massacre?

SWING: It was, again, problems between two black groups. I left right after that. That was my last thing, a sad note to leave on.

Q: But the black on black violence was part of the reason sometimes things slowed down.

SWING: Or the transition, yes. There was a good deal of violence. People feared a lot more violence than actually occurred. And I give a lot of credit to Mandela and others for keeping it within bounds, because there was some fighting between and among the black groups and some between black and some of the white groups. So quite a bit of violence in that period. But it was contained.

Q: Did things break down at any point during your time?

SWING: Not totally, no. Maybe I was naive, but I never feared any ultimate breakdown, nor massive violence. As I said, all South Africans, they all love their country. It's a beautiful, wonderful country. And so I felt that they would in the end, maybe I was naive, that there would not be the kind of massive violence that would make the system, the negotiations break down. And in fact, they didn't ultimately break down, but there was a lot of life lost in this whole period of transition.

Q: Tell me about Helen Suzman. Why was she a hero of yours?

SWING: Helen Suzman was the only white woman who was a member of the Parliament. And she was almost a spokesperson for black Africans. And she had access to Mandela. I got President Bush to write a letter to Mandela before I left for my assignment and I got it to Mandela through Helen Suzman. She had a way of getting things to him and she could visit him, and she did. And she's just a wonderful person. Jewish, very committed and outspoken. The most outspoken person in the entire parliament. You might want to look her up at some point. Marvelous lady. I remember meeting the British ambassador for dinner one evening, I sat next to Helen. And she drank scotch whiskey through the whole dinner, no wine.

Q: How about Desmond Tutu, tell us about him.

SWING: Well, Desmond Tutu, I have great admiration for him. By the way, he'll be turning 90 on the seventh of October. I'm trying to find a way to get a message to him at that time. He's had a lot of health problems recently. Desmond Tutu had refused to receive both of my immediate predecessors Ed Perkins and a fellow named Nickel. He refused to receive either one of them. But by the time I got there, he needed the western ambassadors. And so—

Q: Why did he need you?

SWING: Because he had something going on in Cape Town and Johannesburg called the defiance campaign. And he was trying to come up with an across the board congressional type meeting to bring all the various opponents of apartheid together. And he needed our support for both of those. So he received me and the French and the British, and a couple other nationalities. He had to see us. He was my neighbor. I lived only about five houses away from him in Cape Town. He was a good friend, and I became very close to him after that. I had enormous admiration for him.

Q: Did he have the same vision as Mandela and De Klerk?

SWING: Absolutely. He was very close to Mandela, as I mentioned to you, Mandela spent his first night in freedom with Tutu. Hank Cohen, my assistant secretary at the time, came out for a visit. And Hank and I went to see Tutu at his residence. He said, "Let's start with a word of prayer." He prayed in the language of Sesotho, his language. And he turns to us both and he said, "Don't worry, there's something in there for all of us."

He was extremely important in the negotiations. He led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission afterwards, which was not so much designed to point the finger or to place blame, as to try to give people some sense of justice and equity. I think he did a fabulous job, even though I was gone after that. I followed it, somewhat and he was the right one to have done that. He's not been in good health. He has a very close relationship with Atlanta, with Emory University, and with Tuskegee in Alabama. Very close to another historically black university in Atlanta, forgotten it now. He's very close to them, spent a lot of time in Atlanta, but he's not been well.

Q: The transitional government, De Klerk's idea, was that there'll be a unity government, but the white, South Africans would control it. Of course, that was controversial, I would think with the ANC. How did the transitional government work out, do you remember?

SWING: I was gone by that time, but what they did was a true transitional government, as far as I know, with De Klerk and Mandela. That paved the way for an election.

Q: Which then was just one man, one vote.

SWING: Yeah. And of course, then you had the Mandela government. He stayed on for only one term. And I think after that it was Thabo Mbeki. Thabo was not really Mandela's choice. He wanted the current president Cyril Ramaphosa, but because Ramaphosa was from one of the Bantustans in a minority ethnic group called the Venda, he wasn't acceptable. So he supported Thabo Mbeki from the largest black African ethnic group the Xhosas

Q: A lot of the leadership of the ANC during that time had been either in jail or in exile. Is that right?

SWING: That's right.

Q: So how did the Young Turks deal with that? The people who felt like they had been fighting and pleading for the cause all that time?

SWING: They came back one by one. Thabo was in exile. I'm trying to think about how it worked out. As they began to release prisoners like Sisulu and Mandela, the ones from exile began coming back. Joe Slovo, who is a white man, but he was head of the Communist Party. He came back. One by one they trickled in, and were accepted and allowed because otherwise there would have been trouble. So I think in the end, it worked out fine. I'm just looking over the list of people, there are others who came back, who were a long time either in prison or in exile. A good friend of mine, Donald Woods, who had been the editor of the East London Daily Dispatch, he had to flee at one point because his paper was so anti-apartheid. He came back while I was still Ambassador there, and we had a great talk and it was the first time he'd been back in about 15 years, something like that.

Q: Is that the person that Kevin Kline played in the movie about Biko?

SWING: Yeah. Donald, unfortunately, he died about two or three years ago. And his wife Wendy Woods, I looked her up the other day, she's also passed away. It's sad. But, they had very reluctantly left East London, no choice.

Q: I saw one comment in something I read that, because Mandela and the others went to jail during the 1960s, much of black South Africa leadership had a very socialist or even communist outlook on life. At least in Washington, they even termed them as being in a time warp and they were trying to give them visits to the United States, or to Europe to see how capitalism and democracy were working in other countries. Were you involved in that?

SWING: No, but I think that's exactly right. We need to keep in mind that he went to Robben Island and was there for 27 years. That's a different world that he came back into, things had changed. And there was concern in Washington about who he might rely on, now that he was out of jail. A lot of the government leaders who supported the ANC in the dark years were people who the United States didn't approve of, Algeria and other places like that. Mandela started visiting all of his old friends and these are not friends of the United States. So there was some concern about that, I think, an undue concern, but they wanted to make sure that the ANC leaders caught up quickly with what had happened in the world. The Cold War was over. Capitalism was no longer as dirty a word as it once was at the time they went to prison. I remember when Secretary Baker came there, one time after one of his meetings with some of these people who'd just come out of prison. He came out sort of shaking his head saying "boy, where are they coming from?" and not realizing that's what happens when you're locked away for all those years, time moves on.

Q: Yes, for sure. The grace and the wisdom that was shown in this whole process was tremendous.

SWING: The lessons you learn from someone like Mandela is that there are no eternal enemies. Forgiveness is not a sin and that reconciliation is possible, negotiations are possible, all of these things. The amazing thing about Mandela to me was that he really didn't bear any malice toward anyone, as far as I know. When he came to the States, I brought him down from seeing Secretary Baker. I think I told you this maybe, I could hardly get him off of the elevators at the State Department. I've never seen such mobs before. You had this Anacostia Choir singing Nkosi Sikelela, God bless Africa, the ANC song. Everywhere he went, people wanted to get a glimpse of him.

Q: How did that happen that he was so well known? Was it his wife, Winnie, that kept his fame and his name known, at the beginning? He was locked away a long time, and at the beginning he had no ability to get messages out.

