

## MADAGASCAR

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**SIDNEY SOBER**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Antananarivo (1947-1949)**

*Sidney Sober was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 21, 1990. His Foreign Service career has included assignments in Madagascar, Czechoslovakia, Iceland, Turkey, Bombay and Pakistan. He also served in Washington, DC in INR (Intelligence Research), the Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs.*

*Q: Then your first assignment was a rather unusual one. I've never run across anybody assigned there. Where you assigned?*

SOBER: I was assigned to Tananarive, Madagascar. I think that was perhaps the result of the effort which they used to make, asking where would you like to go. Since I had majored in French, spent my junior year of college in Paris, and knew French quite well, I put down France, and I suppose 30 to 40% of the others did too, among the three places I wanted to go. I can only think that, well they figured Madagascar is a French colony, which it was at the time, and therefore that's pretty close to France.

*Q: What sort of post did you go to and what was it like?*

SOBER: It was an interesting first post. Absolutely unknown to us. In fact, when at our so-called graduation ceremony, at the Foreign Service Institute, my name was announced and they said, you're for Tananarive, I wasn't quite sure where it was although I guessed that it was Madagascar. But I went quickly to the map and found it was.

It was a good place to be for a foreign service officer just beginning at that time. It was a two-man post. It was led by a consul general, an old time foreign service officer who had been alone for at least a year by the time we got there, at the end of '47. He'd been waiting a long time for an assistant. Within about two or three months of our arrival, he took off on a much delayed home leave and left us in charge of the post, which was fun for a young fledgling foreign service officer--for example to be in charge of post on the Fourth of July and have to give a welcoming talk to the people who had been invited to

the consulate for the July Fourth party and things like that. But also it was a rather interesting situation in that a rebellion, a native rebellion, was in effect against the French. It started some time before we got there and went on for another number of months, making for a rather interesting political situation.

*Q: Could you describe the political situation on Madagascar. It was a French colony at that time. What was the situation during the immediate post-war period, and what was the situation during the war. Because the French colonies were all sort of going in different directions.*

SOBER: It was French and stayed French throughout the war. It was far away from the middle east. It wasn't the situation such as you had in the middle east. I think "colony" was not exactly the name for it by the time we got there. I think it was called an overseas territory, slightly different, but basically a colony. It was under a French high commissioner, a man who had been a senior army officer during the war, Pierre de Chevigne, who had been fairly close to De Gaulle.

The French were in charge and that was it. They ran everything and were in charge of everything. The French colonists, who had been there for years, were really the power brokers among the civilian elements. The Malagasies, even among the most evolved, the Hova group, were definitely in the back seat. Although there was this rebellion, the rebellion was not noticeable in Tananarive. It was out in the bush country especially, in the eastern part of the country. The French were rather harsh and eventually effective in putting it down.

So you had really a colonial situation, where you could not hear the voice of the Malagasies.

*Q: I just interviewed yesterday a man who was assigned just about this time to the Gold Coast, now Ghana. He said that they were under instructions, don't report on the political situation and don't contact the natives, the blacks, at all outside that of the servant/master relationship. What were your instructions?*

SOBER: The instructions were nil. That was rather nice. Maybe it would have been helpful, but I don't recall that we ever got any substantial guideline from the department or from Paris. We reported, in a way, to Embassy Paris, although our messages went directly to Washington, with copies to Paris. There was some interest in the rebellion, but it was far away from the United States and I don't recall much interest. A few times, they said, yes, that's interesting, what you're reporting. The interest was largely commercial: cloves, vanilla, some coffee came from Madagascar. Some mica was exported from there. It was not very important, except for the few companies who had a stake, especially in the spices area. Maybe that led up to a situation where it was deemed necessary to have an outpost, that far away, but I got the impression that people really didn't pay much attention to want to worry about what we were doing. We were left pretty well alone, which may reflect that they were satisfied with what we did, but more or less, didn't care very much.

*Q: It still seems to be pretty much the case.*

SOBER: As for Madagascar, well I don't know. Of course they had a big change. About 1960 they became independent. I have not followed it closely. It is well off the main stream of global events.

**SIDNEY WEINTRAUB**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Antananarivo (1949-1951)**

*Sidney Weintraub was born in New York in 1922, and graduated from the City College of New York with a BBA in 1943. From the University of Missouri and Yale University he received an MA and in 1966 got his PhD from American University. He served overseas in the US Army from 1943 to 1946. His assignments abroad included Madagascar, Mexico City, Tokyo, Bangkok, and Santiago. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Mr. Weintraub in 1996.*

*Q: Could you describe how you and your wife got to Antananarivo?*

WEINTRAUB: We had a child by then. We went to Cannes by ship and spent about a week there and in Paris. The last time I'd seen Paris was during the war, so it was nice to go again. We picked up a plane in Marseille. We stopped in Tunis on the way down. One of my classmates had been assigned there. We spent some time there. Then, we flew from there to Tananarive. It was a two-day flight with a night's stopover in Nairobi.

*Q: What was the situation in Madagascar when you got there?*

WEINTRAUB: There had been a Madagascar revolt against French colonial rule about '46, I think. Anyhow, it was a few years before we got there. It had been suppressed quite ruthlessly. Madagascar wasn't an important place for the United States. There were two people in the post: the Consul General, who was a man about ready to retire, a very wonderful man actually, and I was the Vice Consul. He retired, and it took them something like nine months to replace him. So, there I was, a brand new guy who knew nothing about anything and I was running a one-man post.

It was an interesting place. I had to learn French really well. If I didn't speak French, I could speak to hardly anybody because I did not know the Malagasy language and few people there knew English, So, out of necessity, my French became very good. It's since become quite rusty. I enjoyed Madagascar very much and made some very close friends, many of whom and their children are still good friends.

*Q: What were American interests there at that time?*

WEINTRAUB: Not very many. Madagascar had no particular strategic materials. It was not on any great shipping routes or anything of that nature. I suppose we cared because it was off the mainland and, if it were in hostile lands, this would have made some difference. But I assume that what they wanted from me, or what they wanted from Madagascar, was the least trouble possible. I assumed that too at the time, because they didn't put in somebody with any great experience.

Let me give you one experience there though that I do remember, which did matter. The Korean War was in progress. There was a great deal of concern apparently - I learned this while I was there - that, if China entered the war, some of the great bubonic and also pulmonary plague that existed in Manchuria might come down that particular route. There must have been concern that our soldiers would be subjected to the two varieties of plague. Madagascar, and I guess somebody in Washington knew it, not only had both types of plague, but in addition had a system that was very professional in the sense that when a case was found, there was isolation, treatment, and rapid moving in to keep it from spreading. A team of quite high-powered doctors was sent down to examine that. I remember that well because it impressed me. I wasn't always sure that the U.S. government did much thinking at that time. But this impressed me, that somebody did some thinking about issues that could matter a great deal. I was very sick at the time with some infection. I had no idea what it was and there was nobody in Madagascar who could treat it. I was about ready to ask to be evacuated so I could get to a place where I could be treated. One of the doctors there was one of the people who discovered and developed Chloromycetin, which was a brand-new antibiotic at the time. He said, "I can't promise you this will work. It may have side effects, but I think it will work." He treated me with it and it worked.

*Q: What was your impression of French colonial rule at that time?*

WEINTRAUB: By then, the revolt had been put down. The man who was appointed High Commissioner was really quite professional. He later went to the U.N. as a senior French official. I don't know if he was in charge of the Mission, but he was something at about that level. It was typical colonial French rule, with a lot of French expatriates running businesses, some Malagasy were in positions of one kind or another. It wasn't a particularly democratic rule, but I didn't see any overt signs of real oppression. That had happened earlier.

*Q: As far as you and your wife's circle of acquaintances- French rulers didn't get too involved in racial distinctions. Was it a pretty open society or not?*

WEINTRAUB: Yes and no. Most of the contacts we had were French because the French were running the place. But I knew many of the Malagasy who were working in the civil service, and a few businessmen, though there weren't very many. Receptions and parties were frequently a mixture. But my closest friends were French.

*Q: What was your work? Many visa or were you reporting?*

WEINTRAUB: Not too many visas. Mainly reporting. Some problems with seaman who needed protection or had to get evacuated. My job was mainly reporting. It covered a wide area. The consulate covered Madagascar, the Comoros, Reunion. I traveled to all of those places. It was a very pleasant first assignment!

*Q: Did you get any feel for the Bureau you were working for? That would have been Near Eastern and African Affairs, I guess, wasn't it?*

WEINTRAUB: None whatsoever.

*Q: You were out of sight and over the horizon.*

WEINTRAUB: I think that's what they cared about most, that there be no waves.

**PAUL F. GARDNER  
Consular Officer  
Antananarivo (1958-1961)**

*Ambassador Paul F. Gardner was born in Texas in 1930. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included positions in Madagascar, Laos, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Turkey, and an ambassadorship to New Guinea. Ambassador Gardner was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.*

*Q: Your first overseas post at Antananarivo, Madagascar...you were in at the beginning weren't you?*

GARDNER: Yes, I helped to open the post there. We had had a post there several years before, but closed it. Madagascar became independent while I was there so our consulate turned into an Embassy.

*Q: What was the situation in Madagascar at the time?*

GARDNER: At the time I arrived there it was still a French colony so I got a little taste of what the colonial experience was like. I lived rather high on the hog, as did the French at that time. Most of our contacts were French because the Malagasy didn't have much of a role. You had a feeling that you were living in some respect in the 19th century with a good number of servants and the most lavish meals I have ever seen...usually seven or eight courses. We ate well. They had fresh oysters all year around because they brought

them from France during the season there and later had the local oysters. You could get anything to eat that you could possibly want.

You had the strong feeling that the country was being exploited to some degree. I spent three months previously to that in Nairobi preparing for the post to open because Nairobi was to be our sponsoring post and I was headed to do all the mechanics since this was a two-man post. So I had an experience of British colonialism there and the French in Madagascar. In both cases you saw that the local population lived extremely well...the local French and the local British population...though the British were far more racist, having separate toilets and other facilities for the blacks, which you didn't find in Madagascar. The French were much more likely to intermarry with the local people. In both cases you had the feeling of people living rather high on the hog. The Madagascar franc at that time was valued at two French francs. The local saying was that that way they didn't have to change the prices. Everything that was sent out from France was simply doubled in Madagascar.

Things changed very slowly there. As you recall, support for independence came from De Gaulle at that time. He was the one who decided that France should give its colonies their freedom. Madagascar had had a tremendous revolt many years earlier which is not very well known at all, but tens of thousands of people were killed revolting against the French. They were pretty docile when I was there. The principal tribe in the highlands, the Merina tribe, were the ones responsible for this revolution. They were pretty well held down and the radicals were no longer outspoken. You didn't get the feeling that there was very much radical feeling within the country. However, later...the French, of course, sponsored the independence movement there and sponsored the new government. They chose people from other tribes generally to staff the government with the Merina, the principal leaders in the interior of the country, playing a secondary role. So it was quite natural later, I think, that the radical element did come out when the Merina started showing their true colors and the French had more or less divorced themselves from the country. But in my time it was a government set up by the French.

*Q: Was there then Frenchmen sort of buried down in the ministries who served almost like action officers?*

GARDNER: Yes, that was the case everywhere. The French were so-called consultants but you could see that the Malagasy were not in a position to make any of the decisions. So you were to a large degree dealing with the French still after independence.

*Q: How about American interests in the place? Even today in 1991 I don't think Madagascar has caused a blip on the Secretary of State's radar.*

GARDNER: No. This was one of our problems with the new post. When we started listing the United States' interests, it was very difficult to get a good number. In Madagascar you could only say that they were on a traditional African trading route, etc. and that they had some spices, like vanilla, which were important in the United States. But beyond that there wasn't much US interests at the time. And I guess not now either.

*Q: This was sort of the time of African awakening, were you having to send in telegrams saying "hey think of us too" because you were overlooked?*

GARDNER: Yes. Madagascar is not only divorced from Africa of course by the Mozambique Channel but its people are Asian, not blacks at all. They are very akin to the other country I have served in, Indonesia. Their language is very close to Indonesian. And their culture is what is now called Austronesian, very similar to the culture you find in the Hawaii Islands and the Philippines.

You really couldn't relate them to Asia because they didn't even have myths of coming from Asia, although they quite clearly did. You couldn't relate them to Asian interests in any way because they were too far separated geographically.

At the same time it was difficult to link them with the African continent because not only of the people, but also because the flora and fauna were not what you had in Africa. There were no lions or elephants in Madagascar. Instead they had the lemur which they didn't have on the other side of the Mozambique Channel.

So on the whole it was a very isolated country. The capital, itself, is well up in the mountains from the coastal area. So you had a tremendous sense of isolation from everything. It was at the end of most of the airline routes. If you were coming from Paris you stopped at Nairobi and you stopped at Madagascar. There wasn't any place else to go except occasionally to some of the other islands nearby.

*Q: Did Soapy Williams come out while you were there?*

GARDNER: No. The only dignitary from the State Department we had was the Under Secretary for Administration who came out. I don't think the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs made it out there while I was there. Congressmen didn't get near us.

*Q: What sort of feeling did this give you of the Foreign Service at that time? Did you want to get into the mainstream of things?*

GARDNER: Yes. Obviously I applied to do something a little more in the mainstream. I think Madagascar was the thing that initiated me into wondering about cultural adaptation to a modern society and different races' approach to it. That has been my private study from then on...how do different countries relate to their own independence and try to have an independent economy.

*Q: At that time where did you see Madagascar going? A thriving country or a marginal one?*

GARDNER: You felt on the whole that it was a viable country because it had certain wealth there. It had only 5 million people on one of the world's largest islands. It had potentially a great deal of agricultural wealth...not mineral wealth. But you felt it was a



country that could get along and could support itself. It had very good beef which it exported to France. It had some reasonable fisheries, which again were exported to France. So you had a feeling that it would work.

What I didn't realize was the strong radical feeling that still existed, particularly in the Merina people. It didn't come out at the time I was there. But later on you realized it was just under the surface, that it was bound to come out. It was a strong feeling that the French had held back. A strong residue of hostility created by the strong feeling of frustration that they didn't seem to be as good as the French so to speak. The reason they were not as good as the French was because the French had held them back.

This is the sort of thing that I found...virtually all of my career, except in one assignment, in former colonies of the West. I found it in each of the ex-colonial countries to a different degree and perhaps less in Madagascar because of the intermarriage. But, nevertheless, strongly there among one group of people, those who are ruling Madagascar now. They eventually took the radical line, but well after I left.

**ALAN HARDY**  
**General Services Officer**  
**Antananarivo (1961-1964)**

*Mr. Hardy served in the Army from 1957-1959. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956 His career included positions in Canada, Madagascar, Italy, Somalia, Hungary, Mexico, and an ambassadorship to Equatorial Guinea. Ambassador Hardy was interviewed by Lewis Hoffacker in 2001.*

HARDY: I went to Madagascar as General Services Officer (GSO). For a time, I became Administrative Officer, and simultaneously Consular Officer because there wasn't that much consular work there. Why did I go to Africa? I had chosen Africa as a specialty. I had chosen it because I wanted to be a big fish in a little pond instead of a little fish in a big pond, and also just kind a natural interest in things African. Thought it'd be less humdrum, and it was.

*Q: This is approximately what year?*

HARDY: Now we're two years later, 1961.

*Q: The change that was coming through Africa was exciting.*

HARDY: Well, yes.

*Q: Maybe not Madagascar.*

HARDY: It was the beginning of independence for many African nations, when people thought we were going to do so much with economic aid. I later concluded that most of the aid, it took me 20 years to decide it, not the 30 I was in the Foreign Service, but only 20, that each country's got to do it for themselves. If it's going to take 100 years, or 50 years, or 20 years, by and large they're going to have to do it for themselves. You can contribute on the margin, but you can't do it for them. And to some extent, therefore, I think aid needs to be modest. You have to have some out there. That's the way we had to go anyway, perhaps becoming too tight-pursed thanks to the way the Congress is.

*Q: You were, I'm sure, later were dealing with the Communist threat. Communists under every palm tree?*

HARDY: Yes, you really had to search under some of the palm trees, but people said they were there. Okay, so here we are in Madagascar. The interesting thing was at that time, you know, this was the nation-building era in Africa. But the French effectively froze out the American Embassy. Didn't freeze me out because I wasn't at a high enough level to be worth freezing, but by and large we didn't have much influence and we didn't accomplish much. The French didn't want us to. Behind the scenes, the French really ran the Malagasy government in 1959. How they did it, that was a great lesson for me, a great thing to observe.

As a matter of fact, when I got into Senegal many years later, it had become a little more subtle, a little less pervasive but the French still managed to do the same thing. I wouldn't be surprised if they're still doing it today in some places like Gabon and Cameroon. Not everybody else could do it the same way. The British to an extent, but not as effectively as the French. Certainly not the Spanish as I observed when I got to Equatorial Guinea many years later. It was odd, even at the consular and administrative level, if you had really something important, you would run up against a Frenchman behind it all. If you didn't cultivate those French advisors you weren't going to get things done.

*Q: I think the French have an expression, *chasse gardée*?*

HARDY: Yes, and that was a *chasse gardée*.

*Q: Their country.*

HARDY: Those were the days of propeller flights. It was 36 hours, a considerable time, from Madagascar back to the States. Madagascar is unique. It has a flora and a fauna that's completely different from the rest of the world, completely different from Africa, because it had been separated from that continent so many millions of years ago. So that was a thing to observe for someone coming in from outside, was one of those extra-curricular things I joined the Foreign Service to do. Malagasy culture also was quite different, because it was about two-thirds Polynesian and one-third African.

Talking about the administrative cone, I came first as GSO and I was running around repairing people's refrigerators and things like that for a long time; seeing that they

received their things out of the airport and through customs.

Then I became administrative officer when something happened to the administrative officer. Then the much larger administrative section of the AID Mission was amalgamated with the Embassy's administrative section and I became CAMO (if memory serves, Consolidated Administrative Management Organization) Director for about four months until a more experienced officer out of Washington was assigned to the post. Well, by that time we had a fairly decent and large aid mission there, and here I was CAMO director in my second post. I had about 50 people working for me, and I'd have to say that was pretty good experience. I probably couldn't have handled it if I hadn't done administrative work in Toronto and other administrative work in Madagascar previously. I wound up in Madagascar two and a half, almost three years. That was good, and exemplified the good part of the generalist, as opposed to the cone system, approach.

**CHARLES H. TWINING**  
**Rotation Officer**  
**Antananarivo (1964-1966)**

*Ambassador Charles H. Twining was born in Maryland in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Virginia in 1962 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1964. After entering the Foreign Service in 1964 his assignments included Tananarive, Dalat, Abidjan, Bangkok, Cotonou, Douala, Ouagadougou, and Honolulu with ambassadorships to Cambodia and Cameroon. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Ambassador Charles H. Twining in 2004.*

*Q: With regards to your assignment in Madagascar, were you told you would be in Williams' office until a certain point, and then go?*

TWINING: Yes.

*Q: Madagascar is always off the charts, as far as Africa goes. What were you hearing about Madagascar?*

TWINING: Before I went, my focus had been on continental Africa. I must admit I'm not sure I knew a great deal about Madagascar, except how Madagascar had gone through some difficult periods, with a lot of bloodletting particularly in 1947. I knew about the leadership of Madagascar, because the president, Philibert Tsiranana, had worked with other Francophone African leaders, almost like a club, prior to, and just after, independence. What I knew less of was cultural. Most of the Malagasy people's ancestors arrived on a Kon-Tiki type voyage from Polynesia a thousand years earlier. Africans mixed in later, coming from the mainland. I had a lot to learn in that regard.