SWING: No, the ANC kept the whole thing alive, and the world. Most governments kept insisting with the South Africans, who they didn't like anyway because of apartheid, that

Mandela has to be freed and he became the symbol of inequality, of repression. Obviously, when he came out, he had some outdated ideas, and some people were put off by that, and so forth. But he quickly brought himself up to speed again. I think just the incredible interest in the man, after all those years, everybody wanted to see him. He was complaining about how much security he had in the United States, but he had to be protected.

Q: Did you spend much time with him as Ambassador? Or was he too busy?

SWING: A lot of time. Initially, the ANC was very protective of Mandela. So, I called Winnie and Winnie would set up my meetings, because the ANC wasn't willing to. I would go to his house in Soweto, so a lot then. He came to receptions at my residence, a number of receptions, particularly when I had a dignitary there. He came to the Whoopi Goldberg thing. When Secretary Baker came, he also came for that, he and Tutu and Walter Sisulu and a number of the others who had been released from prison. They all came because I had built up a reputation among the ANC and the black community in general that I was very opposed to apartheid. They knew that. I went regularly to church services in Soweto. Every Sunday, I'd go to a different black church, show my face. I'm a Christian, I'm a worshiper, so I went, there wasn't anything to show off about it. But I wanted to show some sympathy for them. That I'm a person who—I go to funerals, there were many funerals. A lot of the funerals became political rallies. So I went to a lot of those. I didn't neglect the government either. They knew what I was doing, but I spent more time with the blacks than with the whites.

Q: Were there other issues that Washington was asking you to get done? Namibia was already independent when you arrived. But were there some negotiations on something nuclear during your time?

SWING: There was a question of whether South Africa was developing a nuclear capacity. I don't remember exactly how that came out. But in the end, we were able to talk to them and get them to draw back a bit on that, so that they signed the non-proliferation treaty, as I recall. There were things like that. Our policy varied over the years, but in the end it came out, right. I think the policies, and the Reagan years got in a good deal of difficulty there. The whole question of constructive engagement that they didn't like, but they eventually came right, under George H.W. Bush, who had reviewed the policy and I think came up with a very good policy after that. It gave us a lot more credibility, not only in South Africa, but throughout Africa.

Q: The Black Caucus in Congress had been very dedicated to this cause. Who were some of the congressmen that used to come visit you?

SWING: They were very vocal. Everybody wanted to come once Mandela was out, the Congressional Black Caucus came out or any number of them any number of times because everybody wanted to see Mandela. One of the biggest groups was the one led by Randall Robinson of Trans Africa. He came out with a very large group. Robinson, Quincy Jones. Arthur Ashe, the tennis player. The whole range of people, Jesse.

Now we had a little bit of a problem with Jesse Jackson, because he was there when Mandela was released. He wanted to come back and sort of set himself up as Mandela's spokesperson. You can imagine that the White House and the State Department really didn't want that. They wanted Mandela to speak for himself and to choose his own spokesperson. So that caused a bit of a problem there. I gave a reception for Jesse Jackson and it fell on the day that Mandela was released. So we had probably five or six hundred guests who came into my Cape Town residence. But neither Jesse Jackson nor I were there because of Mandela's release, and so at the end of the reception, we both appeared and talked to the guests and so on. But the next day, Jesse Jackson was supposed to go to Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, for a big reception they were giving for him in his honor. Instead of going to the reception, he flew to Johannesburg because he knew that Mandela was going there and he wanted to stay with him.

Q: You had a good team, right? Here, you had a large embassy and a good team, the experience –

SWING: I really had a great team there. I did.

Q: Who was your DCM, do you remember?

SWING: The DCM was a very fine lady named Genta Hawkins Holmes, and Genta, after that, became ambassador to Namibia, and she became director general of the Foreign Service, and then she became ambassador to Australia, a wonderful person. She helped me enormously. She was there already when I got there. She did a great job and kept her cool throughout and kept me from getting too nervous. Really. When she left, I had another DCM, Marshall McCauley from Tennessee. I had two really terrific DCM the whole time.

Q: Did all the agencies listen to you? USIS was separate, USAID was separate. Did they take your leadership?

SWING: We had seven or eight agencies. Department of Justice had people there, USAID, USIS, as you mentioned. We had Peace Corps, we had a number of others here.

And my approach to them was very simple. I simply said to them, "you know your business better than I do. I'm not going to try to micromanage you. All I would ask is that you try to keep me informed. Stick to the guidelines of our policy, and don't be making independent policy and I will support you." That's what I needed.

Q: I think we're most of the way done.

SWING: A great team in South Africa. Both of my DCMs, my economic counselor, and my political counselor, all became ambassadors and the Consul General in Johannesburg. So they did very well. I did well by them.

Q: Very good. Was it disappointing to leave before it was all done?

SWING: It was, but the wisdom in the Foreign Service says that it's always best to leave when you don't want to leave and it's a bad sign if you can't wait to leave.

Q: Well, I think we wore your voice out today. You had been there three years and the department had put you up for another position?

SWING: Yeah, it's interesting. I was watching. I was in very close contact with all the ambassadors, but particularly British and the Germans. The British ambassador, now Sir Robin Renwick. He got Washington. The German ambassador was assigned to Washington as ambassador. And then, well, boy. Let's see what I'm going to get... Nigeria.

Q: Were you disappointed?

SWING: No, I'm an African hand. I was glad, Nigeria is the largest, largest population, the largest economy in Africa now. I was happy to go there. Took it on, and worked out fine.

Q: Well then, why don't we pick up with Nigeria or anything else you might want to add about South Africa next time.

SWING: We might want to go back to South Africa a little bit next time, but then Nigeria, I'll prepare for that too.

Q: Good morning. It is April 28, 2021. Bill, you were leaving South Africa when we left you and the year was 1992. I wanted to see if you wanted to talk a little bit about anything else that we had left out, or your hopes for the future for South Africa.

SWING: Thank you very much. I'm not one of those people who ever thought that South Africa would end in a racial war, violence, or whatever. There was a lot of violence, but it was never so out of control that one would lose hope. Why do I say that? First of all, it's a fabulous country, one of the most beautiful countries in the world. My sense was that all South Africans love South Africa, whatever their background, ethnicity, or religion was, and that they were going somehow to make it work. Also, my spirits were buoyed by having both Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk, and a lot of other people on both sides, blacks and whites, who love the country so much they're going to try to make it succeed. So, I always had this dream that South Africa would become a fully functioning, nonracial, multiethnic democracy, and then join a small elite group of countries around the world, not only in Africa, but elsewhere, who belong to that group. I thought it was going to be one of those countries that had the economic potential to give it a great future.

In many ways, and I talked to Thabo Mbeki a number of times about this, I always thought that it was going to help show the way for a number of other African countries. Indeed, today, Southern Africa remains to be the most democratic part of this vast continent. You know the U.S. will fit into Africa three times, it's a huge continent. Virtually every country there is a democracy or heading toward it. So, my vision was that here was a country that would realize both its economic and its political potential and show the way for many other countries in Africa and around the world.

The circumstances were so good. Globally, you had the fall of the Berlin Wall; you had the Portuguese departure from its colonies in Africa; you had the talks between South Africa and Mozambique to regulate their relationship; and you had both Namibia and Angola becoming independent. So, the stage was set. I was confident, therefore, that South Africa would profit from those circumstances. I had a sense that it was going to escape this very sterile debate between communism and capitalism. And indeed, they did. Although I know that, initially, Mr. Mandela was somewhat criticized because he still had leanings toward a non-capitalist world, because these were some of the people who supported him when nobody else would, including countries like Algeria. So, I guess that's what I was saying. I was always encouraged. I never got down, and I never worried about a bloodbath because I served there earlier during the dark days of apartheid. My sense was here, finally, geographically, globally, and recently, we have an opportunity. So that was kind of what I would like to sort of wrap up on for South Africa.