*Q: Today is the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2004. You went to Madagascar when?*

TWINING: I went to Madagascar late in 1964.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

TWINING: November 1964 until October of 1966, when I was pulled out just before the end of my tour for the urgent need in Vietnam.

*Q: Let's talk about Madagascar. Was it the great red island, or something?*

TWINING: The great red island, based on the color of the soil.

*Q: In 1964, when you first got there, what was going on in Madagascar? What kind of government, economy, American interest and all?*

TWINING: When I went in 1964 Madagascar had been independent for four years. It had the regime that basically had been left in place when the French pulled out in 1960. The French continued to have considerable influence. The neo-colonial label has been applied to that situation, but at the same time, it wasn't simply a one-party state which followed French orders; there was an active opposition that had to be reckoned with. This was true especially in the capital city, controlled by a communist opposition party, which made the internal political scene a bit more interesting. Madagascar, at that time, was relatively rich. It was feeding itself and exporting something like 200,000 tons of rice annually, which I would contrast with the mid-1970s, when Madagascar embarked upon a revolution directed by a young naval officer, Lt. Cdr. Didier Ratsiraka. From then on it became a rice deficit state (rice being the main staple), which made me start to wonder about the merits of revolutions. In any case, the U.S. interest wasn't very great.

Apart from its vanilla, perhaps the most important U.S. interest at that time was a NASA tracking station outside the capital, Tananarive. It was important to maintain access from the Malagasy to operate the station, to let the NASA people come and go as well as the subcontractors, Bendix. It was an interesting operation. We enjoyed inviting Malagasy officials to this completely open operation and watch the tracking of a space capsule. President Johnson contributed to Malagasy interest when he sent just returned astronauts Gordon Cooper and Charles Conrad to Madagascar in a Presidential jet to thank the government and people for supporting their space flight.

Madagascar is a fascinating place. I mentioned before the variety of the people. They were mostly Polynesians, speaking a non-African language. Some 80 percent of the flora and fauna is simply unique in the world. The embassy provided support to scientific expeditions. The San Diego zoo would come for lemurs. There was an expedition once from an American university looking for fossils of early reptiles, early dinosaurs, and early mammals. I have somewhere in my effects, as a thank you

from that expedition, a bone from a prehistoric rhinoceros. I never realized that there had ever been rhinos anywhere in Madagascar, but it probably went back to the time when Madagascar was attached to the African continent. All of these things kept your interest engaged.

*Q: What was your job?*

TWINING: It really was an ideal job. It was a small embassy. State had already switched to the idea of rotating a young officer around an embassy. I was rotated as much as anyone I think could be rotated. I always did the consular work, but then I would also do part-time political, economic or commercial work. I did administrative and general services work, e.g., getting furniture into embassy houses. I prepared the embassy budget. I went over to the U.S. cultural center for three months, and did public affairs and cultural work, and taught English. It was really an ideal, hands on learning experience that it is possible to have in a small place. It often meant filling in when no one else was available to do the job. It convinced me of the need for a young foreign service officer to get as wide a variety of experiences early on as humanly possible, advice I pass on to new officers. You may discover that you enjoy preparing the embassy budget much more than you enjoy stamping visas, for example. But, you can't find out unless you do both.

*Q: Looking at the embassy a touch, who was the ambassador? Talk a little bit about some of the personalities, DCM, ambassador and all, how they operated.*

TWINING: It was an interesting mix. The ambassador was one of the early Africa hands from the 1950s named Vaughan Ferguson. As I mentioned before, we didn't have very many old Africa hands. He was of that earlier generation. The deputy chief of mission was someone who escaped the Holocaust and came to America, named Robert Eisenberg. He was very good, an economist. He was replaced by another old Africa hand, John (Pat) Cunningham. They were my supervisors, my teachers. These Africa hands could tell you about the colonial period and the evolution to independence. You could always learn a great deal from them.

*Q: How about the Malagasy? How did you find dealing with them?*

TWINING: For all of us, our first post is memorable. I tried to learn Malagasy, the national language. I had many Malagasy friends. I was single at the time. There was another single officer, Philip Pillsbury, with USIA, with a far better command of the language. We teamed up, and often we would show American films out in villages. We would interact with university and secondary high school students. The Malagasy are by and large a gentle people, as you would expect for those whose ancestors came from the South Pacific. Because they had been very much isolated after they settled in Madagascar, they evolved their own gentle kinds of music and dances and cultural traditions. It was just very pleasant.

*Q: Had the French done what they had done in some other places? Some of the*

*leaders would say, "Go to Paris", and "Come back and be poets." Had they done much of this?*

TWINING: The French supported French-oriented education. Indeed, one of the most famous people in Madagascar was a man who had gone to be educated in France, named Jacques Rabemananjara, who became a poet. But he was also a political figure. The French educated at least a certain elite group of Malagasy, particularly among the more pure-blooded Polynesian stock. They went to Paris or to the French Colonial School in Dakar. They did a fairly decent job of educating an elite group. The education system in Madagascar after the French departed was a rather lively system. I have often felt that different colonial powers stack up differently when you look at their legacy, with the French and the British at the top of the list, for at least the efforts that they made in education.

*Q: I know very little about the country. But, was there a difference between the highlanders and the lowlanders?*

TWINING: Absolutely. There was a big difference between the highlanders and the lowlanders. Madagascar, when I was there, was very much in the hands of the highlanders, particularly those known as the Merina. When the revolution occurred, it was conducted by the lowlanders. So, you had a flip-flopping of the power structure. That indeed was one of Madagascar's problems, trying to integrate the two groups of people.

*Q: Were we able to talk to the various parties there? Was there enough of a political life so that we were able to tap into that and talk to people about what was happening?*

TWINING: You could, but you were focused particularly on the ruling party and the opposition party that controlled the capital city. Unfortunately, the latter had the communist label attached to it. How communist it was, I don't know. But it made your contacts with its members more suspect. That was difficult. So, often we would try to find out the mood of the country by talking to the students, by talking to some of the business people out in the provinces and so forth. That was frequently as good as talking to parties.

*Q: What were their exports? I always think of combs and things like that.*

TWINING: No, besides rice Madagascar exports vanilla, semiprecious stones, coffee and sugar. Already, synthetic vanilla was starting to make an impact on the world market. For a country so dependent on one or two primary products it makes a big difference. Madagascar is also known for its large herds of cattle (zebus) and exported some quality beef during my time.

*Q: Did we have any AID program, or anything like that there, Peace Corps?*

TWINING: Not Peace Corps, which was later. But there was an AID program going on. In a country that always has lots of needs, it is very difficult to know where you best plug in. Do you give infrastructure support? Do you do rural development or seek reform of the financial sector, and so forth? I think AID in those days, with not a lot of money, was also laboring between doing one or the other, unfortunately. To my mind, it called for the need for considerable coordination with other donors, as well as the government, to make sure that we gave useful assistance without duplication of effort. What was awfully nice with the advent of the 1960s was the establishment in independent Africa of a self-help program, funded by AID and implemented by State. One of the things that I could do in Madagascar, which my colleagues elsewhere in Africa also did, was to go to a village where perhaps the people needed a bridge or classroom or health station. We could pay for the materials while the local villagers could contribute the labor, or the sand, etc., to complete the project. It is invariably a very modest program, but effective because it reached the people.

*Q: You mentioned you went with Phil Pillsbury out into the boonies, to show movies. What kind of films were you showing?*

TWINING: Those were wonderful days when the United States Information Agency had money to make beautiful films, as you remember. You might have a film on America's leading cities. You might have a film on America's agriculture, the American cowboy, or race relations. They were great films to tell the world about America. There were also AID films about good health and hygiene. It was part of trying to get people to know and understand America. Madagascar is far away. If they knew anything about a foreign country, it wasn't even neighboring East Africa; it was generally France. We wanted to broaden their horizons.

*Q: Well, within the embassy, was there a feeling that there was competition with France?*

TWINING: I suppose there was a feeling of competition with France. Yet, you realized you had to work with the French. Ministries still had French advisors at that time. You often would work with those French advisors, as you worked with the Malagasy principals. But it was an unequal relationship between the U.S. and France. We were sort of a small fellow next to the big giant. The French had big aid programs, and lots of people, both in the business community and as government advisors, it was an unequal contest. It would have been crazy for us to be competing with them.

*Q: Were the Soviets there?*

TWINING: No, not in Madagascar. I think the reason was partly because the people in power were afraid that having communist embassies there would serve as a conduit to the main opposition party. They did not let the Soviet bloc into the country, at that time.

*Q: What was life at the embassy like, for you?*

TWINING: Because it was a small embassy, you interacted easily with the five or six Americans, both officers and staff members who were at the embassy, as well as its talented Malagasy personnel, but your life couldn't really evolve around the embassy. There just wasn't enough there. You wanted variety, so one's life was much more involved with Malagasy friends, and your foreign friends, and travel around that beautiful country. It was a good balance.

*Q: How about the Malagasies, as people to get to know. How did you find them?*

TWINING: I found them generally very eager to get to know Americans. There was always the aura of the American myth, as portrayed by Hollywood. They would see films, like anybody did, when they were available. I think they were curious about us. If you learned some of the language, or at least maintained your French, it was easy to have access not only to people, but also to their homes. They were very approachable.

*Q: During this 1964 to 1966 period, were there any problems, tempted coups, earthquakes, visits of high-ranking people, or anything?*

TWINING: Happily there were neither coup attempts nor earthquakes, though Madagascar was on the receiving end of some vicious cyclones.

*Q: What was the role of the military?*

TWINING: One of my activities involved supporting our small Air Attaché office, as we sought to get to know the younger Malagasy military officers. Besides being fun, it was a way to feel out what they were thinking, how ambitious they were for power. Were they discontent at all? What should they be doing, aiming for? What we saw were military officers who were still trying to determine what their role should be. We noticed the attention they paid, and their sensitivity to, coup attempts made by military officers over on the African continent. When we asked for their reactions, they would reply vaguely that the Malagasy military did not need to take such actions, but we had to wonder what was in the backs of their minds. Note that, when there was a transition of power in 1972, it went first to the Army chief, General Ramanantsoa, assisted in governing by a number of those same officers with whom we had socialized. He was overthrown in 1975 by one of the younger, radical members of the officer corps, Lt. Cdr. Ratsiraka, who went on to start the revolution in Madagascar, removed fellow officers from power, adopted Marxism-Leninism, and nationalized most of the economy. Curiously, I found myself remotely touched by all this later when the Government of Madagascar informed the American Embassy in 1976 that it had declared me persona non grata. Since this was a decade after I had departed the Great Red Island, the Embassy requested an explanation. It was told that my car – which I had sold when I departed – had been spotted moving around town, and therefore I must be in the country. Such is the paranoia generated in a revolution.



*Q: Did you cover other areas besides Madagascar?*

TWINING: As part of an assignment to Tananarive in those days, you were given consular accreditation to a dozen or more small islands in the Indian Ocean extending down toward Antarctica, e.g., Kerguelen, the Crozet Islands, as well as the British colony of Mauritius, the then French colony of the Comoro Islands, and the French Department of Reunion. This was done primarily so that, if there were ever a consular emergency on one of these often remote locations, we had legal authority to do any necessary consular work to protect American citizens. I traveled to Mauritius, the Comoros, and Reunion to meet any American citizens and provide some basic consular services, as well as to look at their political and economic situations. We also read regularly their newspapers, met their nationals, and issued them visas back in Madagascar. Even then, Mauritius was a jewel. Port Louis was a sleepy capital, with the British firmly in charge and seemingly suspicious of what I was up to. The Comoros were even sleepier. The French were still in control but more relaxed than the British about my meeting any local person I wished. One could only wonder whether the four islands of the Comoros could even constitute a self-sufficient nation, despite its basic production of ylang-ylang (used in the making of perfume), whose incredible sweet smell permeated the air. One had the idea that Reunion was a backwater for the French. U.S. connections were minimal on that poor island, consisting of three large, and lovely, volcanic craters. It was the only place during my entire Foreign Service career where a nasty French customs official insisted on going through every single item in my suitcase, regardless of my diplomatic passport.

*Q: Did the Malagasy feel African?*

TWINING: That was part of the problem. Even the early African institutions, before the Organization of African Unity was formed, seemed to attach Madagascar on as almost an afterthought. The Malagasy felt different from the Africans. They felt generally superior to the Africans. Their skin was lighter, often a pretty, light brown skin. Their country didn't have some of the chaotic happenings that they heard about in the Congo. They were "above that" they thought. We tried to tell them, "Look, who are your neighbors? It's not the U.S., it's not France, it is Mozambique, and South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania." We would urge them to work with the Africans, to feel part of the African... not continent, but perhaps of the African movements. Eventually, that came to pass, but the original attitude was very much that they were different and better.

*Q: Was there any affinity to India, or Arabia?*

TWINING: There was a little bit of both. It's an interesting question. Remember that Zanzibar is not very far from Africa. Zanzibar was then controlled, at least in part (and accounting for some of its problems), by Omanis, for example. Dhows came down the East African coast; Madagascar wasn't relieved completely from that movement. So, they were sensitive, I think, to that part of the Middle East.

India was another interesting issue. You had Indian merchants in Madagascar. The Indians were present in South Africa. The Indians were present, especially in neighboring Mauritius. So, there was some link with India without the Malagasy feeling themselves tied into the subcontinent.

*Q: Did they look toward the Ocean much, or not?*

TWINING: It depended. Those who were in control at that time were the highlanders. Frankly, with their state of roads, they felt fairly removed from the oceans. You are up at a high elevation when you live in Tananarive. You had to make an effort to get over to the ocean. Yet, the ocean was also their lifeline. They had a railroad down to the ocean, to the port of Tamatave. The goods came in through that port and went out through that port. No, it was more the coastal people, as you would expect, who felt that they were part of a maritime tradition. This was just one more element that separated the two groups of people.

*Q: Did we put military ships in there, making port calls?*

TWINING: Rarely. Even today, very few military ships go to the southern Indian Ocean. It's just too far off the sea-lanes. While I was there, we had one U.S. Navy ship visit. You would have a U.S. commercial vessel passing through every once in a while. Those were the days when we received our magazines and so forth by sea pouch. It would take six months for the sea pouch to arrive there. So, you were happy when you had a U.S. ship that was coming through. No, there wasn't very much contact of that nature.

*Q: This was your first post, wasn't it?*

TWINING: Yes.

*Q: How did you feel about Foreign Service work after this?*

TWINING: Well, I was very enthusiastic about Foreign Service work after that, partly because I had the opportunity to try some of the aspects of it, partly because I suppose you were a semi-big fish in a small pond. You enjoyed the cultural interaction. After two years there, I felt very strongly that the Foreign Service was indeed what I wanted to make as a career.

*Q: Did you feel, or did your fellow officers ever feel that they were somewhat removed from the African Bureau?*

TWINING: In Madagascar you felt yourself to be distant from the rest of the world, including Washington. The African Bureau was never quite sure where to place Madagascar within the Bureau. It wasn't part of East Africa; it wasn't part of Southern Africa. You were a bit of a stepchild. Again, communication was slower in those days. You had to type out your telegrams, and hope you didn't make a mistake,

and then the code person would retype the telegrams. One would avoid long or unnecessary telegraphic traffic. You would send things back by pouch, longer dispatches, but they would take forever to get there. You had a diplomatic courier from Frankfurt who came through, generally once a week, to exchange a small, classified pouch. But he made lots and lots of other stops. This is how you were tied to Washington and to the African Bureau.

**PHILLIP W. PILLSBURY, JR.**  
**Cultural Officer, USIS**  
**Antananarivo (1964-1966)**

*Philip W. Pillsbury, Jr. was born in Chicago in 1935. He received a BA from Yale University in 1957 and joined the Foreign Service in 1959. His overseas posts included Spain, Italy, Mali, Madagascar, Zaire, Iran, and Argentina. He was interviewed by Charles Kennedy on February 28, 1994.*

*Q: Yes, in that context. Well now, where did you go then?*

PILLSBURY: Well that kind of thing throws everything into a cocked hat of course. I went home on early home leave and then started looking around for assignments. There was nothing really open because I hadn't really begun the process of asking, bidding for assignments. There were several offers, and then one finally opened up in Madagascar, in Tananarive, and we went in the end of '64.

*Q: So, what was the political situation in Madagascar, in Tananarive. How do you spell it?*

PILLSBURY: TANANARIVE. That is the French version of the name which is now the Malagasy name Antananarivo. It is considered one of the most exotic and fascinating places in the world and still is. Many people, when I mention Tananarive, say: "Oh that's been one of the lifelong dreams of my life." At the time Madagascar was just coming out, as were many other countries in former French Africa, coming out from under the wing of the French. The French were much more involved with and much more strongly entrenched. The French presence was much more evident in Madagascar than it was in Mali. The President at the time, Philbert Tsiranana, was the father of the country and very active in independence, but he was taking it a whole lot slower than the Malian president. There were French advisors in every ministry. The French regarded Tananarive and Saigon as the two best places to go in terms of their overseas empire prior to independence for just creature comfort, and cultural life. It was a wonderful assignment to go to at the time. The country was still ... they had their ecological problems but nothing compared to the way it is today. The population was six million then, it's now

eighteen million. The infrastructure was still relatively intact. That has severely deteriorated since certainly.

Q: *What type of government was it?*

PILLSBURY: It was certainly more open to the west. It was definitely a one party state and Tsiranana was certainly the ruler. I wouldn't call it a dictatorship, but a one party state with a father figure as a leader who was reelected, I remember at the time, with 99% of the vote. He would have won easily 85% anyway. There wasn't any serious opposition to him when I was there. That came later.

Q: *Did it have either a Marxist or a French socialist tinge to it.*

PILLSBURY: Not really. Well yes. I think some of the tenets of the French socialist party, the SFIO, were there, but it was certainly more open to us. Our main competition at the time, and the main barriers to access were the French really, because the French regarded that as a real bastion of theirs at the time in post-colonial Africa which I certainly didn't gainsay. That was their choice. They were there first, had been there a long time. Their cultural operation was a model of the French attitude of their *mission civilisatrice* towards people of another country, and especially in a former colony. They had a policy of educating to the very top of the French system the best and the brightest of the Malagasy people, and they did it always recognizing the extraordinarily deep and interesting, and powerful tradition of the culture of the people and the history of Madagascar. And so recognizing it, they created a love/hate relationship that I think still exists there between the Malagasy and the French. There was a dichotomy among the people of Madagascar, certainly at the intellectual level, individuals who sometimes were faced with the choice of trying to decide if their spiritual heritage was stronger in the Malagasy way or in the French way. So it was fascinating to watch that process.

Q: *What were the American interests in Madagascar?*

PILLSBURY: They were limited at the time in Africa. Of course I mentioned that our biggest concern was communist penetration of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and of course that focused ... Our biggest worries were in the most important ones, in the Congo, of Zaire as it is now known. On Nigeria to a certain extent. And then other countries that were strong. Tanzania, and it's president, Julius Nyerere. In terms of strategy it was the beginning of our very strong involvement in the Indian Ocean. I believe that the first signings of treaties with the British with regard to Diego Garcia took place then. So there was a certain strategic interest there. There was not any particular interest from a resource point of view because Madagascar does not have that much, in terms of some exotic plants and fruits that they use, spices and such but that was about all. In a larger sense our interests were political because Madagascar was the leader in the western oriented grouping of African states - the OCAM it was called, *Organisation Commune Africaine et Malagasy* - which grouped States like Madagascar, Senegal and the Ivory Coast, in an alliance that was under the aegis of the Organization of African Unity, but was more

attuned to the west than were the states like Ghana, Mali, and Guinea which were definitely Marxist.

*Q: How African did the Malagasy feel?*

PILLSBURY: The fact that they are an island is a direct answer to that question. They recognize their geographical affinity and their proximity to Africa and they certainly recognize that they were a part of African Unity. But their cultural, racial, ethnic heritage, especially the people on the plateau is toward Southeast Asia. So the people on the plateau, the Merina have traditionally ruled the country much to the distaste of the people on the coast who are definitely more African. The people around the coast of the country are more Africa oriented. It was only after independence that the people on the coast began to take positions in ministries and have a much stronger voice in running the country.

*Q: What is the proportion about, highlanders versus lowlanders?*

PILLSBURY: I'd say 30 to 40% highlanders, and then if you take all of the groups around it's about 60 to 70% non-highlanders. That includes a large community of overseas Chinese as well.

*Q: So it's a fragmented group?*

PILLSBURY: Yes. Eighteen ethnic groups.

*Q: What was our Embassy like there. Who was the Ambassador.*

PILLSBURY: The Ambassador was a man by the name of Vaughan Ferguson who was one of the few men in the State Department at the time who had wide African experience. He had served in Consulates General, I know, in Dakar, and I think in Brazzaville before independence. He had a good understanding of Africa, pre-independence Africa. We were all hobbled by a lack of access under barriers imposed by the British, the French, the Portuguese, the Belgians, all of the colonial parts of Africa. We just didn't have presence there that the colonial powers had. It was a good Embassy. They had a very fine AID team. And AID had an extensive program in rural development as well. So that going back to the interest question, there was a lot of altruism there. We didn't have strong economic interest, there wasn't a political worry about turning Marxist although they later did, in the '70s under Ratsiraka. So it was really an assistance program to help them solidify their independence.

*Q: OK. You were with USIA on this island where the French are extremely strong as far as the cultural side. We're trying to spread American culture. The French are our allies. Did you feel that one, were the French trying to cut you, two, were you trying to cut the French. How did you see it? What were you after?*

PILLSBURY: We had a modest four man operation. A little cultural center. The most important thing that I felt as Cultural Officer. I believed, and my boss agreed, that in terms of cultural affairs that we had a strong card to play in regards to English teaching because there was a huge interest in that and still is. The French had no quarrel with that at all. They knew that their French teaching operation was very solid and had been in place for a hundred years. Exchange programs on a very modest level also were effective. We did everything we were allowed to do and had the resources to do given what was being allocated out in those days from Washington. Working with the French I felt the most important thing was ... We certainly couldn't beat them, and so to join them in a way. So we had a lot of cooperative programs ... And this I did in Zaire as well with the Belgians and with the French later on. We had cooperative programs. We had a joint venture, joint programming with the French Cultural Center in which we would bring an American who was an expert in French literature, who would talk at the French Cultural Center, and then we would have a Frenchman who would do American literature. This is one example. He spoke at the American Cultural Center. I had a very good and close relationship with the Director of the French Cultural Center who was one of their best in the whole system, admired greatly by none other than Malraux himself at the time, Bernard Mounier. So we had a very good relationship with the French and I don't think there was any feeling of wanting to undercut them, or they undercutting us because we recognized that this was largely their turf and we had a certain part of the pie within which we wanted to work and they said: "Fine, go ahead. At least when I was there, there was no conflict whatsoever.

*Q: You had the people on the plateau, and then those down below. Were we working both of these groups deliberately. It's so easy to sometimes stick around the capital?*

PILLSBURY: Yes. The answer to that is yes we were. We had a countrywide approach. All of our IV program, the International Visitor Program, the AID programs for exchanges, bringing specialists in, definitely concentrated on the country as a whole. We recognized that the traditions remained strong and still are today. We didn't want to step on toes, but also made it understood that we wanted to work with and find leadership elements in the population as a whole. I traveled extensively in the country at the time in those two years and learned the Malagasy language. I had an access that was very extensive and broad-based, let's say, and can say with pride that I had a very good understanding of the culture of the country. We dealt with them countrywide really.

*Q: You say that the country turned Marxist some years later. Did you see any of the seeds of that, were they apparent at the time?*

PILLSBURY: You know, you'd always like to say that you had the prescience, but "nobody listened to me." I don't think so, because the man who took over... He was a sailor and in the French Navy. He had been trained ... he went to St Cyr, I know that. Then he went to the Naval Academy at Brest. Anyway, when we were there, Tsiranana really ran things. It was only subsequently from '66 on that things began to unravel and there was some serious demonstration against the government. They reflected discontent with one man running things for so long, and with the French presence. That created

some of the conditions that led to the coup by Ratsiraka. The Russians and the Chinese never regarded Madagascar with the same interest in terms of influence that they did in Africa itself. Their presence was never what it was in Mali, or Guinea or places like that. No we didn't foresee the change. I think it came even somewhat as a surprise. Ratsiraka expelled our Ambassador and the Public Affairs Officer, and a couple of other people all in one swoop. So our relations with the country went to ground zero and were there for several years. They're very good now.

*Q: It sounds like a rather quiet, tranquil period while you were there.*

PILLSBURY: It was a tranquil period. The Malagasy are a very tranquil people until they get riled. The worst rebellion against the French colonial rule took place in Madagascar in the late '40s, in 1948, except obviously for Vietnam. I found that, again as I said I, had the Malagasy, so I imagine I spent especially the last year, I was with the Malagasy people almost exclusively and I found that they overwhelmed me with their hospitality, with their kindness, again I used in my last talk with you, the civilization that I found, the civil attitude of people from another culture. It really struck me. But they showed also later on that they can be extremely violent. I will say, that I saw some elements in the Merinn, the plateau people. There was a pastor, the church was strong in terms of ideological influence. There was a pastor who had this dichotomy of the love/hate relationship with the French. He really began to be very angry toward the French and their influence and he was one of the leaders in the opposition, not Marxist-Leninist but certainly socialist and very anti-French, that led to the take over in the '70s.

*Q: You left there when?*

PILLSBURY: I left in 1966.

**JOHN E. GRAVES**  
**Attaché, USIS**  
**Antananarivo (1965-1967)**

*John E Graves was born in 1927 in Michigan. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degree from the University of Michigan, and served in the US Navy overseas from 1945 to 1946. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1962, he was assigned to Leopoldville, Bukavu, Antananarivo, Rach Gia, Lomé, Yaoundé, Tehran, Montevideo, Sidi Bou Said, and Rabat. Mr. Graves was interviewed by Richard Jackson on January 12, 1999.*

*Q: After a year there, they figured you were an Africanist and sent you on to Madagascar.*

GRAVES: Madagascar in those days was one of the most pleasant places in the world. After the Congo, I guess Washington figured I deserved a little rest.

*Q: So, you were there resting from 1965 to 1967.*

GRAVES: Right. It was a very pleasant experience indeed. I worked hard, but it was certainly a good life. I have nothing but good memories. Sad now. Madagascar has made a mess of its economy. When I was there, it was a large exporter of rice. Now people are starving.

*Q: It was an extraordinary mixture of African and Asian and had its own island culture.*

GRAVES: Right. Even though it's off the coast of Africa, the primary population is Polynesian or Indonesian. The Polynesians were undoubtedly the greatest sailors that ever lived. They managed to sail east clear to Hawaii even though for generations they didn't dare sail beyond the point where the familiar sky changed. Sailing in the other direction, they must have stopped in India where they adopted hump-backed cattle before moving on to discover Madagascar. The basic population of Madagascar is Polynesian, so much so that when we invited President Tsiranana to the United States, including Hawaii, the USIA film of his visit shows him counting in Malagasy and a Hawaiian counting in Hawaiian and the words are almost identical.

*Q: Was that your idea to send him to Hawaii?*

GRAVES: In part. We wanted to show the relationship. It certainly worked wonders. We had the film, which we showed in Madagascar, confirming the relationship between Americans and Malagasy.

*Q: Were there any real U.S. interests there? What was our mission?*

GRAVES: Yes. The major interest was the NASA tracking station. Madagascar happens to be the first spot where it's possible to confirm the orbit when spacecraft are launched from Florida. So the station was very important. We had to convince the French, who were very influential, and the Malagasy that it was in their interest to participate in the admirable human experience of exploring space. We were busy selling that. I was often on radio. When I arrived there, they immediately took me out to this station. I was on Voice of America (VOA), in French, reporting from the station. Always when you go on radio, you say "This is John Graves reporting from...." Malagasy names are very long, often as many as 20 letters. I looked at the name of the place where the station was located but I couldn't pronounce it. I finally said, "Near Antananarivo." My colleagues all had a big laugh. The following week, when I went on the VOA again, I pronounced "Imerintsiatosika" like a native.

*Q: What was the embassy like and the interaction between USIA (or USIS, as it's called abroad) and the embassy? Do you recall the ambassador or some of the people there then?*



GRAVES: There was a political ambassador named King, a Mormon. The relationship between USIS and the rest of the Americans was good. Probably the most important entity was NASA. There were a lot of Americans involved in that. It certainly was one of the chief reasons for our being in Madagascar.

*Q: Coming from such career ambassadors as Ed Gullion and Mac Godley and as the preeminent French speaker in Madagascar, how was it working with your first political ambassador? Were there different strengths and weaknesses?*

GRAVES: Before the political ambassador, there was a career ambassador who had great personal problems. He probably was an excellent staff person who shouldn't have been put in charge of anything. He had a serious drinking problem and was removed. Then we had the political ambassador. I didn't find him particularly difficult. As so many Mormons, he had done a year or two of missionary work in France, so he spoke French and wasn't greatly handicapped in that respect.

*Q: Before we leave Madagascar, is there anything that we haven't touched on that you would like to?*

GRAVES: Only the question which is the most important concern I have in talking with you, our long period of obsessive anti-Communism. It's not that I have any illusion that Communism is workable. It might be workable in a Heaven populated with angels, but it's not a practical option with human beings, human nature being what it is. You're not going to be able to produce turnips, corn, or whatever in the Communist system. No incentive. People, even if they're idealists, will soon give up really producing. Nonetheless, I was concerned always, even disgusted, with many of my colleagues who were obsessed with anti-Communism. The only motivation guiding our foreign policy all those years was anti-Communism. That was all that really counted. All the rest was secondary or mere window dressing.

Communism is of course a disaster as the recent history of Madagascar clearly documents. When I was in Madagascar most people had a pretty good life and economically the country was doing quite well under the tutorship of the French. But after my departure, leaders from the coastal areas like President Tsiranana were forced out by the Merinas (people of the high central plateau, mostly of Polynesian descent) who had been the rulers before the French arrived. (When independence came to French Africa, the French managed to install Africans who lacked a major base of power and were therefore amenable to French guidance.) Madagascar and the Malagasy certainly were much better off when we left there than they are now. When the Merinas took power they understandably wanted to reduce French influence and therefore called on the Russians for help and guidance. Ratsiraka's policies destroyed the economy, especially rice production.

Communism everywhere fails to produce because it fails to take into account human nature. What happened in Russia was simply that the economy finally got so bad that

something had to give. It wasn't our obsessive anti-Communism that beat the Communists. The system itself just doesn't work. We didn't need to cuddle up to and support really despicable dictators. Marcos in the Philippines, the Shah in Iran, Somoza in Nicaragua. We could have done business with them to the extent that it was in our interests without looking as if we were supporting them. If they managed to stay in power, we should have made clear that it was not because of our support. Foolish on our part to think we had to fight Communism by any means instead of seeing that we would do better being true to ourselves and our values.

*Q: Thinking about Africa, don't you think that there are so many countries, such as Liberia or Sierra Leone, that have fared so badly where Communism seemed to have little to do with it and then thinking about the countries we've been talking about (Congo and Madagascar), how much really should we attribute to the Communist pattern, the socialist model, as the root of their failings?*

GRAVES: I think the countries that had very leftist regimes fared worse. The problem is deep. All of us were optimistic in the 1960s. We thought we could be helpful and do something useful in Africa. Not just the Americans, but other countries, really thought they knew how to support and to promote and make Africa and Africans viable. Experience showed how wrong we were. Or as Walt Kelly's Pogo, playing the role of Julius Caesar reporting from the war had it: "We have met the enemy and he is us." If Africa is poor and chaotic because of its history, climates and cultures, maybe only the Africans themselves can improve matters. I simply don't know what we could do that really would be helpful to Africa and Africans. I know that what we did in the past has not been successful. Some of it was sincere and some was not. The Peace Corps, I admired a great deal even though the long-term impact was probably slight. Our AID programs, I admired a good deal less. Too often, AID helped American businessmen, especially American farmers, rather than Africa. The answer to your question is, no, I don't know. I'm very sorry to say that I spent 12 years in black Africa and I don't know what we can or could have done that would have been really helpful.

*Q: In critiquing the anti-Communist bias of our policy in those years, are you thinking mostly ideologically or also reflecting on on-the-ground competition with the Soviets and Soviet embassies? Did you see that in Madagascar and in Congo?*

GRAVES: No, I didn't know the Russians well in either place. Later on, I knew them very well indeed. I had drinks with them at banquets and played volleyball. It was in Mali that I first knew the Russians. It wasn't the Russians that I knew that bothered me so much as my fellow Americans, Foreign Service people, Washington, the American press, and their obsession with anti-Communism. I remember once being on radio and television when I came back to the US. from some country and a lady calling in to say, "You don't understand, young man. The Communists are evil, evil!" she shrieked. A kind of religious fervor. No leavening humor as when President Roosevelt allowed as how, "Somoza is a bastard, but he's our bastard." The image we created in the world just wasn't in our interests.

**WALTER J. SHERWIN**  
**USAID Operations Officer**  
**Antananarivo (1967-1969)**

*Walter Sherwin was born in Germany in 1931 and graduated from the University of Wisconsin. He has served in AID missions in Madagascar, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Niger. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.*

SHERWIN: I was transferred to Madagascar.

*Q: That was quite a leap.*

SHERWIN: Yes.

*Q: That was still part of RUA at that time.*

SHERWIN: Yes. I guess the transfer was kind of a reward for having served in Upper Volta. I enjoyed it a great deal, but it was a very difficult post. From a personal standpoint, not much was available there.

*Q: How did Madagascar get to be included with all of the Sahelian countries?*

SHERWIN: It was an ex-French colony, had gained its independence in 1960 at the same time as most of the other French colonies in Africa, and had a small AID program by the time I arrived there. As in the other RUA countries, the program had been reduced in size during the mid-1960s.

*Q: What was the situation in Madagascar?*

SHERWIN: The AID program had begun in the early 60s much as the Sahelian programs had, with a heavy equipment drop. But, as with the other RUA countries, the program had been reduced in size by the time I arrived in 1967. One of the projects that was phasing out -- and this was true in Upper Volta as well -- was public safety assistance.

*Q: What was their job?*

SHERWIN: Their job was to work with the local governments, the local police to try to improve their management capacity and their ability to maintain security for the state.

*Q: Did you have any problem with having a project like that?*

SHERWIN: I didn't have a personal problem with it. I wasn't aware of any real abuses at the time. I should mention that in Upper Volta we went through a coup d'état in early

1966. On January first, as a matter of fact, Maurice Yameogo, the first president of Upper Volta, was overthrown, and the army under General Lamizana took over. It was a bloodless coup. But it didn't change our program very much, though of course we had to deal with new people in the government.

*Q: It was a peaceful coup?*

SHERWIN: As coups go, it was pretty peaceful, very different from what transpired years later in Upper Volta and other countries. Anyway, back to Madagascar.

*Q: What was the situation in Madagascar when you were there?*

SHERWIN: It was still under the first independence government, a conservative government run by Filibert Tsiranana, who was very pro-French. The French were very much in control. They were the lead donor, first among equals as far as the international community was concerned. The same was true in every other ex-French colony except Guinea. Our program was quite small in comparison. I guess Madagascar for me and my family was the most colorful and interesting place to live that we had ever been and probably the least interesting program I ever had to deal with.

*Q: Why was that?*

SHERWIN: Well, the AID program was on the decline and nothing new could be launched. But Madagascar is a unique country. It considers itself part of Africa, yet is very different. The people are a mixture of Indonesian stock as well as some African and Arabic influence. They have been there for some 2000 years, and they have a very different culture from the people on the continent. We lived on a hill overlooking much of Antananarivo. We marveled at the sunsets. On any trips that we would take in the country, we found beautiful scenery, but the landscape was severely eroded because of population pressures and poor land management practices. That situation has only gotten worse over time. When we were there in '67-'69, the population was around six million. Now, 30 years later, the population is thirteen million or more, which I think is too much for the limited resource base to accommodate.

*Q: But you weren't dealing with population programs then?*

SHERWIN: No, we weren't, but today I believe AID has a very active family planning program in Madagascar, and it's also involved in a major way with natural resource management. In my day, there was a well drilling project and a heavy equipment maintenance project similar to the one in Upper Volta. We also had two loan programs, one for a railroad bridge, the other for telecommunications. I had to overcome some procedural hurdles to push these loans to the construction stage. In Madagascar, my overall assignment was to begin the closeout of the bilateral program. This became a major effort for me. It was based on the Korry Report.

*Q: OK, what was your understanding of that? What year was this?*

SHERWIN: I believe it was in '66 or early '67. Korry was our ambassador to Ethiopia. He wrote a report the upshot of which was that AID should limit bilateral assistance to 40 countries.

*Q: Worldwide.*

SHERWIN: Worldwide. And stop bilateral assistance to countries that the agency decided were not among the 40. RUA countries, of course, were placed outside the 40. So, our job was to make sure that governments understood the new policy. We did this by drafting amendments to project agreements specifying that projects would be phased out. I had begun to do the same thing in Upper Volta shortly before I left. The governments were pretty unhappy about the impending liquidation of bilateral assistance.

*Q: Were these projects ready to be phased out?*

SHERWIN: Yes, they had been going for some time and I think were due for phase-out in any case over the next few years. The only new activities we could start were regional or multi-donor projects, and I helped develop a \$2-3 million multi-donor livestock project that gained support from the Madagascar government and the French as well as AID. I don't know if it was finally approved and implemented, though.

*Q: What happened to RUA?*

SHERWIN: RUA was abolished, and I guess it was in late '68 that a new organizational form was created based in Dakar, CWAORA, Central West Africa Office for Regional Activities.

*Q: So we could have some projects.*

SHERWIN: Yes. There was a similar organization in Central Africa, wasn't there?

*Q: Cameroon.*

SHERWIN: Right. CWAORA had to oversee the close-down of bilateral programs and convert to the new style of programming for the countries that were no longer eligible for bilateral assistance. The new style consisted of regional programs run through or in connection with some regional organization, and multi-donor projects. This, I don't believe, was a terribly successful form of development assistance.

*Q: What kinds of projects are we talking about?*

SHERWIN: I believe projects were developed in many of the fields where AID normally provided assistance. However, my recollection of this is scant, because my basic responsibility in Dakar, where I was transferred in 1969, was to work on what was left of the bilateral programs in Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. In fact, I

didn't work on any multi-donor projects. I did help mount one regional project -- a poultry raising effort that involved Guinea, Mali, and Senegal.

*Q: How do you make a project like that regional?*

SHERWIN: Well, it's not easy. You use a vehicle like the Organization of Senegal River States as regional sponsor. Its French acronym was OERS. The chicks were raised in Mali and at a certain age they were to be sent to farms, poultry raising centers, in Guinea and Senegal.