As I mentioned to you earlier, I think I was able to hook up a phone call between President George H.W. Bush and Nelson Mandela. I was so pleased that meeting happened. The first country he visited, other than Namibia after its independence, was the U.S. in June of 1990.

Q: That was a very important visit, right? He was still a private citizen.

SWING: Exactly. I mean the government—F.W. de Klerk and his foreign minister—were very unhappy with Washington. They said, "Look, I'm president of the country. Why should I not go first? And I said, "Well, President Bush says that you have the power, but

Mandela has the people, and he should come first." They accepted it, eventually. They weren't happy.

Q: Just two last questions on this: What could Mandela and De Klerk deliver to the young people? Very often in Latin America, we talk about how democracy has to deliver the goods and has to really make people's lives better, otherwise, it's an empty promise. So, what kinds of things could they do to bring in the people that had grown up in so much poverty and strife?

SWING: Well, I think, first of all, they were so thrilled at the liberation of Mandela. That counted for a lot. They set up pretty much right away a national negotiations committee. They began talking about what the future could and should look like. I think that helped a great deal. And then, they began making some changes. Mandela had his home in Soweto until he moved to one of the more affluent Johannesburg suburbs. But having him there was the important thing. He couldn't deliver immediately. In fact, the African National Congress (ANC), which he led, basically was heavily criticized, even after Mandela became president, for not delivering as much as the people had hoped, and as the ANC had promised. Even to this day, it is still a weakness for the ANC that they haven't done as much as they had said they would do, because there's a lot of catching up there. But they began putting more money into the interests of Soweto and the other so-called townships, and things began getting better. There were more job creation programs to help people, at least, to have a means of living even then a great life. Little by little, they could see it happening.

Q: Okay. Final question because I'm a big movie buff and the movie Invictus really touched me. Although you were no longer ambassador, how important was the symbolism of the 1995 Rugby World Cup which was held in South Africa?

SWING: It was enormously important. Here was Mandela with a more or less all white team, welcoming them back and congratulating them. And of course, then they began taking more and more blacks onto the team, but it was an extremely important symbol to the whole nation, and particularly to the whites. It showed that here's a man who is humane, he's not going to lead us into ethnic strife. You know, the blacks will take over as the majority, but it will be in our own joint interest, et cetera. I think it was a great symbol at the time and the timing was, of course, excellent. It gave us a view of the good sense Mandela had for politics. He was a master politician. I never met anyone quite like him.

Q: All right, that's a good place to end on South Africa. So, they called and asked you to go to Nigeria?

SWING: Yes.

Q: Did you go directly? Well, you had to go home for the confirmation hearings, right?

SWING: Yeah, all of that. But look, at the conclusion of my Mandela era, South African assignment, I was, as you say, assigned as American ambassador to Nigeria. Now, I had mixed feelings. I was both surprised, and ultimately pleased. The surprise came because here we were at one of the most critical moments in African history. Mandela's liberation changed the face of Africa. And I watched, you know, how the other Ambassadors from other countries went to major posts and I was named to Nigeria. Obviously, I was disappointed. Yet, over time, I came around saying, "Well, this is because I'm identified as an African hand and African specialist." I then began seeing the importance of Nigeria on the continent, and that it was going to grow even more. Today, Nigeria has the largest population. When I went there in 1992, Nigeria's population was sixty million; today it is 201 million.

Q: Wow.

SWING: It has the largest population in Africa, and it has now overtaken South Africa as the most important economy, not just for oil, but other kinds of investments and so on. So, as I got into it, I realized that, in fact, it was an opportunity. Since I'm identified as an African hand, this is probably the next most important place I could go, either Nigeria, or possibly Kenya. I was pleased, in the end, to be going to one of Africa's two or three most important countries. Today, as I say, it has the largest economy and population, and remains to be one of the largest contributors of troops and police to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions.

Q: Really?

SWING: I've led two of them—the largest ever in the Congo, and one of the smallest in Western Sahara. I had Nigerian troops in both countries, and they were excellent. So, you know, in the end it was a good thing. As you know, I only stayed there one year for reasons that I will explain.

It had a series of military coups, and it was only in 2015 that a Nigerian president was not reelected, so that's the beginning of democracy. In the end, the British did the right thing in encouraging the country to remain as one during independence. One of your questions was whether they should have put these four ethnic groups together, four parts of the country together. Look, it's so much better than having a bunch of chopped up little countries that are hardly viable. I think Nigeria has made it work. It is heavily divided: north is Muslim, and the south is Christian. You have great ethnic divisions and language divisions. They talk like several hundred languages, but three or four principal ones. In the end, I was quite pleased to go there.

Now, what happened was that we have a lot of interest there. We had oil, a big interest. We had an interest in stability and the role that Nigeria could play in the region and in all of Africa. We had regional concerns there with their neighbors. Now, what happened was that I was coming back from a meeting that I had with the British ambassador, and while in my car, I got a call from African Assistant Secretary George Moose. George called me just to say, "I hope you're sitting down because it was the beginning of the Clinton

administration. President Clinton has just named a political appointee to replace you." I sort of gulped and thought okay. Ironically, he was a man named Walter Carrington. Carrington was very active in African Americans circles, an intellectual. In fact, ironically, I had been to his wedding at Howard University, because he married one of my former Fulbright professors when I was ambassador to Liberia. So, I went to his wedding, and that is the way it went. He had been briefly ambassador to Senegal under the Carter administration for three months, and administrations changed, and he was asked to leave. I knew Walter and I liked him. But I thought, now, what do I do? You know what I did? I phoned Richard Holbrooke, who was going as ambassador to Germany—

Q: Okay.

SWING: He is a very sharp guy, and I like him a lot. I got along very well with him over the years. He helped me a lot in the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) for example. And I called Mr. Holbrook. I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I wanted to put my name in the running to be your Deputy Chief of Mission." And he said to me, "Why in the world would a three-time ambassador ask to be my DCM? I said, "It's very simple. I need a job. In addition, I think I have something to contribute because I went to university in Germany, I speak German. I know German, and I have German roots. My first wife was German, and my son speaks German." I said, "For a lot of reasons, I would like to come as your DCM." In the end, it didn't happen. Luckily, what happened was that my former DCM, a wonderful lady, Genta Hawkins Holmes, had become director general. (Actually, I made a big mistake a year before because I had a chance to be director general, and I went to Nigeria instead, which was not very smart on my part). But anyway, she saved me at the time. We had just signed the Governors Island Agreement in June of 1993.

Q: What was the Governors Island Agreement?

SWING: It was an agreement provided for the return of President Aristide to Haiti and the ouster of the military coup leaders. At the time, it had just been signed, so she thought of me, and I was so grateful. I came back and then went to Haiti, so that's how that came about.

Q: On the time frame, so you arrived in Nigeria in the summer of 1992? And then you got this phone call around March or April?

SWING: Somewhere like that. I think I left in probably June or July.

Q: Okay.

SWING: It was actually just exactly one year, as I recall. Now, I had put in place a lot of things there. I had started moving the embassy from Lagos to the new capital in Abuja.