*Q: That made it regional?*

SHERWIN: Yes, and the OERS signing on to the project made it legitimate for AID to be involved. The foundation for the project was a bilateral poultry raising project that had already begun in Mali.

*Q: What was your view of this kind of a project?*

SHERWIN: I didn't see the outcome of it. I was there at the early stages, but I think it was awkward because we were dealing with three different countries, each with different interests and capabilities. We had the difficulty of coordinating project activities, raising chicks in one country and sending them by air for further raising and processing in another country. It was difficult enough in those days just to run a bilateral project, never mind a complex regional one. I would be very surprised if the record shows that this was a success.

*Q: But this was an attempt to maintain programs in these countries under the Korry Report policy where we didn't have bilateral programs.*

SHERWIN: That's right. I might mention as an aside that one man lost his life because of this project. He was a Guinean named Oumar Balde who was an official in the OERS in Senegal. He was our contact point, and we became very friendly with him. He had escaped Guinea for political reasons some years earlier. He was on Sekou Touré's enemies list, but Guinea was an OERS member and part of this project, and Balde decided to go back to Guinea to undertake negotiations for this project under assurance that he would be well-received as an OERS representative. Well, the minute he landed in Guinea he was apprehended and promptly hanged. That was a shock.

*Q: By Sekou Touré?*

SHERWIN: Yes, the president, the dictator of Guinea. Not a nice man.

**JOHNNY YOUNG**  
**Budget and Fiscal Officer**

### **Antananarivo (1967-1969)**

*Ambassador Young was born in Georgia and raised in Georgia, Pennsylvania and Delaware. He was educated at Temple University and entered the Foreign Service in 1967. Before being named Ambassador, Mr. Young served in a number of embassies in the administrative field, including Madagascar, Guinea, Kenya, Qatar, Barbados, Jordan and the Netherlands. In 1989 he was named US Ambassador to Sierra Leone, where he served until 1992. He subsequently served as US Ambassador to Togo (1994-1997), Bahrain (1997-2001) and Slovenia (2001-2004). Ambassador Young was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.*

YOUNG: Well, you have to keep in mind that when I came in in '67, you could count on one hand, not even two the number of black officers in the Service. I mean very few. I went to Madagascar. I was the only one and then later on another African-American officer came and the ambassador could not distinguish between the two of us. This second officer's name was Irving Williamson and the ambassador used to call Irving Johnny and he used to call me Irving. Irving was the Econ officer and Irving was just there for a short time and then he moved to Mauritius where he went to work. I just was quite surprised that there weren't more of us in the Service, but it was very few. The few who made ambassador at that time almost all as I recall back in the late '60s, they almost all came from USIA (United States Information Agency) and not from the State Department. I think maybe the only one that I can recall at that time might have been Terry Todman and there might have been one other or so, but almost all were from USIA.

*Q: You were in Madagascar from when to when?*

YOUNG: I was in Madagascar from 1967 to 1969, but I was also accredited to Mauritius. I have to tell you about one of the first things that happened to me on that first assignment. It was in 1968, the students in Paris were rioting.

*Q: This was May or June of '68?*

YOUNG: That's right. They were rioting and they had a major impact on airline service and the students in Madagascar identified with the students in France and they, too, were rioting and sort of stirring up things. Well, one of the problems was we couldn't have usual pouch service between Mauritius and the rest of the world. I had gone to Mauritius to help on the administrative arrangements to get the post set up for its independence in 1968. I went to buy furniture and help set up offices and check the books and all kinds of things like that. My wife went with me and when our work was done which was I guess about a week or two, we prepared to return to Madagascar and I was asked to serve as a non-pro courier. I think this occurred in about April or May, something like that. I was to be the non-pro courier taking these pouches back to Madagascar and then from Madagascar I think they would then be put on Air Madagascar and sent to France. That's how we would get things from Mauritius to the rest of the world. I had five pouches and

when I got to the airport I was told to check them in. I checked them in, these are classified pouches. I got the courier letter, the works.

When we arrived in Madagascar we went to claim the pouches and there was one, there was two, there were three, there were four, but there was no five and panic struck. My wife and I, we looked in every corner in the whole of that airplane. We couldn't find that fifth pouch. I was getting frantic. Before we had set out on our first assignment I had been ill and I'd been in the hospital in Washington for internal bleeding. They didn't know what the reason was. I never reported it to the State Department. I just took off on my assignment and my wife was worried that I was going to get sick again. We looked and we looked and we said, well, we have no choice but to call the embassy. I called the embassy and explained what happened. They said come in right away. I went in with the four pouches. They took the four. They contacted Mauritius right away, explained what happened. Mauritius found the fifth pouch, said there was no evidence that it had been compromised in any way, telegrams flew back and forth. The country team was assembled. I thought oh my God, this is the end of my career. It hadn't even gotten off the ground yet. We arrived in late October, so we'd only been at post about five months. I thought that's it, my career hasn't even gotten started, finished. The communicator who took me to the airport said that he accepted responsibility because he never briefed me on how I should handle a pouch as a non-professional courier. Everyone said to me, oh, they certainly took care of that in orientation class. They surely told me. No one ever mentioned anything about how you behave as a non-professional courier. I didn't have a clue. He accepted responsibility for that and I thought that was a very big thing on his part. It really was. It's amazing what goes around, comes around.

Now, we had become friendly with this communicator and he was a very bright fellow and we remained in touch with him. He was not a high school graduate. He was very clever though and we told him, his name was Theodore Boyd, Ted Boyd and we told him, "Ted, you know, you're a very bright man. Why don't you finish your GED (General Educational Development) and why don't you take the Foreign Service exam?" He took the Foreign Service exam and passed it with one of the highest scores recorded at that time. Succeeded in passing the oral as well. He was brought into the Service and he became a U.S. Information Agency officer. USIS (United States Information Service) put him to school. He did his bachelor's degree, did his master's degree and worked toward his Ph.D. Some decades later he ended up as my public affairs officer when I was in Togo. That's jumping ahead a little bit, but. That's what happened on my first assignment. Losing a classified pouch which was quite something.

*Q: Now, tell me, let's talk a bit about when you arrived in Madagascar, what was the state of Madagascar like? What was happening there and what sort of government?*

YOUNG: It had a very stable government. One that was basically directed from behind the scenes by the French. It was a forgotten little paradise. When I tell people today, when I describe the kind of Madagascar we had then to the Madagascar people talk about today, they can't believe that it's the same place at all. At the time we were there, it was the second most popular place among French colonials. They loved it. They adored it.



We all had a great life there. We lived in wonderful houses. We ate the best food. We had the best clothes. It was a good life. We were kind of like a little forgotten place.

I'll tell another little story that I think is a great little story. We lived in a house and the embassy was also next to these very long steps that led up to a market. I think there were like 800 steps up to this market that was up on a plateau. Back in 1968 when the students were rioting in Paris, the students in Madagascar were following in a similar vein and one day the students came descending down these steps screaming and what have you. We had a young political officer who was I think on his third assignment at that point, one of the brightest guys we've ever met, full of beans as well. His name was Fred Rondon and Fred said, "Oh, my God the revolution is here." We said, "Oh, Fred, keep quiet. No revolution is here. We're a forgotten island. Nobody knows we're here. They've forgotten about us" and on and on. He says, "I tell you the revolution is coming. This country is out of step with what's happening in the rest of Africa and its going to come here." We said, "No revolution is going to come here. This is the one place, the island of stability and peace and calm and the good life." He says, "I tell you it is coming here." So, Fred would write these very thoughtful think pieces for what we called at the time airgrams and he'd keep sending these things in about the changes he saw coming to Madagascar. Now, when we were there, only Western countries were there. There were no Russians, no Chinese, no Eastern Bloc countries, strictly the West and it was stable, solid, the French behind the scenes pulling the strings. He left and moved on and we all went to different assignments after that.

A few years later it happened just as Fred had predicted and there was a revolution there and it was a very extreme turn to the left. As a matter of fact we got into trouble with them, and in a fit of anger the government of Madagascar PNG'd (persona non-grata) the ambassador, the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), the admin officer, the political officer and I think one other officer, about five of them. They were all gone in no time at all. Our relations hit rock bottom. They remained that way for many, many years until we came to the understanding that times had changed enough for us to reestablish relations at the full diplomatic level. We decided that we would name an ambassador once again to put things back on track and as it turned out that ambassador was Fred Rondon. It was a wonderful way for Fred to have a first ambassadorship as well.

*Q: Who was your ambassador when you got there?*

YOUNG: That's an interesting story. Our ambassador when we got there was a fellow by the name of David Space King and I remember him because I was a bit concerned as to how we would get along. He was a Mormon. He had been a member of Congress, did not succeed in his reelection bid and was given this ambassadorship to Madagascar. Well, I thought, my God, I'm going to work for a Mormon ambassador and the Mormons don't believe that we should belong to their church and that we are the descendants of Ham and we are cursed and on and on. Not only am I black, but they're sending this man to a black country also. I wonder how this is going to work out. As it turned out he was wonderful. He was also in the forefront of trying to push for change in the church, which he eventually succeeded in doing and he was a wonderful ambassador. He was a very good

ambassador, very effective. He learned how to speak the local language. He wrote a book on the country. He was very good. I liked him a lot. Spoke superb French. It was really pretty good.

*Q: How did you find being the B&F (Budget and Fiscal) officer?*

YOUNG: Not very much to my liking at all because I found it too confining. I wanted to be with the people more and I wanted more contact with the outside as well. I didn't want to just sit in an office and do numbers and work with just the FSNs (Foreign Service National employees). One of the things that I did, I did two things, number one I began teaching English as a foreign language at USIS. The other thing I did was I began to give international folk dance lessons. During this period when I was active in the YMCA, I did international folk dancing. You know, dances from Romania, Bulgaria and Israel and Hungary and different places like that. I started teaching a class in that and that got me out and that made it possible to do what I was expected to do inside and then have friends on the outside getting to really meet Malagasy.

*Q: How did you find them?*

YOUNG: Loved them. Wonderful people, absolutely wonderful. Beautiful, gentle, kind. They invited us into their homes. My wife and I had an enormous number of Malagasy friends unlike a lot of other people in the mission. We just reached more and as a result it paid off in friendships on the outside.

*Q: Was there a difference between the highlanders and lowlanders?*

YOUNG: A big difference. Most of the people in the capital city Antananarivo where we were were mostly highlanders. Most of the people around the coastal area were a mixture of African and Indonesian stock. They had a certain look to them and it wasn't the same look that you would see in the highlands. The people in the highlands, you could put them on the streets of Jakarta and you'd never find them again. Some of the ones from the coast you put them on 125<sup>th</sup> Street in New York and you'd never find them again.

*Q: You were there during a time of turmoil in the United States, particularly with the Vietnam War, but also on racial things, too. Were the Malagasy that tuned in? Were they interested?*

YOUNG: Very interested, oh yes. They didn't have riots and demonstrations and that sort of thing. They were very attuned and very keen on things American and particularly things black American, music and culture and plays and you know, we'd get groups out. We'd get dance troupes and musical groups, almost always black groups that were enormously successful in their presentations in Madagascar.

**FERNANDO E. RONDON**

**Political Officer  
Antananarivo (1968-1970)**

**AF, Madagascar Desk Officer  
Washington, DC (1970)**

*Ambassador Fernando E. Rondon was born in California in 1936. He received his bachelor's degree from University of California (Berkeley) in 1960. His career has included positions in Tehran, Tangier, Lima, Algiers, Tegucigalpa, and ambassadorships in Antananarivo and Quito. Ambassador Rondon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 4, 1997.*

*Q: You left Algiers in 1968. Where did you want to go and what happened?*

RONDON: My wish was to have an assignment as chief of a political section. I was expecting to continue to serve in the Arab world, but the need for Arabists declined sharply as we broke relations with so many countries in the area. I had learned French; so the Department suggested an assignment to Madagascar. That came as a surprise, but we went. It sounded fine; people who had been there spoke warmly of the country.

In fact, we found Madagascar incredibly comfortable; it was a neo-colonial state. I had never known what the phrase "neo-colonial" meant until I got to Madagascar. Madagascar became independent in 1960 when most of the Francophone states became independent. The President was Philibert Tsiranana. French officials held key posts in his cabinet and military. Almost every minister had a Frenchman as his top civil servant. So the government was very close to France. There were French troops in the country. The country was not really totally independent.

As in Algiers, the French culinary culture continued. The food was wonderful thanks to a number of restaurants run by French citizens. Antananarivo (the name of the capital then) was wonderful. We could travel around that fascinating, peaceful country with little difficulty. French influence was pervasive and stabilizing.

It was very, very important for us to get along with the different Frenchmen who were so influential in the power structure. That influence is my definition of "neo-colonial." When I returned as Ambassador it was after a revolution which made the country quite different from the one I knew from 1968 to 1970. The French were thrown out temporarily. But in the 1960s, the French influence was overwhelming; they guarded their status jealously and were wary of any potential competitor.

A few months after I left, French interests were involved in a smear campaign against the American Ambassador, Anthony Marshall, which eventually resulted in his being expelled--allegedly for interfering in Malagasy affairs. In my opinion, I think the French resented Marshall's efforts to bring American investment to Madagascar, which was still

a French preserve. Marshall was too much of an activist ambassador for France's tastes, although Marshall did his best to include French interests in his creative business projects.

I was the political officer in the Embassy. My first ambassador was David King--a former Congressman from Utah nominated by Lyndon Johnson. He was followed in early 1970 by Marshall. Both were good ambassadors. King learned to speak Malagasy. King was an elder of the Mormon Church; the Malagasy are very religious, so that there was close affinity between the Ambassador and the Malagasy. King's willingness to learn the local language and his religious convictions made King a very popular Ambassador. He was very careful about not stepping on French toes. He did a fine job representing the US.

We had a NASA tracking station on Madagascar. Apollo VIII flew while I was there. We spent a lot of time trying to get the Malagasy interested in outer space; we used to show films; the astronauts visited Madagascar.

We had good relations with the Malagasy and the French living there. That broke down when Marshall was expelled.

Madagascar has a mixed population. The majority coastal people are of African origins; the highland people are of Malayo-Indonesian origin. The ruling political party was coastal-dominated and very pro-French. The highland people were more nationalistic and not so pro-French. They were not a threat, but they were not as close to the French as the coastal people were. There were also religious differences: the coastal people tended to be Catholics; the highlanders were mostly Protestants. This generalization needs to be tempered by recognition of the strong influence of the Lutherans on the coastal people. There was a small Muslim minority in the north of the country.

Our main interest in Madagascar was the NASA tracking station. Madagascar also has one of the world's largest natural harbors at Diego Suarez. We did not want the Soviets to have access to that bay. The 1960s was a time when we wanted to have good relations with every African state. Although we didn't have major American interests in Madagascar, we did have some stakes in the country's pro-Western foreign policies.

The Malagasy are intelligent people. The country had a lot of economic potential. Ambassador Marshall thought that if Madagascar could develop its cattle industry, it could become a major exporter. He interested American business persons in the potential profitability of the cattle business. Marshall, wisely, wanted investment in the cattle industry to be a three-sided affair--Madagascar, France and us. There were French interests that didn't want our involvement in the cattle business or in any business at all for that matter.

There was no problem in making and maintaining contacts in Madagascar. I had good contacts with coastal people, highland people and the French. The Malagasy are very cordial and courteous people. The highland people (the Merina) tended to be better educated and held most of the civil service posts in what was a coastal-run government.

The highland people didn't care for the coastal people; they distrusted them. The President was a coastal man; his security forces were also coastal. That intimidated the highland people; they knew if they didn't behave, the coastal troops might be let loose in the capital. But there were no incidents between the two communities while I was in Madagascar.

There was a leftist movement in the country at the time (AKFM) which had some communist members. There was an indigenous leader, in the southern part of the country, Monja Jaona, who periodically led minor insurgencies; they were troublesome, but no threat to the government. In general, the late 1960s were a tranquil period in Madagascar. I had the opportunity to learn a lot about the country. There was considerable nationalism--people who resented the French presence. I fully expected that one day there would be a strong reaction to the French influence -- unlike in Algeria where the religious guerrilla warfare was totally unexpected to me -- in Madagascar, I knew there would be a reckoning because the French had not allowed the country to become really independent. So something had to give, particularly in light of the strong nationalistic feelings which existed. We sensed that something would give one day.

Our 1968-70 experience in Madagascar was a very happy one. Our daughter, Susan, was born in Tananarive.

*Q: You left Madagascar in 1970 and were assigned to Washington. What did you do?*

RONDON: I was assigned to the Madagascar desk, which also included responsibility for Mauritius, Chad and Gabon. That gave me an opportunity to make my first trip to Black Africa. I had been in South Africa with my wife; that was an eye opener because we got in trouble twice while there. The first time we were found sitting on a bench which was reserved for blacks. The second incident occurred at a railroad station when we entered the wrong door, i.e., the one reserved for blacks. Our stay in South Africa was rather psychologically uncomfortable; we had a hard time dealing with apartheid.

On my way from Madagascar to Washington I visited Chad and Gabon. I was routed through Johannesburg to Libreville, Gabon. I was carrying a book in my briefcase and as I disembarked in South Africa, the customs officer asked me to open the briefcase. He then saw the book which was "Portnoy's Complaint." He told me that that book was banned in SA. In fact, I had stopped reading the book because I didn't like it, but I was shocked that someone would tell me that I was carrying a banned book. When the customs man saw my diplomatic passport, he asked me to make sure that I took the book out with me when I left SA. I was thoroughly irritated by that incident.

When I got to Gabon, I was quickly reminded about the problems of a developing country when the customs official held my passport upside down. I went to Cameroon, which I found to be far ahead of the Gabon. They were with it! That brought home the realization that every African country was different and that generalizations about Black Africa are stupid.

**ANTHONY D. MARSHALL**  
**Ambassador**  
**Madagascar (1969-1971)**

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

MARSHALL: I was asked, “Would you like Malawi or Madagascar?” I said, “To be truthful, I know where they are and I know something about them, but I don’t know that much. I’d like to have a briefing from the country director on both.” So I did. Madagascar really caught my attention for both its people and its mixed natural like, both the wildlife and the flora and the fauna. It has always interested me and I was and am now very much involved in the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York. But it interested me very much then. So I said yes to that. So anyway, I packed up and went off to Madagascar with an interest in seeing what I could do for American business. Our former ambassador there, Ambassador King, had been asked by the Malagasy government to organize a cattle project. As President Philibert Tsiranana said, “We have more cattle than people. We have 14 million cattle and six million people. I want more people, and every 12<sup>th</sup> child can be named after me, and I will give out honors every national day to the women who produce twelve children.” Hardly the formula for the rest of the world.

*Q: He of course, had been the father of Madagascar since independence in the 1960’s. Things were beginning to become a bit tense.*

MARSHALL: He was fading. His health was fading. He had to go to Europe to get medical attention. He had to go to Paris. But also, his mental facilities were failing. When I arrived there, I thought it was absolutely delightful, and it is a terribly interesting country. Having been separated from Africa for at least 50 million years - that was a figure I used to use – but with the flora and fauna and the people, and the fact that no man on Madagascar, as there is in East Africa where Richard Leaky and others are digging up bones all the time, has been found. Ambassador King had been asked to see what the U.S. could do to help Madagascar with its cattle. And he didn’t do anything. I couldn’t NOT do something. First of all, I wanted to do something. I didn’t want to just sit, although maybe sometimes that’s what one should do. For people representing our country abroad, maybe sitting is the best policy, but it is neither in my nature, nor did I believe it was the

right thing to do. I thought that by creating closer economic ties, we would have better relations between the two countries... and I say that for anywhere. Maybe timing is wrong in some instances, but I believe that's the truth. So I went about trying to find out who and where and how much, and talk to people. So I talked to Madagascar. This is my condensing it a lot. I talked to the French, whose agreement on doing the project helped. My proposal was one third, one third, and one third. The Malagasy provide the land and water; the French have the abattoir and the Americans have the ranching. Where was I to get the American side that was the next thing I was faced with? I made contact with some companies, American ones, but wasn't really able to find one. I eventually got Bob Anderson of Atlantic Richfield, but also, he was sending someone to Madagascar. I mean, a lot of work went into it. He decided to go ahead with the project. I continually coordinated in Madagascar, going to Kenya a number of times, getting on contact with African regional representatives of American companies who were and are headquartered in Kenya and talking with them and seeing if they would take a look at Madagascar. Then, we had ship visits, we had CODELS.

*Q: In trying to get something done there, in trying to reinforce the American presence, were you up against the French; did they not feel it was a French fiefdom? Were they quite suspicious of your activities?*

MARSHALL: I don't know whether you'd call it suspicion or jealousy, or just French. I think I'd call it just being very French. There were two factors that were working. One was Madagascar's politics/ The other was the French not liking Americans succeeding in their area. The Madagascar political system was quite complicated, but there was a man by the name of Andre Resampa.

*Q: Oh yes, the Minister of Interior, closest associate of Tsiranana.*

MARSHALL: Yes. He helped him get to be what he was. But then Tsiranana became suspicious of this motives; his actions. He was a likely candidate to take over from Tsiranana, but Tsiranana did not want that while he was still alive. There were others who were failing too, like Tsiranana. At the top of the list was the fact that there were people down the ladder from Tsiranana who were playing politics. They were both egging him on to thinking there was going to be a coup and they were planting themselves into a proper position no matter what might happen.

*Q: Does playing politics mean exploiting friction between the highland people and the coastal people? Hadn't there been some riots?*

MARSHALL: Yes, there were some riots. There was a Maoist riot in the south that was of no consequence. But reportable. I thought I had good relations with Tsiranana. I thought, "How could I improve?" This probably aggravated the French. But it was what I thought should be done. I said I would like to pay a call in Tsiranana's home village. Nobody else had ever done that! Even the French had never thought of that, regrettably. When Tsiranana heard about this, he was absolutely delighted. He said, although he would not be there, I would be a guest of his and his wife's and he would send his half-

brother, a non-entity in all other respects, to be with us. He would send him with me, as well as a Protocol Officer, in his plane. We went up and I can't remember who else I took with me, and there were speeches, and there was a meal cooked out on the outdoor stove and toasts and the whole business. I saw the hospital, the new dentist's chair they bought, and it was what should have been a totally successful day.

Two days later, I was visiting a non-resident diplomat who was at the Hilton Hotel and were talking about what had appeared in the paper that day and the day before. That was that a foreign power was trying to incite change in government. I said I'd already called several of the other ambassadors and we were trying to get the government to say what they were talking about because otherwise we were all accused. We know the Germans were giving the Socialists money, we certainly weren't. While I was talking to him, I got a call from my secretary saying the Foreign Minister wanted to see me right away. So I trotted around and saw him, a man named Jacques Mantasara. He was and is a very nice man. He said, "I have to tell you that you must leave the country." I asked why, and he said, "I can't tell you, I am just the messenger." "Well, I'd like to see the President." "He won't see you. I've already asked." "You're making a terrible mistake." "There is some evidence that some of your people in the embassy are acting against the government. And the President has been shown evidence of this." I asked if I could see the evidence. I was told "no." I asked for two weeks to pack up and leave, I was given five days. The next morning, he called me back to the Ministry and simply got out the printed document list of all the embassies, opened to the U.S. embassy page and there were five little tick marks beside five names. He said, "These people also have to go. You haven't done anything wrong, but you're the captain of the ship, and you have to go too."

So I left. There was great confusion in Washington about what to do about this. There were many talks about it. I said that I wanted to for back and make farewell calls. So this became a point which we were asking for. They said they would like another ambassador sent and replacements for all the five people that were expelled. We were pretty firm on the issue. Ramanantsoa came to the United State for the UN General assembly meeting and he met with Secretary Rogers, but that didn't go anywhere. Before that, they'd sent a mission which was supposedly to show the evidence, which they did not bring with them. So we really weren't getting anywhere. I met with Ramanantsoa clandestinely. He established the place and time. So he was doing this for a friend to tell me there was nothing he could do and that I wouldn't be able to come back. Finally they did agree to my coming back in February, this happened in October. We said this was out. I had gotten another post. I went on to Trinidad and Tobago.

*Q: It must have been a challenge leaving so quickly to explain and motivate the team you left behind to carry on under the circumstances. You had a good DCM?*

MARSHALL: Yes.

*Q: I the end, thinking back on it, what were our real interests there, the U.S. interests in Madagascar at the time?*



MARSHALL: There was a NASA station there which ultimately closed after I left.

*Q: Simply outlived its use or as part of the misunderstanding?*

MARSHALL: I don't know how it would operate now, but it was extremely important, if not essential, at that time due to the Apollo missions. Two things about Apollo, before going to Madagascar. I went to see President Nixon before I left; I sent a memo ahead as well. I don't think it ever got to him though. I said, "Mr. President, I understand that you are having some flags and moon dust put together and I wonder whether I could take one when I present my credentials? The president asked his Chief of Protocol to get it done. So I got it.

During my time in Madagascar we had a unit from COMIDEASRFOR, Admiral Bain, and a third one who had been part of the Apollo mission who was on a world wide tour, stop by. The visit was a great success. But getting back to the NASA station, the station go the first fly-past of the first orbit that had taken place, and it also did other things that I was never told about, but I think it was of considerable use. I think it was no longer needed though. And we had one in South Africa; of course, I visited when I was in Madagascar.

*Q: What were our other interests?*

MARSHALL: Well, we fell into that general Cold War category of interest in protecting out flow of oil from the Middle East, an interest in all of Eastern Africa and mounting tensions in Somalia because of oil. We wanted the ability to maintain a military presence in the Indian ocean, not only through Diego Garcia. We wanted the ability to have ships visits to show the flag as well as to have shore leave not so much in Madagascar, but in Kenya.

*Q: You would travel down to the ports during these visits? Difficult travel I imagine?*

MARSHALL: I never missed a ship. I'd say economic interests were minimal. We imported 70 percent of their vanilla supply, but I don't think we'd go to war for them.

*Q: In your time, Madagascar was still on the French model and French system and there was talk of Tsiranana being attracted by what he called the Israeli model. But then after these events and then Tsiranana's departure, things changed very much towards a less friendly, more leftists, less prosperous Madagascar.*

MARSHALL: When we got there, Madagascar obviously was politically independent. They made it very, very clear that what they wanted was economic independence, which was stupid and unrealistic. Their thinking was that they didn't want to be dependent on anybody; they wanted total freedom to decide what they wanted to do in economics as well as politics. What that in real terms mean, was that after I left, they kicked French franc and military out. The French army was their defense and the Madagascar army was building roads. That's an oversimplification, but it was a stupid decision. Then they

nationalized a number of companies, and of course, the French didn't like that, but they were kicked out. They took away the French Ambassadors right to have a plane and a number of other things. When I was there, I had a plane; I went all over the place. It was an operational mission, an Air Force plane. Somehow or another, where I wanted to go, their operational missions seemed to mesh most of the time.

**JOSEPH A. MENDENHALL**  
**Ambassador**  
**Malagasy Republic (1972-1975)**

*Joseph A. Mendenhall was born in Maryland in 1920. He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Delaware in 1940 and a master's degree from Harvard University in 1941. Mr. Mendenhall served in the U.S. Army from 1941-1946 and joined the Foreign Service in 1946. His career included positions in Turkey, Iceland, Switzerland, Vietnam, Laos, and Madagascar. Mr. Mendenhall was interviewed in February of 1991 by Horace Torbert.*

MENDENHALL: My inspection tour came to an end when I was nominated in August, 1972 as Ambassador to Madagascar. I had gotten a cable, while I was in Madrid inspecting, from the Department asking whether there was any reason why I shouldn't be nominated as Ambassador to Madagascar. I guess this was a routine inquiry sent to all ambassadorial nominees. I cabled back that I was not aware of any reasons why I shouldn't be. When I came back that summer before my nomination had been formally approved--it had been approved by the White House and sent to the Senate--I spoke to Bill Hall, the Director General for the Foreign Service, and told him verbally about the problems I had had with Senator Pell, which I mentioned a few minutes ago. He said, "Don't worry about that at all. Pell was about to be selected out of the Foreign Service when he resigned in 1952, so you don't need to worry at all about that." I was very pleased to hear his verdict, but I thought he should know that there could be some problems with Pell on the committee.

I went up for my hearing in early September. I had gone to the University of Delaware, though I had been born in Maryland and was a resident of Maryland. A Senator from Delaware, because of a mutual friend of ours, took an interest in my nomination. Indeed I had put him up overnight when I was AID Mission Director to Laos and he was out there on a mission. This was Senator Boggs, who was very much a gentleman. He took a personal interest in my nomination. He invited me up to the Senate for lunch in the Senate dining room, introduced me to others--I remember Lloyd Bentsen was there--and said he would speak to Senator Aiken who was the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee about me. He did and when I went up for my hearing the principal line of questioning to which I was "subjected" was by Senator Aiken talking about my

relationship with his state of Vermont because one of my sons-in-law comes from Vermont. Senator Fulbright absented himself from the hearing--I don't know why. Senator Sparkman, who was very much a gentleman, presided. So I had no problems at the hearing at all. Pell was not present.

I got back to the Department and almost immediately received a telephone call from Senator Pell to say that he had wrestled with his conscience whether to be present and oppose me at the hearing but had finally concluded that he would absent himself from the hearing, but that he still felt it was very unwise of the government to be choosing me to go out to Madagascar as ambassador. Well, I had come back from the Senate hearing feeling rather euphoric but Pell succeeded very much in deflating that feeling. I still have no love for the present Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

I went to Madagascar that fall and found indeed that that ambassadorial assignment was anticlimactic after my experiences in Vietnam and Laos.

*Q: Like mine to Bulgaria.*

MENDENHALL: U.S. interests are so limited. Indeed, before I went out Dave Newsom, who was then Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, said to me that the biggest problem I was going to have to learn in Madagascar was how not to work. He said, "You have held important jobs in your career which have kept you extremely busy and active, but out there you will find that there is not much to do and your greatest problem is going to be how to accommodate yourself to that." And indeed he was right.

There were only two U.S. interests in Madagascar. One was port visits by our naval vessels in the Indian Ocean and the second was a NASA space tracking station. I wanted to do what I could to preserve those two interests but found that I was confronted with a very radical Foreign Minister by the name of Ratsiraka. I tried cultivating him over the first several months. He was interested in getting aid from the United States and I said, "On the basis of my experience there is no use trying to get aid from certain agencies in the U.S. government where there is no possibility of getting it for Madagascar, let's try where there is a possibility. Let's ask those agencies where we might get something--among others the Export-Import Bank." That was the tack that I took. I did everything I could to get a modest amount of aid, but this Foreign Minister was resolved to move Madagascar into the radical camp. At that time he was severing the old relations with France. France had a base in northern Madagascar at Diego Suarez. The French Ambassador was always dean of the diplomatic corps. The French Ambassador occupied the old governor general's residence. Well this radical Foreign Minister cut the French out of all of these privileges which they enjoyed and then turned to the U.S. and the first thing he did was to take our air attaché's aircraft away from them. We had used that to move around Madagascar. That was his first step. The second step was not to approve any more port calls.

The final thing, the NASA tracking station remained in existence as long as I was in Madagascar, but this Foreign Minister had come to the U.S. on a visit in the summer of

1973 and said that he wanted \$10 or \$20 million a year in rent on the basis of the agreement which we had with the Malagasy government. Well, NASA had never paid rent for any of its space tracking stations. I don't know why the word "rent" appeared in the agreement, it shouldn't have, but it gave this Foreign Minister the handle with which to pound us. And he did insistently pound us over the next few years, but NASA was not about to set a precedent by paying rent in Madagascar.

Also I think this Foreign Minister was annoyed because during his visit here he was not received by Henry Kissinger, who was then Secretary of State. I mentioned in one of our earlier meetings that this was the kind of thing that sometimes redounds against us when the heads of state, or foreign ministers of these small countries come to Washington and don't get the kind of treatment which they got consistently when they went to Peking or Moscow. I think this further turned Ratsiraka against us.

Well, I decided in early 1975 that the time had come for my retirement. I felt that the U. S. Congress was taking over too much foreign policy, leaving very little role for the executive branch of the government at that particular stage in our history. There wasn't much more I could do in Madagascar, so when one of these periodic programs where one can apply for retirement within a certain window of time with an advantageous pension came along, I opted for retirement at the end of January 1975. The last day of January I got a cable from the Director General of the Foreign Service saying, "Would you like to be considered for one of the UN ambassadorial posts--the one dealing with economic and social affairs." Well that was that area of activity for which I had declined two jobs years earlier in my career and had no interest in that job and utterly no interest in living in New York. So I cabled back, "Thanks, but no thanks."

So my retirement became effective on the end of January, 1975, but I elected to stay on in effect as a political appointee ambassador for another four months, which had an interesting aftermath. In mid February a coup was mounted in Madagascar against the Malagasy Prime Minister. He was assassinated in the coup. This was a coup of the black people against the brown people. The Malagasy population consists of the two. The brown people are of Polynesian origin. Nobody knows when or how they came to Madagascar. The brown people, when Madagascar was an independent country had traditionally held the blacks, who had come from the mainland of Africa, in subjection and indeed slavery. So there was no love lost between these two people. The browns had traditionally prevailed. But by the mid-20th century, the blacks were in the majority and this coup was blacks against browns. The blacks did assassinate the colonel who was a brown Prime Minister. It was really military against military--two opposing military camps. Our residence happened to be in the valley between the two opposing military camps.

As soon as I got the first word about the coup attempt, on the basis of my earlier experiences of two coups in Vietnam and one in Laos, I rushed to the office in order to stay in contact with Washington reporting what was developing. I felt that my good wife, who was alone in the house with the servants had had enough experience with coups in

Vietnam and Laos that she knew what to do--keep your head low. Indeed, she went down into the basement with the five servants and stayed there during the first day of the coup.

We had three emergency radios in the residence to enable her to stay in touch with me at the office. Every one of those radios failed when the emergency came so pretty soon I was out of communication with my wife. I wasn't unduly worried because I thought she would simply stay put which was the safest place to be with all this gunfire passing overhead. The next morning my defense attaché came to me and said, "I am going to go out and get Mrs. Mendenhall and bring her to the embassy." I said, "Look, you are going to subject yourself to an undue risk. She knows what she is doing. She will stay there." He insisted that he was going. He left and it turned out that it was just as well that he did. He arrived at the residence and my good wife, Nonie, was just about to get into our little Volkswagen bug and head for the office because the servants had all gone home at that stage and she didn't want to be alone any longer. She would have headed right into the worst part of it because she didn't know where the fighting was taking place, whereas my defense attaché did. He arrived at exactly the right moment to rescue her and take her to his house so that she did not get involved in the fighting directly. But it was a sort of an ugly experience for her for about 24 hours.

Pretty soon thereafter the fighting subsided, the coup was over, the blacks in effect took over the government. The man who became the head of it after I left was the fellow who had been the radical Foreign Minister, he was a black. He ousted our NASA space-tracking station. He is still there. That was in 1975 and this is 1991. For many years, perhaps still, he was guarded by North Koreans at his residence. He proved extremely radical during the early years of his regime. I think he has softened somewhat since. I have no direct evidence of his connection with the coup, but I wonder.

Well, Tully, came May, 1975 we packed our bags. We left Madagascar, moved to Italy where we have been ever since.

### **GILBERT H. SHEINBAUM**

**Chargé d'Affaires**

**Antananarivo (1975)**

*Gilbert H. Sheinbaum was born in New York on April 20, 1929. He received a bachelor's degree in political science from New York University in 1950 and served in the U.S. military from 1951-1953. Mr. Sheinbaum entered the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included positions in Laos, Vietnam, Denmark, Madagascar, Malawi, the Philippines, and Switzerland. This interview was conducted by Tom Dunnigan on September 6, 1995.*

*Q: Your tour in the Department came to an end in 1975? And you were assigned to Madagascar or should we call it the Malagasy Republic? I'm not sure which is the correct term at the moment?*

SHEINBAUM: It's Madagascar.

*Q: Was this an assignment you asked for?*

SHEINBAUM: This came up rather suddenly. I still expected one more year in the Department. In fact, Inger and I were counting on staying until 1976. But suddenly, Greg Kryza, the Executive Director of the African Bureau, appeared in my office one day and wasn't talking to me. He had served on a selection board which I had been backstopping, but he was talking to my office mate and saying, "Oh, what a terrible thing, our Chargé in Tananarive had been killed in an automobile accident in Nairobi, and God, what am I going to do now?" About a half an hour or so later, his deputy, Lyle Hewitt, told me by phone that "Greg Kryza wants to know if you can go to Tana. And they want you to go in a week." So I told this to Inger, "Inger (this was on a Friday), they want us to go in a week." Well, I somehow knew it wasn't going to happen in a week, but that's what Greg wanted. And Inger says, "No way. I'm not going there -- blah, blah, blah. I can't go that soon. And what do we know about Madagascar?" Well, I said, I've got a post report. And then on Monday, we invited for dinner Dick Matheron and his wife Kay. He had served as DCM there up to a year before. We had a delightful time at dinner, after which Inger said, "I'm ready to go." It took two months for us to get out of there because Bob Keeley had been named as Ambassador.

*Q: We had not had an Ambassador there for some time, had we?*

SHEINBAUM: Right, after Joe Mendenhall left in May 1975, there was no ambassador. The Government had changed to a Marxist-style government. Bob Keeley was nominated; the Malagasy Government, as it was known at that time, was sitting on his *agrément*. At any rate, he had to okay my going as his DCM, but he was out of town, so we had to wait until he came back. And it was two months before I actually left. Bob and I hit it off very nicely, but then when I got to Tana, I found that the Malagasy Government wasn't going to approve Bob Keeley. While they did not say so directly, they did not like the fact that he had most recently served (as DCM) in Cambodia where we in June had been forced to close our embassy as we had opposed the communist Khmer Rouge. And a Marxist government had just taken over in Madagascar.

*Q: Leaving you as Chargé?*

SHEINBAUM: So I was Chargé for about a year and a half and then I was replaced by Bob Barrett.

*Q: What languages are used there?*

SHEINBAUM: French and Malagasy. In Madagascar there is one dialect that is predominant especially up around Tananarive where Merina (M-E-R-I-N-A), pronounced "Mare-in", is the dominant dialect for intellectuals but otherwise . . .

*Q: You could get by in French?*

SHEINBAUM: They spoke beautiful French.

*Q: Had the country calmed down after the assassination?*

SHEINBAUM: You mean the assassination of February '75?

*Q: Yes.*

SHEINBAUM: Yes. The country was very quiet. It was, in a way, unusual. You didn't feel as though there was a dictatorship, but there certainly wasn't freedom as we would know it. The Minister of Interior, Amy Portos, was a man who had very strong control over the government and some power over Ratsiraka, the President -- which was unfortunately, I think. And he was the only person in the government, as I recall, with whom I could not get along easily. Everybody else I got along with just fine.