Q: What was Abuja like?

SWING: At the time, it almost didn't exist. It was a village.

Q: It was like creating Brasilia in Brazil, right?

SWING: A very good analogy. It was very close to Kaduna. Of course, the residents of Kaduna were upset because why didn't they choose Kaduna? We are a big city, you know, the second largest city. Instead, you went to Abuja. Now, today, Abuja is enormous. It has grown so much with the government being located there. So, I began to move the Embassy from Lagos to Abuja, about the first properties. I started moving our people in. The British were way ahead of us; they had already bought the best properties, and they'd already gobbled it all up. So, I got there and did what I could to purchase what was there, and then to build the rest of them.

I started a program of moving around the country. At independence, Nigeria had three regions: east, west, and north. By the time I got there, they were creating more and more, and I started going to all these states. The media always asked me, "Why are you going at such a torrid pace to visit all these states?" I said, "I'm trying to get there before the president creates more." Today, Nigeria has thirty-six states.

Q: Who was the president?

SWING: Ibrahim Babangida. It was a military coup. He'd been in power since 1985. He was such a charming guy and so smooth that he just charmed me. He could talk his way out of any situation. He kept stringing me along about, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador, we're going to have elections," et cetera, et cetera. So, before we left, in fact, they did have elections.

Q: That was in June of 1993, right?

SWING: Yes. And there were very good elections. Except he didn't like the outcome. His opponent who won—

Q: Who was his opponent? Or were there many?

SWING: No, it was a businessman, a very prominent Muslim, but a southerner. The Northerners don't like the southerners, even if you're Muslim, so. Moshood Abiola won a free and fair election. We had the Carter Center and other electoral observers there. Everybody declared it free and fair. But since Babangida didn't like the results, he annulled the elections. Well, you can imagine the riots in the streets. I had to evacuate the embassy, and my wife, all the family members left. I kept on this small skeleton staff because of the violence. People knew that the leader Babangida had annulled the elections which were free and fair. That's kind of what happened there. Abiola then, at one point, came to the embassy, and asked for protection. I said, "Abiola, if you stay in the embassy, as an American protectee, you will lose all credibility. You need to go back home and fight this from outside. You cannot be seen as under U.S. protection." I took a chance, but he left, and thankfully he wasn't harmed. He was a good candidate, and

would have been, I think, a fairly good president. He was a good businessman. I think he had a lot of contacts in the outside world and at the UN. Anyway, it didn't happen.

Q: So, a lot of turmoil. Did Babangida eventually leave?

SWING: He stayed around for quite a while. We protested this annulment and stopped all our aid programs. We placed sanctions, and at some point, he had to step down. But he handed it over to another businessman, a man named Ernerst Shonekan. He only lasted a few months. Afterwards, another military man, a friend of Babangida, a fellow named Sani Abacha took over. That's the point at which I left. I actually would have liked to stay because it was an important time. We had interests there, but it didn't happen. I moved on.

Q: Did the U.S. oil companies leave at that point?

SWING: No, they stayed on. They had too many interests there. They were away from where all the trouble was. They were down in the southern part—it was all offshore oil, so they had reasonably good protection there, as I recall.

Q: So, the big rift was between northerners and southerners. But would you say that Nigerians are like South Africans in that they all loved their country? Or did they have a hard time—

SWING: I think so. You know, I used to say that Nigerians are all A types. It's not quite true. The Muslims in the north are much quieter and more reflective. Whereas down south, you had the Yorubas and the Igbos. Yorubas in the southwest, and the Igbos in the southeast. They're much more gregarious, and they're all Christian. I don't know why I equate that with being gregarious, but they're more gregarious than the Muslims up north.

Q: So, with all this political turmoil which went on for some years with the political military takeover and some violence. How is it that Nigeria became so big and so rich?

SWING: Well, I think they've managed some to bring the country together more than in the past. Economically, they're doing well largely because of the oil. They've had elections since 2015, which isn't a long time, but it's fairly stable right now. They've played a bigger role now, I think, in the United Nations and in the African Union. So, it's a much more subtle country now. Although it's been difficult, Nigeria has brought its people together. I think they're going to be pretty stable in the future now that they've gotten through the very difficult past.

Q: Boko Haram and Muslim fundamentalism came later?

SWING: Oh, yeah. This is a terrible thing happening right now. The kidnappings are the big issue, currently. Many of the private schools are questioning their future. And you know, there are a lot of Christian missionary schools in Nigeria. They have had a big role to play in educating Nigerians. In fact, many, if not most, of the best educated Nigerians are all graduates of missionary schools. So, their role has been big, but now they're

questioning their future saying, "How can we continue? It's a risk of having our students and maybe our faculty kidnapped." There's a real reassessment going on now. A lot of these Christian missionary groups are very conservative. Some of them have more converts in Nigeria than in the States. They have very small conservative denominations with small numbers in the States. That's a real issue for the future. How do you stop the kidnappings now? It's all for money, of course, as you can imagine.

Q: It's for money. In the beginning, the first round of kidnappings of schoolgirls seemed like it was more sexual than just ransom.

SWING: Yeah. Then they kidnapped the schoolboys. They've had all sorts of kidnapping since then. It's basically about money. The Nigerian military has been unable, so far, to stop these killings from Boko Haram and others coming in from Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.

Q: What was the embassy like when you arrived? The morale? I guess it was a skeleton crew as you left because of the unrest.

SWING: Yeah. That's when we were transitioning to Walter Carrington. By the way, Walter died here about a year ago. I was very sorry to see that. I knew him quite well. We got on well, despite his political replacement and the last.

It was a very large embassy at the time, as we had big interests there. They had about a half dozen or more agencies, including a big aid program and a big U.S. Information Services program. At the time, we also had Peace Corps, the Foreign Commercial Service, USAID, and we had military defense attaches. A lot of that scaled back, of course, later, but it was a good sized embassy. It was probably number four or five in Africa, something like that. Not as big as South Africa and Liberia. Morale was pretty good. People liked it there. It was a twenty-five percent differential posted at the time, so they earned very well. They also had a good leave policy, so morale was pretty good. It didn't get better after that.

Q: I heard once from a colleague that arranging meetings could be terribly difficult in Nigeria because they never knew exactly when certain religious holidays would start. Did you face some of those cultural kinds of things that made it hard to work there?

SWING: Exactly. That's always a downer for morale there, but I think the morale when I was there was reasonably good. There was a lot of hesitancy about moving to Abuja, because Abuja, at the time, was a village. Lagos, I mean, today, it has one of the largest populations in the world, something like twenty million maybe. It wasn't necessarily a very pleasant place to live, but there was a lot to do. You had a major airport. You could get out, you know, it was good.

Q: Alright. Anything else that you did that you put in place in Nigeria that you were very proud of or concerned about?

SWING: Well, what can I do in one year? I did what I could. We started moving the embassy there. I established a pattern of getting around the country and trying to get all my officers to get out and talk to the different governors. They're called the Federal State of Nigeria, and it is very federal. You need to get out and talk to the governors, and that allowed me to send a lot of messages about the importance of elections and the political stability and so on.

I talked to all of the governors about the importance of the elections. I have to say most of them agreed with me. I had a very active role with the Nigerian American Chamber of Commerce. I made a major set of remarks when I first arrived there to let them know that I was going to support them, and how I saw the outlook for trade and investment there. That was good. I visited a lot of the offices and the factories that were there, including the oil companies down on the southeastern coast. I was there to see them quite often.