*Q: But not the Interior Minister?*

SHEINBAUM: Yeah, the Interior Minister. But with Ratsiraka, I had a fairly nice relationship with Ratsiraka. And during the rare contacts with Inger, Mjme. Ratsiraka was extremely nice - but she was cooped up in the palace.

*Q: Yes, I was going to ask, what our relations were with the Ratsiraka government?*

SHEINBAUM: Well, he had closed down our NASA station there in July '75, shortly after he had taken office in June -- summarily closed it. Fortunately, a lot of our vehicles were left outside (the employees had taken them home), so the NASA staff had gone back to the States and we had the benefit of a few extra vehicles. But we couldn't get access inside the NASA station. The Malagasy claimed it was a spy station, but all it did was track our spacecraft - a function no longer needed a few years later. Subsequently, while I was there, they also nationalized the oil companies -- there were a couple of American oil companies operating there. That changed our economic picture there because that was our primary economic interest at that time. And we were not doing any business -- there was not much going on in the economic sector and, of course, in general, things were slipping down hill in Madagascar. They still are, unfortunately.

*Q: Yes. Did you receive cooperation from the government or were they stiff-arming you?*

SHEINBAUM: Well, I had a couple of PNG cases on my hands. The first was the Marine NCOIC, who was just about to leave anyway. Then they did expel two of our people. The admin officer had been seen one day with a couple of students who were very leftist.

Mind you, this was a Marxist government. The government didn't like us seeing Marxist students. A few hours later I was summoned to the Foreign Ministry and informed that they were PNG'ing three guys. They PNGed the administrative officer, the sergeant in the defense attaché's office, and one other person whose name I did not know (later I learned that he hadn't served in the embassy there for several years). But they had his name still on the . . . By then we had had another ambassadorial nomination in the works which we withdrew shortly. So then it was determined that I should be replaced by another Chargé of more senior rank to let them know that not only were we withdrawing the nomination, but we were not going to send anyone in for the long haul. I think that the next ambassador there was sent about 1980-81, about four years later.

*Q: What was the attitude of the local Malagasy people? Were they friendly to you?*

SHEINBAUM: Yes, quite. We had a number of good friends there. Some of them, of course, were rather cautious -- maybe most of them were cautious, but I had two good personal friends who were ministers in the government whom I would see quite frequently. I had good relations with the Soviet Ambassador, the Chinese Ambassador, and the French Ambassador. The French were kind of leery of our role there, but, of course, that had declined. I had encouraged the French not to weaken their role there and which proved to be a good point. I'd told the French -- there were two ambassadors during my tour -- to forget about thinking of dropping their aid. I said, "No, that would be a mistake. Because you're just leaving a vacuum and you know who will replace that vacuum" -- as the Soviets already were. The Chinese had been trying to get an edge in there and, in some ways, I think Ratsiraka favored the Chinese as a counterbalance, but the Soviets had stiff-armed their way into a very dominant role.

*Q: So much for communist fraternal feeling, eh?*

SHEINBAUM: The Soviet and Chinese Ambassadors only met once while I was there. That was at my farewell.

*Q: Very interesting.*

SHEINBAUM: We have a group picture of the diplomatic corps there with the two of them. They were very outwardly civil on that occasion, but you could see the gulf between them. Both Mao and Zhou En-lai died while I was in Tana, and I made calls at the Chinese Embassy both times because I thought that was appropriate. I mean things were evolving -- this was 1976 -- between the United States and China and I needed to reflect that. I had no instructions and I had to decide each time on the spur of the moment. I just could not see not signing the condolence book.

*Q: Well, that was the right thing to do. I mean, Nixon and Kissinger had gone to China. We had relations. What was the influence of the Cubans there? Were they. . . ?*

SHEINBAUM: Not much. They provided a security force for the President but that was it. They didn't get in the way. Or at least not in any way that was perceptible to me. I



think Ratsiraka was trying to make sure that he stayed as much in control as possible. He didn't want any of these outside influences, even if they were Marxist brothers, coming to dominate.

**SAMUEL VICK SMITH**  
**Economic/Commercial Officer**  
**Antananarivo (1976-1978)**

*Samuel Vick Smith was born in Hollywood, California in 1940 and graduated from New Mexico State University. He entered the foreign service in 1967. His career included posts in Bien Hoa, Nairobi, Antananarivo, Amsterdam, Tokyo and Wellington. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: In 1976 you were, where did you go?*

SMITH: I should say that almost immediately after I got out of the Econ course I started taking early morning French so that I would have some world language. I had the aim pretty soon to go to Madagascar and I was able to do that. I kept bugging my career counselor who happened to be a friend, saying, "Now am I going to be able to get this job in Madagascar?" The one Econ officer. That was the beauty of it. You know, run your own section. Remember I was still an FSO-5 and Ed said, "Don't worry, Sam, nobody else even wants to go." In the summer of 1976 I completed the early morning French and I got a S3/R3 and we went to Madagascar. I forgot to say the most important thing here that in December of '70 our daughter was born in Nairobi. We just married her off this April (2001).

*Q: What's her name?*

SMITH: I think I will leave that private.

*Q: Ok.*

SMITH: So, she was born in the Nairobi hospital and the medical care was fine. So, now when we're on our way to Madagascar in '76, she was five years old and about to start the first grade. She had just completed Kindergarten. So, she started the first grade in Madagascar. So, off we go to Madagascar at the end of the summer of '76 to the capital, which was in the process of changing its name from Tananarive to Antananarivo. Of course the country had just changed its name from the Malagasy Republic back to Madagascar.

*Q: You arrived in '76?*

SMITH: Yes, either in August or September. The government wasn't in turmoil, but it had been in turmoil and the leader of the government was President Ratsiraka who I think was a lieutenant commander in the navy. He had been the foreign minister in the previous regime. We had a NASA tracking station there. The NASA tracking station employed a lot of Malagasy and it tracked satellites including the manned satellites. It was at the end of the Apollo era and Ratsiraka said that we owed them ten million dollars in back rent. He said that he wanted one million dollars a year in back rent for ten years. We said we're not going to give you ten million dollars. There was this negotiation back and forth and finally he thought he had the trump card. We were on the eve of the launch of the Apollo/SOYUS' mission where we were going to join up with the Soviet Union in space. It was a very important mission to us and the Soviet Union and Ratsiraka said, "Pay us the ten million dollars or I'm going to close the station." We didn't pay him the ten million and the station was closed. Out in the outskirts of Antananarivo, about thirty miles away was this big satellite dish and a lot of other equipment abandoned. When we arrived in 1976 there were still attempts to try to work something out, but nothing was being worked out. So, all of these Malagasy who had been employed out there were out of work and things were going from bad to worse. At the same time Ambassador Bob Keeley had been nominated to be ambassador to Madagascar and Ratsiraka and his government denied agreement because of Keeley's involvement in the fight against the communists in Cambodia. So, this shows the way Ratsiraka's government was going. He claimed he had a policy of "Tous Azimuth," all directions. But he leaned awful hard on the left side of the spectrum. He was cozying up to communists at every chance, but pretending to have good relations with everybody else. He certainly didn't improve his relations with the United States by refusing to take our ambassador. I think you would agree that's almost unheard of. I've never heard of it before, have you?

*Q: No, how did this play out?*

SMITH: It took a long time. Keeley had already picked Gil Sheinbaum to be his DCM. So, Gil was there and by this time as Chargé. Keeley never came; he eventually was nominated and accepted to Mauritius, a smaller island with a little bit better political leadership. Incidentally Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world. It's a big island and it is relatively unpopulated, about eleven million people. It's off the southeast coast of the continent of Africa. I should say a little bit more about it. It's got an interesting ethnicity; the Malagasy language is shown to be most closely related to Indonesian. The people there are a mixture of some sort of Malayo-Polynesian and African. They don't call their ethnic groups "tribes" because they all speak Malagasy. They have distinct ethnic groups; the one farthest up the mountain is the Merina. The Malagasy tend to drop the last vowel, so that Merina is pronounced "Merin." It had been the dominant group and their kings had united the country under them a couple of centuries before and then had been overthrown by the French. The French and the British parceled things out and the British got Mauritius and the French got Madagascar, but then the French had to fight for it. So, around 1896 or '97 they marched across the island losing a lot of troops to malaria, but conquering the island. As I said, at the time I arrived there, things were not very good. The NCOIC, the head of our Marine Security Guard had been given thirty days to get out of the country for some reason I never discovered.

Within thirty days another incident happened. Do we have time to talk about it today, yes?

*Q: Okay, why don't we talk about that and then we'll?*

SMITH: Okay. My wife, daughter and I arrived. Since we had no ambassador, we had an empty ambassador's residence and the admin officer put us into that residence in the backyard of which were about twenty old Dodge vans. These had been the motor pool to carry the Malagasy workers out to the satellite tracking station every day from the city. All those people had had these technical jobs where they were learning things that could have helped everybody, and the short-sightedness of Ratsiraka in closing the tracking station meant these people were all out of work. We had the vans and we used them ourselves. A lot of us who were waiting for our cars to arrive were driving these old vans around town. The admin officer was driving home from work one day for lunch and there was also a student strike and a shortage of buses. There were students standing along the road hitchhiking and he picked up two or three of them. He got to talking to them and invited them to lunch. I should preface this by saying in Madagascar, the students have a history of political activism and at the same time the Madagascar government was hosting an international conference on the teachings of Djuche which they spell with a "d" like Djibouti. Many people will know Djuche is the philosophy of Kim Il Sung's communism in North Korea, and Madagascar was hosting an international conference on North Korea's political philosophy. All these international leftists from all over the world, many of whom couldn't go home to their own country, were coming to Madagascar. In the middle of all this they had the student strike and the bus shortage. Our admin officer picked up these students and arranged to have them for lunch a day or two later. When the lunch is over, they left his house and the police arrested the students. When the Chargé and I, who were having lunch together, came back to the embassy, there was a message for the Chargé to go to the foreign ministry. He went to the foreign ministry and was given a list of three people who were declared *persona non grata* by Madagascar and had to leave the country in either twenty-four or forty-eight hours. At the top of the list was the admin officer's name. Second on the list was the second man of the two-man defense attache's office, an army sergeant. The third person on the list was Charles Twining. So, Gil Sheinbaum, our Chargé, got this list over at the foreign ministry and said, "Well, I think I know why you want to *persona non grata* our admin officer, but I urge you to reconsider. He hasn't done anything wrong. I have no idea what you have against the sergeant, and I've never heard of Charles Twining. He's not in my embassy. I don't know who he is." He came back to the embassy and said, "Who is Charles Twining?" One of the local employees said, "Oh, he was the political officer here ten years ago." So, we sent a cable back to Washington saying you may want to inform Charles Twining that he has been declared *persona non grata* in Madagascar. When the diplomatic note came over, informing that these people were declared *persona non grata* for interfering in the internal affairs of Madagascar, they'd left Twining's name off. We figured they realized what fools they'd made of themselves and wouldn't put it in writing. The other two had to leave. Well, we weren't a big embassy to start with. We had the Chargé, me, a vice consul, the defense attache and his assistant, the admin officer and then there were a couple of people in USIS and the marine guards. A few days later

Washington declared *persona non grata* the admin officer of the Madagascar Embassy in Washington, DC. A few days after that the Chargé was called over to the foreign ministry. We looked at each other before he left and said, "Who's next?." When he got over there they let it be known that there weren't going to be anymore *persona non gratas*. I've always said that what happened to them was that they realized that they were going to run out of English speakers to replace their staff before we ran out of French speakers to replace ours. That's the way my first four or five weeks in Madagascar began.

*Q: Okay, well we'll pick this up again. We've talked about going to Madagascar and by the way you were in Madagascar from when to when?*

SMITH: The summer of '76 to the summer of '78.

*Q: You've talked about the PNG episode and so we'll pick it up with what else went on the next time around.*

SMITH: Okay.

*Q: Great.*

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*Today is August 17, 2001. Sam, then what happened?*

SMITH: Well, as I said, all of that happened in the very first month we were there. It was quite an inauguration into Madagascar and eventually the admin officer was replaced and also the number two in the DAO section, (number two of two) was replaced. He was replaced by a marine sergeant who was a native French speaker, which helped a lot. We went on. The relations between our two governments never got much better. I think you're interested in family life also.

*Q: Yes, I am.*

SMITH: As I've said, we had this one child, our daughter, who was born in Nairobi; we arrived in Madagascar when she was still not six. There was a school called the American School of Antananarivo. It had been a thriving concern when NASA had been there with the tracking station that Ratsiraka had closed down in the mistaken belief that they were going to be able to extract ten million dollars out of us. They had other options. So the school was in bad shape and I didn't fully realize this. You know, you look down these lists that you get from personnel and they say what schools are available at certain posts. Usually, in most places as you know there's some sort of school available for little kids. When they get bigger then it becomes a problem. The fairly young vice-consul had been dragooned into being a liaison between the embassy and the school board. He said, "You better get stuck into this, I don't have a kid, you do." In fact, I think it was normal for the Econ officer to have that job and he just had had it in-between. You probably know that one of the jobs of that officer is to liaise with the office of foreign schools in the State

Department to get a subsidy if the school needs it. Well, it became evident real quick that the school needed it. We were down to about eight kids. Our daughter was the only embassy kid in the school. The school was in a pleasant little two-story house out in the residential district and at the time we had three American women school teachers. Two of them were married to Malagasy, and one of them was married to a Canadian aid worker. They were good teachers and they were willing to work for not much money because I was able to pay them in New York. We had a school board chairman who for some reason was a British lady who not only had become ill with a disease, that I've forgotten the name of for the moment. It's a common disease; you don't need to go to Madagascar to get it. It had weakened her. Also, she felt that it was ridiculous to try to run a school with only eight kids. So, I not only inherited the job of liaison with the embassy, I inherited the chairmanship of the school board. I spent a lot of evenings filling out papers and my main function was to get more money from the State Department, which was generous and kept the school going. They could make up the difference between the school fees that we charged every student and the money I had to pay out. We paid rent to the landlord, which wasn't much. Then we paid those two or three teachers. We were able to keep the school running for two more years, in the face of many people saying it was a lost cause. Members of my own embassy were sending their kids to French schools. That was their choice, but it certainly didn't help me. But, we survived it all. Our daughter got through the first and second grade and was ready to go to the next place, which we will learn about the next time.

As far as the normal work went, it was a real good job. It was probably even better than I expected and I expected it to be a good job. I was the one Econ officer in this small post in an interesting country and in addition to that the lack of an ambassador meant I was often in charge. In less than two years I drew five weeks of charge pay, which meant that I was charge for more than ten weeks. They didn't let you draw chargé's pay until after you've had five weeks of doing it. Then the sixth week you could get it. There was a lot of trade promotion involved too, for whatever trade promotion there was, was mine to do. I did the CERP reports. In Nairobi, we'd always done the CERP report on communist country influences in Kenya, but I was just doing a tiny part of it. There in Madagascar I did almost all of it. We had no political section. We had a chargé, an admin officer, the vice consul, and me. So, I would do that every year and all the other CERP reports, and then answer all the requests to find out what the Malagasy were doing on this and that and whether they would support us in the UN on this or that.

One thing that was a interesting was that even though the government wasn't friendly, they wanted to show that they were interested, I guess. Of course, the government workers weren't unfriendly; in fact they probably didn't think much of their government. So, they were very open to the American Econ first secretary when he would call up and say I need an appointment with you to talk about whatever Washington has sent me to talk about. I could go see them. I used to say I had more access in Madagascar than my boss had with his government counterparts in Nairobi. That made it good. If you invited them to a dinner or a party, they'd come. The Kenyans were notorious for accepting and never showing up or not accepting and showing up. The Malagasy were a lot more careful about diplomatic courtesy. We bumbled along through what we call the fall '76. It

became Christmas season. Gil Sheinbaum was married to a Danish lady and he and his family went to Denmark, leaving me in charge. The next thing that happened is that my local employee who was normally the Econ section head Foreign Service National, (but who was a lot better than that) dropped in after lunch and said, "Oh, Mr. Smith, did you know that there are riots in Majunga and that people are beating up and massacring the Comorans?" I said, "No, I didn't know that. Where did you hear that?" "Oh, I heard that on the radio." Well we had no political section, but we had a political section Foreign Service National, one of whose jobs was to listen to the radio and tell us what the heck was going on, as none of us were able to speak Malagasy. I called up Olga and I said, "Olga, by the way, have you heard about this?" "Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you." "Thanks a lot Olga!" The murderers were from a smaller ethnic group from the dry southern region of Madagascar-the region of Madagascar which was maybe in the southern temperate zone rather than in the tropics. It's a dry, poor area, so it produces a lot of migrant labor. They'd gone to Majunga, which is a fairly thriving port city on the northwestern coast of Madagascar on the Mozambique Channel. Out in the Mozambique channel are the four Comoro islands, three of which were an independent nation of the Comores and one of which had chosen to stay part of France. This was also a poor place, a producer of migrant labor. So, here in Majunga you had one group of migrant laborers from across the water, the Comorans, who were all Islamic and then another group of migrant laborers from the south, probably none of whom were Islamic, some of whom could have been Christian. There had been an altercation between the two, I think involving an unfortunate act by an innocent child next to a mosque. It had developed into a massacre, with the rioters going into French peoples' homes and dragging out their Comoran servants and murdering them. Obviously, as the chargé, I had to report on this; tell Washington what's going on down there in the grand Isle. I needed more information. I wasn't going to get it out of the government. All they were going to say was what they were saying on their local radio. They were putting it in their French broadcast. I went around to the other more or less friendly embassies, which were primarily the French, the Germans, and the Egyptians to see what was going on. The French embassy I could walk to.

I was walking back from the French embassy when, as I came up from behind our embassy, I could see there was a large group in front. I said to myself, *oh my God, now they're blaming us, they're attacking us with a demonstration and here I am in charge and can't even get back into my embassy.* I came around the corner and low and behold, all it was was my consular local leading his family band in Christmas carols. [He] was also the conductor of the national orchestra. That was a relief. I went back in and wrote a cable to Washington in which I made a prediction which came true. I never got any credit from anybody for doing this and I think it's primarily because nobody cared. I said there were 30,000 of these Comoras living in Majunga. I said, as strange as this may seem, I think what the Ratsiraka government will probably do is just deport all these people back to the Comores to solve the problem, and that's what they did.

Sometime around then, either just before the end of '76 or at the beginning of '77, Washington, in its wisdom, abolished the position of vice consul so he left and I became the consul. Well, when he left I inherited his main consular case. Since this is unclassified

I have to be careful mainly to protect the privacy of the victim. An American citizen had lived in South Africa most of his life, but he was born in America and he was a bona fide American citizen and he was of, I'd say, late middle age. He was a passenger on a twin engine light airplane which had left Southern Africa on its way to either Reunion, a French territory or Mauritius, the independent country, both of them deep out into the Indian Ocean to the east of Madagascar. So, for a light airplane without tremendous range to get to them from South Africa, it had to cross Madagascar. For whatever reason the South African pilot chose to land in Madagascar to try to get fuel. The Malagasy said he didn't have permission to cross their country, let alone land there. Within a few hours he and another South African and my American passenger were all locked up and had been accused of things like entering the country illegally, etc. My job, amongst other things was to go and visit the American in prison. I don't think we're required to visit people more than about once a month. I made a point of visiting this poor guy once a week and talking to him and trying to keep his spirits up and taking him any mail he had and hearing what he had to say and reporting back to Washington what was going on. He spent a long time there. He was still there when I left. While he was there he petitioned for his wife and kids to immigrate and I took care of getting immigrant visas for his wife and kids back in South Africa. At one point they took him away from us. They took him out to Il Saint Marie, which is a tiny island off the east coast of Madagascar. After a few months they brought him back, and apparently none the worse for wear, but a little thinner. Eventually, long after I left, he was finally released.

*Q: I mean, since he was a passenger, I would have thought that you know, he would have been let go way before, I mean you know, sort of an innocent caught up in something.*

SMITH: So would I have thought. When they had his trial, my local employee, the band leader, and I went to the trial and sat through the first half hour or so until we were evicted because it was going to be a trial having to do with the national security of Madagascar and therefore, a closed trial. I think, by their law, he entered the country illegally and this was his crime. That was his crime and this was his punishment.

*Q: You were there when the Carter administration came in? Did that make any difference particularly in human rights, but any other way did you notice a change in what you were supposed to be doing?*

SMITH: Right. I didn't notice any changes, or if I did I've forgotten about them. Frankly, I don't think Madagascar is very high on anybody's radar screen in Washington. It wasn't a big human rights violator at that time and I don't think the Carter administration had gotten fully into the human rights business. Even if they had, they would have gone off after more obvious targets. We didn't see that. One evidence of not much change is that most of the time I was there I was in the Carter administration. It had to have been from January of '77 until I left in the summer of '78 and we still didn't have an ambassador. I think it probably was the Carter administration that finally sent an ambassador.

*Q: How well did you feel that Madagascar, was your impression of Madagascar fit into Africa very well or?*

SMITH: Hard to say. I think they fit into it as well as anybody. I have to regress a little bit. While we were there they had a full-fledged formal election which made Ratsiraka president under I think a new constitution for seven years and then he was reelected for another seven years. Then he was voted out after a total of fourteen years and reluctantly left the presidential mansion. His replacement did so badly that within a few years he was back. The thing that was remarkable about his foreign policy was the way he would pick up these left-wing clauses. I described already his hosting the International Conference on Juche, the guiding principles of Kim Il Sung's North Korea. He made a lot of noise about supporting the Polisario front. That I think is an indication of him trying to show how forward-looking he was where I think most people anywhere didn't care too much about the fate of the Polisario front. He tried to get involved in mediating the new war between Somalia and Ethiopia that erupted at that time where they switched sides. Somalia had been sort of a Soviet friend at least and the Ethiopians had traditionally been our friends. As you know, Ethiopia really became communist and Somalia's Siad Barre became our friend until the whole country fell apart again about ten years ago. So Ratsiraka tried to mediate that conflict with no more success than anybody else.

*Q: Did you find that I take it he wasn't much of a player, so I mean when you were reporting on Madagascar and whither Madagascar and all it really much of a play on the African scene.*

SMITH: He's trying to be, definitely trying to be. While I had been in charge for ten weeks out of the two years I didn't go out of my way to be the political officer. I figured the chargé could handle that. While we were there Gil Sheinbaum was replaced by another officer named Robert South Barrett, IV and that was done to indicate to the Malagasy that there wasn't going to be a U.S. ambassador anytime soon. That was definitely done by the Carter administration now that I think about it.

*Q: I think in other words this was not just slippage, they really want, I mean there was a decision not to hurry this up?*

SMITH: Yes. Throughout the time we were there, the biggest aid giver was still France. I would guess that an awful lot of that was because they had so many French aid people there taking salaries, which would count, but at the same time the Russians were big into giving or selling weapons. The Chinese were building, I forget now whether it was a road or a railroad up from the coast. I guess the road because the railroad ran that way. They were going to build it up from Tamatave which was the main port on the east coast and not very far from the capital of Antananarivo, which was up in the highlands. There was a little narrow gauge railroad that ran up, but there wasn't a good road. The only port that had a road that connected the capital was the one at Majunga that we spoke about, but that was a long way away. I think it's 600 kilometers over to that port. That port didn't, if I remember correctly, have any deep-water berths. Everything had to be unloaded onto barges, up to the port, then put on a truck and then driven 600 kilometers down to the capital.



Aid was one of the things I would be reporting on in two different reports, one report on aid in general and another report on what the communists were doing. I went down to the port of Tamatave once on an official visit and was being shown around the port. Here was one warehouse just full of unhusked rice. It was a shipload of rice from Cambodia at the time of the Khmer Rouge. Madagascar's socialist policies had destroyed their rice growing efficiency, so they were having to import rice. They were always trying to outsmart world markets. Instead of buying rice on the open world market at the world price, they were going to help their fellow socialist state of Cambodia and buy it from them. This rice was grown, I think it's safe to say with the blood of Cambodian peasants. When it arrived there in Madagascar, it had to be declared unfit for human consumption because it hadn't even been husked. On the trip over it molded or whatever. What a sad tale. The Malagasy paid for this and they probably paid some price less than what decent rice from America or Thailand would have cost, but if they'd gotten it from us or the Thais, they could have eaten it.

*Q: How about the French, did the French play a pro-counsel role or not?*

SMITH: Well, they played a very important role. I wouldn't call it pro-counselor, but they were the biggest aid program. They were the biggest foreign presence and were the most important embassy in town. Certainly they had more foreign nationals than anybody else unless you wanted to count the Chinese or the Indians who'd been there a long, long time.

*Q: Were the French, did you find that they were undercutting our commercial efforts or anything like that or was there any particular problem?*

SMITH: I'd say rather than undercutting our commercial efforts, of what little effort there was, they had almost a monopoly on it, let's put it that way. I don't think American companies were trying that hard. A tiny market in the middle of nowhere with bad shipping.

*Q: I would think that there would be a certain feeling of isolation and difficulty in sort of keeping the embassy happy. I mean keeping the people together there.*

SMITH: I think there was. I don't think I felt it, but I had more work to do than I could easily accomplish by myself and I had one outlet because the embassy kept getting smaller and smaller and I kept getting more and more responsibilities. Every time there was a regional conference in Nairobi I was the one to go. If it was AID having the regional conference, well I was the AID Officer. If it was Commerce having the regional conference, well I was the Commercial Officer. If it was Consular Affairs having the regional conference, well I was the Consular Officer. I went to three of these. After I came back from the second, the admin officer, Mike Adams, who was doing his best to keep track of morale said, "Your wife didn't look like she handled this last week very well." He didn't say anything more. So, the next time I went to Nairobi I took her along. I think there was a morale problem.

The State Department and the USIS people got a paid R&R and we took it to Lyon, France where my wife's sister lived. That was in the middle of the summer of '77 and I turned that into a trip to the Paris Air Show. You could tell the poor defense attache was feeling really isolated because the dopey military didn't give them these interim R&Rs.

We spoke earlier about how dangerous the roads are to the Foreign Service. This defense attache, in late '78 was driving a Land Rover more or less in that region between the capital and Tamatave and much like what happened to Howard Funk in Kenya, he came around the corner and here was a big truck coming the other way. He was badly and permanently injured and my replacement, Jerry Cook, who was with him was killed. You did feel isolation there. When we went there we were told in the post report that the climate was described by the French as being agreeably unhealthy. The capital is at 4,000 feet so you have a climate not unlike Nairobi which is at 5,000 feet: brilliant sun, a dry season, a rainy season. You could almost do without taking your chloroquine, but you should it. It's certainly not a steamy tropical climate. If you got down to Tamatave when the door opened on the airplane it smelled like you had walked into your musty basement. It was known that there was a deficiency of calcium in the soil so everybody was supposed to take calcium pills. There is no way to get calcium from the local food if there isn't any in the soil because the cows can't produce it in the milk and the vegetables don't have it and so we took calcium pills. We were all sick a lot, not just me, the whole embassy. I've always thought, with no scientific basis, that there were probably some other trace minerals whose function in our body isn't too well known, but which weren't there also. It wasn't a very sanitary place.

We had something called the Thursday Luncheon Club which was a group of officers from different embassies who spoke English. We'd get together every month on a Thursday at a restaurant for lunch. Interestingly, one of the English-speaking diplomats was the Cuban ambassador; another one was the Libyan chargé. I'm ashamed to say it was the third month in a row when I woke up with excruciating stomach pains that I finally put together that it was always happening on a Thursday night. We switched to the Hilton and not only the stomach pains didn't come back, but a lot of the former members showed up again saying, "Oh, didn't you know, that's why we quit. We were all getting sick at the Solima Motel." Solima was the nationalized oil company. When they nationalized all of the former private companies, including AGIP, they'd taken over the AGIP Motel and it became the Solima Motel. It had a nice restaurant except that it was obviously harboring some pretty nasty germs back in the kitchen. I've always said that we've always earned every nickel of hardship pay I was paid. My wife and daughter had horrible allergy problems. Because of the socialist economy, you couldn't get the medicines you needed. On Saturday mornings you'd find you and the other embassy officers going from pharmacy to pharmacy trying to find the medicines that the doctor had prescribed, but since that he was prescribing the same for everybody, the pharmacies didn't have it. It was depressing.

*Q: Well, you left there in '78. I take it there was a certain amount of joy?*

SMITH: Yes. I was glad to get out of there. Before we leave there, let's see if there's

anything else I need to mention. All the other work stayed pretty much the same. I did one other immigrant visa. In the case of the prisoner, he was the petitioner, so all I had to do was sign as witness to the petition and send the documents off to South Africa where the embassy would issue the visas to his family. This was the other way around. At that time there was a missionary school at the south end of Madagascar where a lot of AID people from all over Africa sent their children and there was a young student down there who was not an American yet. His father was or his mother was, but he wasn't. The father and mother were over in Lusaka, I believe, and so I received their petition and I was supposed to issue the visa. I'd never issued an immigrant visa before on my own, so my assistant the bandleader and I worked on it. We got to the point where we had to figure out what number to issue. In the middle of all this, I had to call the young man at the school to arrange for him to come at an appointed time so we could issue the visa so I'd be there when he came. That was during another bit of unrest in the country, which we should mention. The big market day in Madagascar on Friday. One Friday afternoon in the market something happened, the police shot somebody. A lot more shots rang out. A lady at the French Embassy who just happened to be standing by a window was killed. Pretty soon the whole capital of Antananarivo was in chaos. The forces of order left and there was nobody controlling the city. The mobs were burning down police stations. This went on the whole weekend and then on Monday morning or Monday afternoon, loyal troops were flown in from the coast and stopped the rioting. We went back to work on Monday morning. I think once again, I was probably in charge, maybe not, that may not be fair. But, anyway, I came back Monday morning to work and outside my window as close as twenty feet away, I could see looters running down the street carrying television sets. In the middle of all this I had to call the kid at the southern end of the island. I called him up, and in the middle of our conversation, the operator came on the line and said, "Speak French or Malagasy." They didn't trust us and they wanted to be able understand what we were saying. So, that was another occasion. The phones weren't very good. Finally we had everything together, but I still didn't know what number to put on the immigrant visa. I had to call the State Department. I sent a cable, which of course hadn't been answered, describing the situation, asking, what number do I put on the visa? Finally, the desk officer called me back on this scratchy line and we shouted back and forth. She said, "Have you issued any other immigrant visas this year?" I said, "No." She said, "It's number one." So, that's what happens when you ask an Econ officer to be a Consular officer. In the summer of '78, we left. Another important thing happened, I got promoted to FSO-4 while I was there, finally, and this was mainly on the strength of the good work I'd done in Maritime Affairs, plus I guess, showing that I could serve as a small section chief in the middle of nowhere.

**FREDERICK (TED) G. MASON, JR**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Antananarivo (1978-1981)**

*Frederick Mason was born in Connecticut in 1926 and graduated from Yale. His career included posts in Saigon,*

*Paris, Casablanca, Antananarivo and Rome. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

MASON: In my next assignment, I was to be Country Public Affairs Officer in Madagascar at Antananarivo. You chose one post from each geographical area, and I chose Madagascar because it is at a high elevation and, at least, it shouldn't be too unpleasant a place to live in. But once I got there, I found there was not much going on. It was an unfriendly regime. They had North Koreans flying their MIGs over the city almost every day. But the people were friendly and very good people, all the ones I knew had been converted to Christianity either by the fathers on the coast--the black tribes on the coast were converted by the French fathers - or by the London Missionary Society on the high plateau - the people on the high plateau of Indonesian origin were converted by a mix of Norwegian and Americans. We had American Baptists, too. As I understood it, only the Mormons were looked upon unfavorably by the other sects of Christians, for they came to proselytize instead of evangelize.

I had the impressions that my generation had received in the 1930s and 1940s from literature, as in Somerset Maugham's "Rain," about sexually repressed missionaries and so on, so I looked askance at the work of the missionaries until I went down to Fort Dauphin, at the southern tip of the island and beyond the Tropic of Capricorn to Manambaro, where the Lutherans had built a hospital which looked like a one-story World War II barracks on wooden pylons. They used volunteers, people mostly from the Northwest, Minnesota or westward, Scandinavian or German in origin. These people were very fervent Christians who would take a year or two off from their practices or jobs and come out to work at this hospital or do whatever else was needed.

There was one man who owned a garage in Nebraska and came out to see what could be done about a generator which had been given to the hospital by a rich lady. It was a generator for an enormous operation and it used much more fuel than they could possibly afford to burn for their small operation. So, they found this garage owner, and he was able to reduce it to a small putt-putt generator, which was exactly what they needed. It was a great service. There was a doctor I met who said he loved it because his practice at home restricted him to only certain operations. Whereas here, he removed a woman's spleen in the morning and operated on somebody's skull in the afternoon and did a variety of other operations almost every day.

They didn't have to feed the families. The families would camp under the building, in the shade, and feed their own sick member, while he was in the hospital. And they cured people. When I arrived they had reduced the French presence drastically, and the French-staffed hospitals were closing down. We had a case in which one of our trucks was sideswiped on the highway by a big Malagasy truck, and the young economics officer was killed while the defense attaché's hip was broken. I saw him years afterwards and he had a shoe with a brace on it, since one leg was several inches shorter than the other. He was still on active duty at DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency). They didn't have the means. It was no longer the modern hospital it had been before. So, he was evacuated by air as soon as possible.

We were told to be very careful about getting an assignment in Madagascar, because if you have a heart attack or a burst appendix, you won't be able to get to Nairobi in time. They would do the best they could for you, but that's all. That's what living in Madagascar was like in Antananarivo. My wife and I lived in a beautiful house with no children. We had a cook, a gardener, and a swimming pool which didn't function. We also had a maid, who did housework, and this was more than we needed. My wife had her piano and a temporary job as the chargé's secretary.

*Q: What was the government like?*

MASON: The Ratsiraka government was Marxist. I was told of a gift from the Soviets to the government in the form of a serum for polio, I think it was. Now, polio serum has to be kept cool. The government was quiet about this because they were keeping it only for their own party members, not for the general public. You would see kids downtown with sticks for legs, dragging themselves around in the street. But that didn't count for the ruling party. They took the serum and put it in the attic of the Presidential Palace, where the temperature must have been almost 100 degrees, so it spoiled all the serum. That's the sort of thing: incompetence, mixed with ideological stupidity. This sort of thing happened only too frequently.

I should say that in 1972, the pro-French President, Tsiranana, was overthrown and the Hotel de Ville, in downtown Antananarivo, was burnt down leaving only a shell. It was there the whole time that I was there. There was no attempt to rebuild it. Then there had been another coup in the mid-1970s, 1976 I guess it was, which brought Ratsiraka to power. I arrived in 1978, and he was sitting hard on the people. He's back in power now, but I'm told he has seen the light and is welcoming aid from the West. By the way, I'm still in touch with my chief assistant there and have a framed "Certificate of Appreciation and Commendation" signed by the entire staff.

*Q: How were you able to operate?*

MASON: Not very well. We would have shows. We would have films. The people, again, were a very religious people, very pious. There again I learned something. When Pope John Paul II made his first trip to the United States, I was able as Public Affairs Officer to invite the Cardinal to my house and see the film of the Pope's trip to the United States, which was quite impressive. He was very gracious and benign about it, and we had a nice friendly discussion. But afterwards a group of nuns asked me about the American nuns in the film and repeated what the film had said, that some of them wished they could be priests. Specifically, there was one red-headed nun in Philadelphia, who had to sit in the basement while the priests were sitting in the nave where they could see the Pope. She was outraged at that—perhaps rightly, perhaps wrongly, I don't know. I tried to be truthful about controversial subjects in the States without saying that this was the way things should be in Madagascar. I simply explained that we have a woman's movement in the United States, and women are demanding equal status with men, and it is not for me to say whether this can take place within the Church or not.

Then on other occasions, I'd invite people to the house for movies, and once we showed *San Francisco*, with Jeanette MacDonald and Clark Gable and Spencer Tracy. They thought that was wonderful. That was just the kind of movie they loved.

*Q: Great Earthquake.*

MASON: Great Earthquake, but everything comes out well in the end. They all sing *Nearer My God to Thee* at the end. But then we had *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with Vivian Leigh distraught and alcoholic and then being raped by Marlon Brando. Afterward one woman asked me, "Is this really what American women are like" and I said, "Oh, no, no! This is a very, very unusual case. Nothing like this happens in the general population." Now *Streetcar* is a great play. I have great respect for it, especially in its sociological aspects, the decline of the Southern aristocracy, and the rise of the immigrant population, represented by Brando/Kowalski. This was a change in the power structure in the United States being documented in human terms, and I think Williams did a beautiful job of it. It's his best play from that point of view. But it was not something I should have shown to an audience which loved *San Francisco*.

This takes me back to the early days in Casablanca when we showed *A Farewell to Arms* with Rock Hudson and Jennifer Jones, and it was interesting to note that the Moroccan boys were outraged because he deserted. "This man was a deserter! He had a job to do and he didn't do it." They were taught that you don't desert. "Well, he's not a deserter," I said, "because the American army wasn't there. This was the Italian army and he was just an ambulance driver." I guess I got around it that way, but you can see the mind set of various peoples. It depends on where you are and how well you know those peoples. This has been my complaint with the Agency, with over centralization in Washington, with "opinion makers" as we call them. *We* can be the opinion makers, if we get the kids at the right age and show them what America is really like. But we weren't supposed to go after kids. No, we were supposed to go after the people who were already in power and argue with them and convert them and bring them over to our point of view. This really depends on where you are working.

*Q: Of course it does.*

MASON: And a public affairs officer who gets to know a population as I tried to get to know the Moroccans on the one hand and the Malagasy on the other has to do it a different way.

*Q: Before we leave Madagascar, who was your ambassador there?*

MASON: First I had Bob Barrett, who was the permanent chargé d'affaires. We didn't have an ambassador for the first year. The second year it was Fernando Rondon, a Hispanic who had been ambassador to Ecuador and Honduras. He had had a previous assignment in Madagascar. One of his children was born in Madagascar so he was very welcome there. His French was good and he was a fine man, but he wasn't a close friend.

Bob and Mavis Barrett are close friends. Bob didn't get his ambassadorship until after serving as DCM in Beirut, and then he was made ambassador in Djibouti, where he stayed for two tours. I got along beautifully with Bob and admired him as an officer. And with Rondon? We got along well, but I was only with him for a very few months. He had to wait to present his Letters of Accreditation, so of course couldn't participate in public affairs for several weeks.