That's what I've always done naturally as an ambassador to get around. You cast a wide net to see everybody. I met with any Fulbright professors who were there. The other thing I did was that I've always used the residence as a place to display African art. I had my own collection, and by that time, it was quite a large collection from the Congo, Liberia, and elsewhere. Hence, I asked Nigerian artists to display their art at the residence alongside mine, so it was a mixture of their art and mine. We had a huge turnout for this event called The Living Arts. It had a big turnout and got a lot of publicity from the newspapers and so on. I have never accepted the art in the embassy program. When I get to an embassy, if they have it, I send it home, I send it back. I say I've got to display my art, which is African art. It's highly appreciated by the Africans, you know, because it shows that we value and appreciate your culture. It's made me a lot of friends among the artists, which I really enjoyed. It shows the U.S. in a somewhat different light than just political, you know.

Q: Right.

SWING: So, I like that. Well, it's all I could do in one year. It was a very short time.

Q: Very good. In a couple of the other oral histories, there's mention of, after the election, some American diplomats being PNG'd (designated not welcome, or persona non grata) and being sent out of country.

SWING: I'm only aware of one. I had a very good PAO (Public Affairs Office), Michael Bryan. Mike was very good. But after the annulled elections, without consulting with me, he put out a very tough statement, and the government obviously did not like it. He didn't clear it with me, and I tried to protect him. In the end, they said no, he's got to go. I tried to protect him. I was concerned that he didn't clear it with me, although I probably would have toned it down a bit. Anyway, he was thrown out. That's the only one I'm aware of.

Q: Sometimes that can be very serious. But in the case of Nigeria, Washington wasn't concerned, right?

SWING: No, it didn't hurt his career. He probably got a better job by speaking his mind, you know.

Q: Very good. But you already knew that you were going to Haiti. Is that right?

SWING: No. It's only when I got back to Washington that the director general, my former DCM, told me that Governor Island had been signed in June, and they'd like me to go as ambassador there. Of course, I was absolutely thrilled. Funny thing is, and this may surprise you perhaps, but because Aristide was in exile, I presented my credentials to him at the Haitian embassy on Massachusetts Avenue.

Q: Oh, how interesting.

SWING: I went back home that night to watch myself on channel five and channel seven. So then, I'm getting into Haiti now. But in my mission, I was preparing to leave because I already presented credentials to Aristide, so all I had to do was to leave for Haiti and meet with the prime minister, who was in hiding because the military was still in power. I got a phone call from Secretary Warren Christopher, a wonderful gentleman. I liked him a lot, him and his wife. I was learning Haitian Creole, and he called me over. He said, "Will, the Ministry of Justice Guy Malary has just been assassinated at Heineman today, so unpack your bags. You can't go to Haiti right away." And I said, "Mr. Secretary, do you want to give victory to the thugs?" I said, "Why don't I go ahead and show that we're serious?" And he said, "You're right. Go ahead." I said, "Get my bags down. I'm ready to go." I went down, of course, when the military was in charge.

Q: This in October of 1993?

SWING: Right. I arrived on October 8. I stayed till January 1998.

Q: Can you give the setting about Aristide and what had happened, and why we got to this point of helping to reinstall him?

SWING: Well, he was overthrown in a military coup in 1990. He managed to get to the United States for exile. He was living in Washington. I went to call on him and asked his approval to present my credentials, and then later I went to present my credentials at the Haitian embassy. So, when I arrived, I was already accredited. But the military was still in power, and the prime minister, named Robert Malval, a very intellectual businessman and a wonderful guy, was hiding at his home. My instructions were to deal only with him and those members of his cabinet in hiding, and not to have a relationship with the military.

Q: So, this coup happened three years before. There had been some debate in Washington earlier on what to do. It's a pretty big deal to decide to intervene, but by the time you got back, they had already made the decision that they were going to help Aristide get back?

SWING: Yeah, exactly. But they were going to exhaust the other options, like sanctions, before using the military option. During the period after I got there, the next summer, President Carter was sent down, heading a delegation to try to negotiate a solution to get the military out of power. When he got there, he was highly critical of me because I had no relations with the military. And I said, “I'm sorry, Mr. President, those are my instructions.” He was highly critical of me that I didn't know anybody there at cetera, et cetera, so I let him do his own thing. He didn't include me in most of the meetings, by the way.

I have never been very happy about that. That's the way he wanted it, and that's the way he did it. Finally, before we put the troops in, I got a call from Washington, I think from Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott saying, "Will, get President Carter out of there. We can't deploy until he leaves." So, I finally got him on a special plane from Washington. I got him on the plane that evening, and they were invading the next morning at about five a.m., so I just barely got him out. That was in 1994.

Q: In my reading, I saw there was an earlier incident in which a U.S. ship was arriving with 700 troops on a training mission. And then the captain turned it around. The U.S. military decided that they didn't want to take the risk of landing.

SWING: The 700—

Q: They were coming in to train people, not to invade, right?

SWING: Right. But it was ill perceived in Haiti. There was a crowd. The U.S. military turned the ship around and left. That happened when Vicki Huddleston was the Chargé, later my DCM. That was just a few days, actually, before my arrival. I got there on October 8. I think it was the first or second of October, probably. There was a lot of publicity around that whole fiasco. She was very much in the news at the time. But she was well informed and was very helpful to me. She was a good DCM and went on to be ambassador to a couple of countries. She did well by me.

It was all done before I got there. Yeah, it was a little embarrassing, but rather than risking an arm confrontation, it was probably better that it worked out that way.

Q: So, you arrived, and Vicki Huddleston was the DCM. Were you charged with seeing what could be done to get the military to accept Aristide's return?

SWING: No, I had no contact with them. Most of the questions of preparations for Aristide's return were made in Washington, and I think rightly so. I mean, obviously, we'll all be there to welcome him, hallelujah, but there was nothing much that I could do. I worked closely with the government in hiding. They didn't know that much about his return. I couldn't reveal that much to them.

I got a call in September of 1994 about the time of my birthday on the 11th of September. It was from Strobe Talbott, and he said, "Will, I think you ought to know that we're

looking at this intervention." He gave me the details then because I had not been given very much in a way of concrete details about it, so we prepared for that. It was led by a wonderful general from my home state of North Carolina. He was about six feet seven and former North Carolina State basketball player, Hugh Shelton. He became the chairman of the Joint Chiefs after that. He came in, and after the troops had arrived, I remember seeing him walking down the runway. He looked like the Pied Piper of Hamelin—a huge man, you know. So, we went in at that time—

Q: Did they come in by plane?

SWING: By plane. They came in, and there was no battle or anything. The military stood down. Some of them were sent away to various parts, such as to Panama and Mexico, basically just to get rid of them.

Q: Was Aristide on the plane?

SWING: No, they wanted to make sure everything was ready for his arrival. They weren't sure if there might be fighting or something, so he came back at a later time after our military had everything under control. We then, eventually, turned over to the United Nations troops. It was the first time that a United Nations contingent had ever been commanded by an American general, a three star marine general from my home state, North Carolina. A lot of North Carolinians here, but—

Q: There was a UN Security Council resolution that paved the way legally for this invasion and Aristide's return, right?

SWING: That's right. Now, that's interesting because this was managed by Madeleine Albright, who was our UN ambassador for a time. No one thought the sanctions on Haiti would ever work, because it was clear the military would just let the people suffer, not themselves. We knew from the beginning that it wouldn't work. But UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright had to be able to go back to the Security Council and say, "Look, we've tried all other options, including tough sanctions. They haven't worked, so now we have to use the military option." It was very clever. Albright was wise and she did it right. That's how we got the UN resolution as cover for our own troops to go in. We also brought troops in from CARICOM-Caribbean community. They had enough to give us a little more credibility in the sense that the Caribbean community was also with us in the cause of helping to get rid of the military.

Q: So, the UN came in as peacekeepers or as police?

SWING: No, they came in as a peacekeeping force, both soldiers and police. The police came to train the police, which they did, because the Haitian police were a pretty motley crowd. It was pretty good police training, to make that a proper police force. They came in later, separately.

Q: So, how long were the U.S. troops there?

SWING: Good question. I think they were there for about eight or nine months, something like that.

Q: Okay.

SWING: Then the interesting handover. The first American general ever to head a UN peacekeeping force handed over to his UN counterpart—President Clinton was there. He came down. We had President Clinton, UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright, and a number of members of Congress attending. It was quite an occasion there. I was so concerned about the safety of Aristide because he was a controversial figure in Haiti. There were an awful lot of people out there who didn't like him. You had this fellow with FRAPH (Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti), Emmanuel 'Toto' Constant.

Q: So, he was one of the opposition leaders.

SWING: He was one of the oppositions to Aristide. I had to build a bulletproof glass stand for Aristide to speak from behind, so that no bullet could reach him. I think people thought I was a little extreme, but I thought about what would happen if he were assassinated on this day, you know. Everybody, including President Clinton, had to speak from behind that too. But Clinton was very popular there. He loved Haiti, because he and Hillary Clinton had spent their honeymoon next door in the Dominican Republic. He had come across to Haiti and fallen in love with it. He would have done anything for Haiti. In fact, the word was that almost every cabinet member came to Haiti at some point, so they could go back and at the next cabinet meeting and say, "I was in Haiti yesterday." We had so many cabinet members visit. I lost count of the names.

Q: What did you think of Aristide?

SWING: I'm of mixed views about him. Look, he was very sharp, and very strong intellectually. He spoke about five languages. When we did the Summit of the Americas and he came to Miami to speak there, he spoke in French, Haitian Creole, English, and Spanish. He was very intellectually bright and affable, yet not very modest, if I may say so. I had mixed views of Aristide. He was always controversial. When he came back, he really didn't do that well. He could have been a much more reconciling figure, but he didn't and it's too bad. I also think that he was very much interested in money. Eventually, he got involved in the drug trade, and I think it ruined his reputation. He didn't do as well as he might have done had he been a different person. He had mixed reviews. You know, he was also a Catholic priest, not a theologian. In the end, he left the Catholic Church and married his secretary.

Q: I didn't know that. So, he had been elected in 1990. He had spent ten months, and then was ousted and came back. Was he technically serving the rest of his term? How did that work?

SWING: He was serving the rest of his term. As I remember, he wanted to have those ten months restored, and it was turned down, as I recall. Then there was another election. His friend and prime minister, René Préval ran, and everybody knew that Preval was just a placeholder for Aristide. Aristide showed his true colors over the years. Now, he's accumulated a lot of money, and he's back in Haiti, like a lot of others who left. I think he's out of politics altogether, as far as I know, but I haven't really followed that closely anymore, you know.

Q: So, you must have had a great reputation by this time of getting countries to respect elections, right? Or at least hold them?

SWING: Let me tell you the story. I got a call from the Secretary of State's office saying, President Clinton asked me to stay on for an additional year, which is why I was there for four years, and I was happy to do it. I would have stayed for five years if he had asked me, because it was intriguing.

By the way, I don't know if you have seen Haitian art, but it is absolutely fascinating. We have a lot of Haitian art. I actually wish that I bought more. I don't know where I would put it. But it's great art. They're so artistic. You know, the French say, "I think therefore I am." And the Haitian say, "I imagine therefore I am."

Q: I understand there was a special coordinator in Washington just for Haiti.

SWING: Right. Yes.

Q: How did you work with that office? Did it work well?

SWING: It was Jim Dobbins, initially. Jim and I are still good friends today, which is evidence of how well we work together. Look, I let him take care of the Washington side of things, and I couldn't be gone that often from Haiti even though it was a very short flight. I was happy for him to do that. Jim is very good—I don't want to say bureaucratic since that's demeaning, but he's very good within the bureaucracy, working the Hill, working within the administration and their various departments, and so on. I was pleased to have Jim there, and he was a real strength for me. He was a very bright fella who writes well, and he did a lot of the reporting out of Haiti for me, picking up on reports that I had written and then casting them for Washington. So, we worked well together. He came down a number of times. He knew a lot of the players and was particularly effective on the Hill, and with the Department of Defense (DOD) and the other agencies represented there.

Q: Okay. And the embassy? How was the security situation?

SWING: Security was all right. I mean I had close protection. I had a bulletproof SUV and that sort of thing. But I never felt in any particular danger there, as compared to some other places like the Congo and elsewhere I've been. At times, I wasn't necessarily a very popular figure there, because the ones who didn't want Aristide to come back blamed me

for it. My wife and I, when we were in Miami, we would go to a bakery to pick up croissants or something in the morning. There was a Haitian guy there, and he would leave the room when we came in because he just detested us for bringing Aristide back. So, there was that side of it. But I never felt any threat at all there, and I was in no danger at any point.

Q: And for the rest of the embassy staff, were there a lot of problems with crime?

SWING: Yeah. People were aware of the circumstances and where to avoid and so on. I never felt that there was a big security problem for us there. Perhaps, I was too naive. We did have extra security people more than an embassy would normally have because of the circumstances. There were a few groups around who didn't like Aristide and therefore who didn't like us, but no real danger.

Q: So, Aristide was more popular with the working class and the poor?

SWING: Yeah, very much. He already had made a lot of promises, however, he hadn't fulfilled them all. They looked at him as a person who could give them an equal opportunity. One of the problems in Haiti is particularly the Lebanese who control the economy, and much of the polity. They were all educated either in France or the U.S., and they had managed to deny a lot of education to Haitians, who grew up in Haiti. That was a kind of an issue there. Some of our friends were Lebanese, but we had to be careful how, when, and where we saw them, as we did not want to be seen somehow in their grips.

They controlled the economy; that would be an absolutely true statement. Over the years, they held the Haitian people down in terms of education, because education is the way forward. They had, in their own ways, subtly held them down. Look, I think one of the major structural issues in Haiti is frankly the French system. I don't think there will ever be stability in Haiti until they get rid of that system. What do I mean by that? You cannot in Haiti have the French system where you have a president and the prime minister. The president will never let the prime minister do his or her job. It just won't happen. So, you need to get rid of the French system, come up with a more Westminster style system where you have either a president or a prime minister, but not both. So much of the instability has been the president possibly getting rid of the prime minister, and Robert Malval, who loved Aristide, at the end of the day, he despised him, and he was kicked out.

Q: So, were they able, with your help, to make more investments in education?

SWING: They began to make some improvements there. There were a lot of people from Florida, particularly Miami—NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) who were coming down and establishing private schools until they could do something about the state structure there. To this day, Haitian educational opportunities are still very limited. The problem is, even if you get an education, what does it count for? Many of the schools are so bad, so if somebody said you got a diploma, it doesn't mean you have a good

education. Not everybody can afford to go to Florida or elsewhere in the U.S. to get an education. The Lebanese crowd can and others with money, but the majority of Haitians cannot.

Q: In Honduras, when I was there, I saw an interesting dynamic. There was a group called the "turcos" but they were Christians from the Bethlehem area who originally had come during the turn of the twentieth century and had become the economic force in a country dominated politically by people with a very Spanish background. I don't know that they held anyone else down, but they definitely did well.

SWING: To pick up on your point there, what I have observed over many years in Africa and Haiti has been something that I call "domestic colonialism." For a small group of people like the Lebanese, they simply become colonizers. They become worse than the foreign colonizers. They take over and deny the majority of the population of their rights. It's an interesting concept, domestic colonialism. I've seen it again and again and again, such as in the Congo, Liberia, Nigeria, and for a long time in South Africa, because it was the whites dominating the blacks. So domestic colonizers are what it is, unfortunately,

Q: In the countries in the Western Hemisphere that I saw, the traditional Spanish surname elites would run for office and control the government. But the influence on the government came through the economic interests that would support the parties.

SWING: Exactly.

Q: Is that how it worked in Haiti?

SWING: More or less. Although, parties weren't very important.

Q: You talk about the lack of economic opportunity, but Haitians had a lot of skills too—

SWING: Absolutely. You know, the interesting point here is that you will never almost never see anything in the Miami Herald about a Haitian getting in trouble. They are extremely hard working. The first thing they do when they get to Miami is they phone home and say, "I made it and I'll be sending you money very soon." They're hard working, and they get a job. I've never seen anything to indicate that—they virtually never get in trouble. They're very devout Catholics, very religious, and very strong family people.

Q: Do they tend to go into construction more than agriculture?

SWING: Yeah. I have enormous respect for them. They will take any job just to be able to get money to send home. They are hardworking, devout, and upstanding, and they rarely ever cause any problems for getting in trouble, other than the fact that a lot of them are there in an irregular status without a proper visa.

Q: Okay. Well, let's talk about the immigration to the United States. Did most of them come as "boat people?"

SWING: Yeah.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about that phenomenon?

SWING: Well, the situation was so bad after the military took over that they will do anything to leave from the northern shores of Haiti. They risked their lives on these rickety boats to get across to, at least, to Cuba. Guantanamo Bay, or somewhere. The U.S. Coast Guard was picking a lot of them up and taking them back. My job was when they came back, I was to make sure that they were able to start their lives again. We would meet with them and counsel and help them where we could. Eventually, the ones in Guantanamo would eventually make it from there to the southern shores of Miami. Now, the president did a very good thing with the Haitians who were in the United States. They got something called TPS (temporary protective status), so they didn't have to go back. Even more recently, when there were problems in Haiti, whether it was the earthquake or whatever, they were all given TPS as their status, so they didn't have to leave, which would have been, of course, very cruel. But many Haitians left on boats, and many died in the seas before getting to their destination, because they were so desperate to leave and to have a better life.

Q: One of the characteristics of U.S. asylum policy is that you can qualify as refugee status if you are subject to political danger. However, that doesn't extend to economic refugees, so these people were fleeing out of economic desperation, and sometimes from some violence as well. But it's harder to prove your case to the immigration judge if your problem is economic. Right?

SWING: Absolutely. That's exactly right. We had a real political problem with Washington, which was the unequal treatment of Cuban refugees, and Haitian refugees. Cubans always got the favorable pass. Haitians rarely. The conditions in which Haitians were living in these camps in Florida, were not very good either. But we kept saying, "This is unequal treatment. Because Cuba is a communist regime, why do you make a political judgment about them? And not about the Haitians who also deserve a chance?" But we never prevailed, and I think, probably to this day, that same unequal treatment still exists, but I don't know. That's my guess.

Q: In a couple of sessions, we'll get to 2015 and 2016 when there was both Cuban and Haitian immigration coming up from South America, through Central America, and up to the United States at the end of the Obama administration. To reduce the "pull factor", they may have made it harder for new Haitian refugees to enter, but they also ended the "wet foot, dry foot" policy for the Cubans at the very end of the Obama administration.

SWING: Yes.

Q: One of your predecessors wrote that at the embassy they were always being asked to confirm the details of massacres that had never happened. Was this something that was no longer happening when you were there? —

SWING: No, that didn't happen during my time.

Q: Okay. Tell us about the sanctions. So, there were sanctions put in place against Haiti after the coup. But, when you were there, did we strengthen the sanctions? What else was done?

SWING: Well, there were the additional sanctions that were put on the Haitians. I think everyone knew that it was just going to harm the Haitians and not achieve the goal. So, it also increased the number of people taking to the boats and trying to get across the border to the Dominican Republic. There are many Haitians in the Dominican Republic, you probably know, and others were trying to get across because it meant that there was scarcity of food, fuel, and other things. That was a problem. I never supported the sanctions. I never thought they would work, and they didn't. I just wish that they had probably gone to the military option earlier. It would have saved a lot of effort, and would have, I think, helped the Haitians much more, if we had made that decision earlier. But as I mentioned, Madeleine Albright wanted to use sanctions to show that they didn't work, so that one could go for the military option. It just took a bit longer than they should have, than would have been desirable.

Q: One of the elements of sanctions is that American citizens can be prohibited from spending any money that the government might get. That would affect tourism in places like Cuba where everything is government-owned, but I guess it affected services in Haiti, since the government owns the power company and the water company, things like that. Did the sanctions cause the embassy staff any problems?

SWING: No. I mean obviously things like electricity and water you have to have, so one makes a compromise on that. I don't recall any great difficulties for us because of the sanctions. Overall, I think that was probably less available than there would have been, but it was manageable. I didn't care, and it was okay.

Q: Okay. How was your relationship with our ambassador in the Dominican Republic?

SWING: It was very good. What I did when I got there was, I said to her—I'm trying to remember who was there at the time. She was a very nice lady and career officer. She's still very active in Florida with some of the Caribbean countries. Donna Hrinak. I suggested to her, I said, "Look, why don't we arrange to meet every three months: once in Haiti, and once in the Dominican Republic." So, we did that, and we alternated. That allowed us to really coordinate very carefully. And of course, what was happening in Haiti had big effects in the DR too, because you had many Haitians living in the DR, and many who were crossing the border and wanted to get over there. As such, it was very important that we be meeting regularly with one another, coordinating our policies. It worked out actually to the benefit of our policy in both countries. It was very good.

She was a terrific officer. I liked her a lot, and we worked very well together. The only thing was, you know, when I went to the DR, I couldn't wait to get back to Haiti.

Q: Why?

SWING: Haiti is so much more interesting. The food is so much better, and the people and the art are so much nicer. Any time you would see a good piece of art in the DR, it was almost always Haitian. The Haitians are so much more interesting I find as a people, and that's a gross generality, of course, but it's so much more interesting than those Dominicans, I find. So many Dominicans, you know, so many of them are in the States, as you know.

Q: Well, Haitians now too, but the Dominicans maybe for a long time. So, was there also a return to democracy going on in the Dominican Republic at the same time?

SWING: I think so. Yeah. There were some elections. I've kind of forgotten that. But I think there were a couple of elections during that time. I remember that Balaguer, after he left office or died, I guess, they had several elections. They were quite good.

Q: Yeah. I remember that. Interestingly, when Ambassador Hrinak went to Hugo Chavez' Venezuela, they viewed her with caution because she had a reputation of bringing back democracy in the Dominican Republic. So, I'm wondering, maybe you also might have, by this time, gotten a certain reputation that would have given some elites pause.

SWING: You know, it's funny you say that because when I arrived in Haiti a lot of people said to me, "Oh, we're so glad that you're here. You're going to help guide us through the elections." And I said, "Do you know that I haven't lived in a country that's had elections in twenty years?" You know, the DRC, Liberia, Nigeria, all these places I've been. They were a bit disappointed at that time.

Q: The man famous for investing in Haiti's health care system–Paul Farmer. Did you meet him? Was he living there?

SWING: Paul Farmer came a number of times. He made it clear to me that he didn't want anything to do with the American embassy. He had his own view of things. He spoke Creole. He loved Haiti, and I guess he thought what I was doing was very different from what he was doing, which is true. He was on the health side of things. I gave him credit. I read his book and still have his book, as a matter of fact, on Haiti. It's very interesting. But he chose not to have anything to do with me. It was very hard to get to know him, because he was very much for the people of Haiti. He didn't want anything to do with the government or politics. You know, it was all about health, NGO work, and helping the Haitian people. I admire him for that.

Q: Were we, with our aid mission, able to help with health services?

SWING: We were doing quite a bit in that area, but nothing that would involve Paul Farmer. Our aid program, actually, after Aristide came back, was quite large. It was one of the larger programs that we had regarding education, health, scholarships, and a number of things like that.

The other country he's been very active in, for obvious reasons, is Rwanda because of the genocide, He's been very much promoting health care too, which is a good thing. I think he and President Paul Kagame are probably very good friends now. But he splits his time sort of between the two, if you will.

Q: Okay. So, you didn't have any contact with the military and General Cédras. But they all left and then when Aristide came back, there had been a shadow government that started to form—

SWING: Yeah, there was a transitional government started. And, you know, it was a sham. They had a sort of a pseudo prime minister in place when the troops arrived. I will never forget that General Hugh Shelton, who I greatly admire, and he's now retired in North Carolina, he and I went in to see this pseudo prime minister that they had at the time. He's a big guy, you know, and a four star marine general, sitting up there like this with his legs crossed. And he said to this prime minister, "Mr. Prime Minister, I want you to really be gone from here by tomorrow noon. You take everything that belongs to you, and nothing else." He said, "You understand?" He was about 6'7", a huge guy. I'll never forget that. It was so wonderful to see that guy out of there. We sent Cédras off to Panama, where he had gone to the School of the Americas for military training. We sent his deputy off to Mexico, and then the rest just scattered.

Q: Did Aristide or the U.S disband the army?

SWING: Yes. We did get rid of the army, and basically I remember we said to them, "Look, you're a small country. You've only got one neighbor, and you don't need an army. You only need a proper police force." That was done at a meeting with Aristide, the military commander, the police, and a couple of others. I'm a little foggy on that. We then trained a police force. What we had then was a program to retrain the military for civilian jobs. That's what it was. It was fairly successful.

If they're going to stay in the country, you have to give them a viable option to have families, and to keep body and soul together. A lot of them are probably just as happy once they've got a new skill to go that way, you know.

The president of Costa Rica came to Haiti during my time. It was at a meeting he had with Aristide. I was present and some others were there. He convinced Aristide that you don't need an army. Who would that president have been?

Q: In the mid-90s? It was most probably José Figueres, the son of the man who eliminated the military in the 1940s in Costa Rica. That's an interesting parallel.

SWING: He came, and he convinced Aristide that you don't need an army, I don't have one. Why do you need one? You got only one neighbor, etc. I remember that now. He was the one who, I think, convinced Aristide.

Q: Well, any other important figures in Haiti that you worked with?

SWING: All of the prime ministers that Aristide had were capable of doing the job, but the problem was that Aristide wouldn't let them do their job. Robert Malval went to Washington. He was very popular with President Clinton and his administration, and they put him up at Blair House, treating him like a head of state. Word got back to Aristide, and he was very unhappy with that. He didn't last very long after that. In the end, Robert Malval, who had been so devoted to Aristide, grew to absolutely hate him too. The only one who survived and succeeded was René Préval, who recently died. Rene and I worked very well together. After the earthquake, I came back to Haiti. I was with IOM (International Organization for Migration) then and flew back to Haiti to see René Préval to see what we could do, because we were very heavily engaged in Haiti at that time. I realized that he actually did a pretty good job. He stayed on and Aristide left him alone at that time, as he was no longer present. But the others, one by one, Aristide got rid of them.

I had a lot of contacts with the artists. I love the artists and the artwork. It's fantastic. The painting is wonderful.

Q: So, is there a particular artist that you think we should know about?

SWING: Well, I mean there's many that I could name for you. I'll send you a list of them if you would like, so you can look them up.

Q: Okay, very good. I think you always hear about that, and music and food, right?

SWING: Yeah, yeah, exactly. The Haitians are delightful people, and once you get them in a place like Florida they can relax and breathe freely.

Q: So, I think we can stop here unless there's any other important stories that you wanted to discuss about Haiti?

SWING: Let me see. I'm trying to think if there were. If not, I'll do it next time.

Q: But you stayed on for a fourth year, and you were enjoying it?

SWING: Yeah, I stayed on for fourth year because President Clinton wanted me to. By the way, there's a funny story. I stayed on for fourth year and was prepared to stay even longer than I stayed. He came down to Haiti during my time. I got this phone call from the Secretary of State's office saying, "President Clinton appreciates what you've done in Haiti, and he really liked to see you go on to a very good assignment after this. Where would you like to go?" I decided to seek Germany because I speak German. I mentioned

India. I mentioned a couple other places. About two weeks later, I got a phone call. And they said, "President Clinton would like you to go as ambassador to Nigeria." I said, "Well, that's wonderful. Thank you very much. It's a real honor, but I've already been the ambassador to Nigeria." They hadn't even looked at my CV. So, I waited and another week or two passed. They said, "We would like you to go to Zaire. We think Mobutu will be out of power pretty soon, and we'd like you to take that on." I said, "Fine." I called my wife who was in Rome, shopping with our daughter, who was a UN peacekeeper in Bosnia at the time, and there was a long silence on the other end of the line. Obviously, they were very unhappy about that.

Q: How many countries did your wife go to with you?

SWING: She went to almost all of them, but she was evacuated about six times. You know, Haiti, Nigeria, Liberia, and the DRC. So, I've already been an ambassador in Nigeria, so then he called me back and said, "Would you like to go to the DRC?" My wife was not thrilled about it, but we took it on. It was my last assignment. Before I went off and joined the UN for the next eighteen years.

Q: Right. You had worked very closely with the UN while you were in Haiti, right?

SWING: I had. I worked very closely with and—that actually came to my good fortune because the head of the UN mission in Haiti was probably the most famous UN peacekeeper, Lakhdar Brahimi.

Q: Oh, yes.

SWING: And Lakhdar had been foreign minister of Algeria. He had done the peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and elsewhere, so we became very good friends. And later, he put my name forward to become head of a UN peacekeeping mission, and they sent me at that time to Western Sahara. I did that for two years, and then went back to the DRC for another five years. It worked out well.

End of Interview