*Q: Was the government there trying to throw up roadblocks and hurt the relationship or were we generally ignored or how did it work?*

MASON: As far as I could figure out, we were ignored. The opposition were encouraged to embarrass us. There was an article about what Castro was doing in Cuba, and a USIA film about the Mariel Boat Lift in 1980. When they saw the film, my chief assistants came up to me and said, "Please don't show this film here in Madagascar!" And you could see from some of the faces on that film that this was not the cream of Cuban society. I didn't show the film, but it never should have been sent to me in the first place. Then I let an article go which was critical of Cuba, and the Cuban ambassador complained. Again, I had never been briefed on the so-called third party rule. I should have known, but never even had an orientation with USIA. That's the way they trained people.

I had gotten my promotion in Casablanca, by the way, through Jim Tull, who said I was the best Center Director he'd had in 20 years in the business because I was able to move my center from the old premises to the new premises, while still continuing to work with no hiatus. "While any other branch Public Affairs Officer would have closed down everything for a period of weeks, if not months," he went on. Well, I didn't have to close down, and I don't think that was such a great accomplishment. I am surprised that others had had to. Another thing I discovered when I got to Casablanca was that the flag we were still using in 1954 in that old cultural center was a 48 star flag, 15 years after Alaska and Hawaii had achieved statehood! So I had to ask the Agency to send us a new one.

*Q: Anyway, back in Madagascar, did things move at all or was this just an unfriendly regime?*

MASON: It was not entirely unfriendly. The number two man at the Foreign Ministry was Rasafsehen, a fine gentleman. He was just as friendly with us as he could have been, even though his boss I guess was not. He invited me once to the Ministry, greeted me on the steps outside and saw me off the same way. Unfortunately, he was sent to the U.S. as ambassador in the early 1980s and died during a bypass operation at George Washington University Hospital His wife was there, and it was a sad moment. He was such a nice fellow. He would be admired by any Malagasy. They are a kind and gentle people.

By the way, it was in Madagascar that I wrote the first draft of my novel, Hostage to Fortune.

**FERNANDO E. RONDON**  
**Ambassador**  
**Madagascar (1980-1983)**

*Ambassador Fernando E. Rondon was born in California in 1936. He received his bachelor's degree from University of California (Berkeley) in 1960. His career has included positions in Tehran, Tangier, Lima, Algiers, Tegucigalpa, and ambassadorships in Antananarivo and Quito. Ambassador Rondon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 4, 1997.*

*Q: In 1980, you were appointed as US Ambassador to Madagascar. How did that come about?*

RONDON: I was surprised when I was asked whether I would be interested in the job. The inquiry came to me telephonically. I said that I would certainly be interested. I was told that it would probably take at least six months before an *agrément* could be approved because US- Madagascar relations at the time were not very good. In fact, about five months after I had left Madagascar during my earlier tour, the Ambassador and five Embassy staff members were declared *persona non grata*. The same thing happened two or three years later with another two Americans being declared *p.n.g.* Between 1975 and 1980, our Embassy had been run by a Chargé.

But in 1980, Madagascar began to hint that it would like to upgrade relationships with the US through mutual appointments of ambassadors. Washington agreed. The Department decided to nominate someone who knew something about Madagascar. In fact, *agrément* was given within 48 hours. Interestingly enough, during my first tour, I had developed good contacts with the Embassy's national employees and some of them remembered me and spoke well of me when my name was first mentioned as a possible ambassadorial candidate. Through their contacts with the government, I think, our national employees were very helpful not only in getting *agrément*, but getting it quickly. A lesson from that experience is that a young officer should cultivate good contacts in the country of assignment if he or she wishes to return sometime later as ambassador.

In 1972 Madagascar had experienced a second revolution during which an admiral, Didier Ratsiraka, was chosen to be President. He decided that his government would be a leftist one. Madagascar is the only example that I can think of where the United States failure in Vietnam may have led a foreign leader to think that the triumph of communism was the writing on the wall. I believe the story that Didier Ratsiraka came to the conclusion that the future of Madagascar depended on an alliance or close friendship with the Soviets rather than the Americans. He further decided that Madagascar's best friend should be North Korea. They built presidential palace for him. However, Madagascar, which had been an exporter of rice, became an importer because Ratsiraka's leftist



government destroyed the distribution system. The incompetent North Koreans were brought in to give advice on rice cultivation. The North Koreans sent military conscripts to advise Malagasy farmers who knew much more about rice cultivation than their “advisors.” Ratsiraka was a stubbornly proud man and would not admit that he had made a major mistake in throwing his lot in with North Korea and the Soviet Union.

The Soviets had a large presence in Madagascar. There was a Communist Party on the island which was close to the Soviets. The Cubans were very popular; their ambassador was a well liked figure. The Cuban had a great sense of humor; he was also the dean of the diplomatic corps. That presented a problem for me. I had to go to the Cuban Embassy a couple of times when the Ambassador was hosting a diplomatic function as dean of the corps. He could not come to the American Embassy; there was absolutely no reason for him to be there, just as I never went to his Embassy on bilateral business. Occasionally, we did speak together--in Spanish. As I said, he was very bright and engaging. But we never discussed ideology or Cuban-American issues. He was succeeded by a humorless ambassador who quickly lost all of the good will that his predecessor had garnered.

The US was willing to become engaged again with Madagascar primarily because we wanted to deny the Soviets a free hand on the island, especially the port facilities at Diego Suarez. We didn't want the Soviet navy using that bay; it would have been a great base for them.

The Department of State didn't have any great illusions about Madagascar. One of the ranking members of the Bureau of African affairs (AF) was opposed to sending an ambassador at all, in light of Madagascar's previous behavior. But the administration did want to normalize relationships with Madagascar. I was treated well. Slowly but surely relationships were rebuilt. By 1980, the Malagasy were withdrawing from the courtship of the Soviets.

My favorite anecdote of my tour actually came even before I left for Madagascar--during my Washington briefing period. I was invited by Duke University to visit its primate center. I went with my twelve year old daughter Susan, who was born in Madagascar during our first tour there, and my wife, Marian. The Director, Dr. Elwyn Simons, took us to see the animals. Duke has one of the most important lemur breeding programs in the US. Many lemur species are endangered. Dr. Simons introduced us to a *propithecus* lemur whose name was Nigel--a beautiful animal. When Simons gave the lemur to Susan to hold, Nigel embraced her. Dr. Simons then noted that, unfortunately, Nigel would never have off-spring because no mate was available. Then came the suggestion that I could be very helpful in facilitating Duke's search for a mate for Nigel. As far as Susan was concerned, the finding of a mate for Nigel in Madagascar was my sole purpose as ambassador.

I spent my first year becoming re-acquainted with Madagascar--talking to people, getting around the island, etc. The government was run by coastal people but the bureaucracy consisted primarily of highland people. As I mentioned in my previous discussion of Madagascar, the coastal people and the highlanders are racially different. Although the

country has 18 tribes, most outsiders just divide the country between the highlanders--of Malayo-Indonesian origin--and the coastal people--of African descent. Reference was never made to race; the inhabitants were either the "coastal" or "highland" people. The majority of Malagasy were coastal. In fact, the two communities managed to co-exist, although the highlanders were very much prejudiced against the coastal people, some of whom were descendants of slaves owned by the Merina monarchy about 100 years earlier. So the society was very complex, with tension between races or between people of different social backgrounds.

I also began a campaign to get Washington to do something for Madagascar. I was very interested in having a senior US government official pay a visit; it would stroke Ratsiraka's ego as well as being an action-stimulating event to force Washington to pay some attention to Madagascar. I sent a message requesting such a visit; I also suggested that a senior military officer come to visit. On the latter, the CINC of the US Indian Ocean fleet did come. The President put his plane at our disposal and we flew to Diego Suarez to look at the Soviet base that was supposed to be there. In fact, there was nothing there -- which made our admiral happy. We had reassurances that neither we nor the Soviets would use Diego Suarez. This was fine by us because our principal objective was to deny the use of the port to the Soviets; we had no need to use it. The Admiral's visit was also instrumental in moving Madagascar away from the Soviet orbit and into at least a neutral position.

Later, Vernon Walters--ex-general, ex-ambassador, and representative *extraordinaire*--visited Madagascar. That was a very successful visit. When Walters was in Paris as our military attaché, Ratsiraka had been Madagascar's attaché. Walters remembered Ratsiraka. Walters charmed the Malagasy--he was an enormous success. He also gave a further push to our drive to move the Malagasy away from their leftist policies. So our relationship was warming up. It was very helpful that we agreed to supply rice to Madagascar under the PL 480 program. Ratsiraka was profoundly surprised that we provided rice; he did not think that the US would ever do anything like that. When we provided the rice, we noted that it was the rice of the ancestors--Carolina rice had come originally from Madagascar in pirate ships. That made a big impact because the Malagasy are very sentimental people. In fact, I think our PL 480 rice actually came from Texas, but I didn't know this at the time of the first shipment. We were not in a position to assist the Malagasy to improve their own rice cultivation practices; that would have required an assistance program which was not available during most of my tour. In any case, the Malagasy were beginning to work again with the French and the World Bank.

Eventually, we managed to start a small assistance program. I take real pride in being able to re-establish a friendly relationship between the US and Madagascar. That was my principal goal because with the establishment of closer ties, we were also able to help lead the Malagasy in a different direction from that which they had taken during their Soviet courtship days. I mentioned earlier that Madagascar had been neo-colonial. That was true, but it underwent tremendous change between my two tours. By 1980, Madagascar was very, very poor. There were many shortages--e.g. toilet paper, sugar, oil, soap, aspirin. Rice would disappear from the marketplace. It was a 25% hardship post.

When the Embassy Marine Guards held their annual Marine Ball at the Hilton they paid for the evening in part by bartering toilet paper and soap. Times were tough in Madagascar.

Ratsiraka's government had rejected the French language. It was decided that schools would use only Malagasy. That seriously hampered the whole educational system because there are a number of subjects that were difficult to teach in Malagasy, notably mathematics. Finally the government changed its policy and on its own, without pressure from France, and teaching in French was resumed. French assistance was returning. The new French Ambassador was of an entirely different stripe than the one that had been there during my first tour. My colleague was not a pro-consul. He was a professional diplomat. France was patiently, slowly trying to wean Madagascar away from its many poor practices. Fundamentally, Madagascar was never really a leftist state. It is a very Christian country. The goal of all Western governments was to get the Malagasy to modernize. France led the way with a far less paternalistic policy.

I should make a comment about Madagascar itself. It is a very different country than the US. For example, the Malagasy word for "foreigner" is "alien" --like an extraterrestrial being. It is truly difficult to become close to a Malagasy. They believe in spirits and they worship their ancestors. It is a country in which the dead are unburied and re-wrapped. During a reburial ceremony, the dead might be paraded around town so that they can see the changes that have taken place since their departure from earth. Houses in Madagascar are often tall because one wants to live at least on the second floor because the spirits won't go up. Life and death are closely intermingled; there is a great deal of superstition in Madagascar. There are many taboos.

Madagascar is an island; it is quite isolated. Events in other parts of Africa--e.g. South Africa--were of little concern. The Malagasy were concerned about the Comoro Islands which were nearby. They were concerned about the mercenaries there which I will mention later. There were occasions when the Malagasy were concerned about the possibility of South Africa mounting a coup, but those were unfounded fears. The regime which preceded Ratsiraka had allowed airline flights between South Africa and Madagascar, but they had been long suspended by the time I arrived as ambassador.

I got to know the head of the World Wildlife Foundation in Madagascar. He was of African ancestry. He invited me to go camping in the forest--with our spouses-- so that we could see lemurs. I was interested in nature and also a great supporter of the World Wildlife Foundation. So indeed we went into the forest and camped during a beautiful and wonderful weekend. We watched the lemurs flying overhead. After our return home, I learned that I had scandalized the highlanders because a) the forest was the home of the spirits and b) I had gone into the forest with a black person. As I said earlier, the highlanders were very prejudiced against black people.

It was not a major scandal, but the word about my forest trip had gotten around. In fact, Ratsiraka was delighted because he was from the same tribe as the head of the Madagascar chapter of World Wildlife Federation. That is not why I had gone, but my

action confirmed that I was not prejudiced. The end of this story came when Madagascar gave Duke University permission to send a team to capture a mate for Nigel. The Embassy was very much involved in this operation--e.g., the Embassy stored the team's equipment, including the dart guns. In fact, Duke captured many mouse lemurs which escaped their cages and got loose in the Marine Guard house, causing a small panic. Duke captured three *propithecus* lemurs--two females and one male. I should mention that Nigel and his mate, Diana, had offspring. I was a hero in my daughter's eyes--mission accomplished.

My wife was a member of an organization called "The Wednesday Morning Group." This consisted of the diplomatic spouses, the wife of the Foreign Minister and the women of high society in the highlands. The common language was French. The group provided small amounts for self-help projects--mainly in the highlands. It was a good organization. One day, the wife of the Foreign Minister recommended a project in the lowlands. The highland spouses objected. Marian, who rarely spoke at these meetings because she was reluctant to speak French in public, did on this occasion speak in favor of the project. In fact, the group approved the project. At the end of my tour in Madagascar when the subject of giving me a decoration was raised (all ambassadors are normally decorated at the end of their tours in Madagascar), Foreign Minister Richard insisted that he would have to decorate me personally as a "reward" for support of his wife's proposal at the "Wednesday Morning Group"--when Madame Richard had the courage to propose and Marian to support a project for the lowlands.

The AF Bureau was very supportive of my efforts and I think pleased with our accomplishments. I must note that while Ambassador to Madagascar, I was also accredited to the Comoro Islands. I was the first ambassador--albeit non-resident-- to that country. I presented my credentials to President Abdallah in 1981. It took me a while because, with the change in administrations in Washington, new *agrément* had to be requested. The Comoro Islands is a very small country. We wanted a relationship with the Comoros based on our policy of universality, but we were not about to make any investments in that country. All we wanted was to maintain a relationship by making periodic visits. The Comoros wanted us to do a lot more; the French were already engaged there and that was enough as far as the US was concerned.

South African and Rhodesian mercenaries were involved in the Comoros; in fact, they had installed the government then in power. They were very much in evidence, although slowly, over a period of years, their influence declined.

Madagascar is a country of many surprises; one is never quite sure how things will turn out. The Malagasy don't forget their friends. After I had left, the Malagasy Embassy in Washington continued to extend invitations to Marian and myself; the bonds they establish are enduring, as befits "the country of ancestors."

**SAMUEL S. REA**

**Program Officer, USAID  
Antananarivo (1984-1988)**

*Samuel S. Rea was born in New York City in 1938 and was educated at Princeton and SAIS. He has served in AID missions in Botswana, Senegal and Madagascar. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.*

REA: I left Dakar on June 30, 1984. About a year before this, when I began to think about what to do next, I had had a hunch that AID might be getting ready to open a new program on Madagascar, “the Great Red Island” in the Indian Ocean. In December 1983, I took the unusual step for me of writing the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa at the time, Ray Love, to apply for a job – but it was a job that did not yet exist: to “help put together an expanded program in Madagascar,” as I think I put it. Ray forwarded my request to John Koehring, the REDSO Director in East Africa, who had responsibility for Madagascar as part of the regional program there.

Though I did not know it at the time, John had just taken as his Deputy Art Fell, who must have put in a good word for me based on our collaboration in Paris. John and Art had, in fact, been tasked with starting new activities in Madagascar and were looking for an officer who would be permanently stationed in the capital, Antananarivo (Antan, for short). The leading candidate for the job, REDSO’s chief Program Officer, Jim Graham, declined the offer. Jim was the natural choice because he had directed the preparatory work and exploratory study required before a resident officer could be assigned there. So in the Spring of 1984, John invited me to fill the new position of REDSO’s “Program Officer for Madagascar,” resident in Antan and responsible to John himself as REDSO Director. I was to be the first representative of AID resident in Madagascar since our previous bilateral mission had closed there in 1972.

To repeat, I saw this as the dream assignment. Responsibility for developing a Madagascar program from nearly scratch as the “AID man in Antan” gave me a great sense of challenge and adventure. It also provided me with the best support group I could possibly have asked for – the multidisciplinary REDSO team in Nairobi led by John, Art, and Jim and, at a second echelon, the Science and Technology Bureau in AID/W. My assignment to begin with was two-fold: First, I was to direct a program of short-term help and exploration; and second, concurrent with that, I was to prepare a program of long-term assistance which AID could implement at such time as the U.S. was convinced that the Government of Madagascar (the GDRM) was truly committed to policies of economic liberalization and reform. If this were to happen, AID would then be prepared to move ahead quickly with long-term development assistance at higher funding levels.

*Q: What was the situation when you got there?*

REA: Madagascar’s situation was dismal. AID/W, then REDSO, briefed me on the Malagasy economy on my way out to Antan. As I read and heard about it, the situation appeared similar to the one we had faced in Senegal four years before. An economic

emergency marked by the hemorrhaging of foreign exchange, an avalanche of debt, and a crisis of credit-worthiness had forced the government to negotiate a stand-by agreement with the IMF and a structural adjustment program with the World Bank. The other strong similarity with Senegal was that France was an important player here, as well. Madagascar was, in fact, France's second largest recipient of foreign aid after Senegal. So the main features of the situation appeared very familiar.

What I found puzzling at first – and a source of frustration later – was the lack of an apparent cause for such dire circumstances. Years of drought preceded our rescue effort in Senegal and the Sahel, but the reasons for Madagascar's crisis did not lie on the surface. The island was just as poor in terms of GNP/capita as Sahelian countries. Yet with the exception of the extreme south it was well-watered. Education statistics for Madagascar were much better than for the Senegalese. Remember, too, that Madagascar is very sizeable, the fourth largest island on earth (after Greenland, Borneo, and New Guinea), with an area larger than France, with good harbors, ample natural resources, and a long history of exposure to the West. At first, all this just didn't seem to jibe with the situation I saw when I arrived.

My initial impression of the country is still vivid. I had caught an early morning flight from Nairobi after my REDSO briefing. We crossed the Mozambique Channel an hour after dawn. I recall my astonishment as I looked out the plane window on the land between the coast and Antan and I remember thinking to myself: "What is this – the surface of the moon?" On the ground during my first few days I was shocked by the clusters of beggars, most of them children, clamoring for hand-outs in the streets. Clearly, the national situation called for vigorous action.

By contrast, my work situation was very positive. The Embassy, led at the time by Ambassador Robert Keating and his admirable DCM, Dave Rawson, who were my day-to-day supervisors, had set aside two rooms on the ground floor for our AID offices. REDSO had recruited a Malagasy business woman, Agnes Rakotomalala, as my Administrative Assistant – a brilliant choice – and she was already at work. REDSO had also lined up a house which was soon ready for me and my new bride, AID education officer Julie Owen, to move in. And there were a great deal of introductions to be made in the GDRM and the donor community.

The program situation when I arrived reflected REDSO's careful preparation. Beginning the summer before, Jim Graham, Stu Callison (the REDSO economist), and many others had visited the island and put together a "preliminary" CDSS strategy, finally dated May 1984. This included a thick annex with the information they had collected on Madagascar's society, economy, agriculture and transport sectors. It was a good tentative plan for what should be done in the near term, until we could learn more. It highlighted the right areas and pointed in the right directions. REDSO's 1984 plan was the groundwork for the foundation we were to build over the next four years, before my departure in the summer of 1988. AID's current program in Madagascar today has been built squarely on that foundation.

*Q: You said we had a Mission in Madagascar in 1972, what happened?*

REA: A violent uprising that year overthrew the government which had ruled Madagascar since Independence in 1960. The outgoing government had been virtually a continuation of French colonialism under ruling local elites. The gulf between haves and have-nots had widened until the social situation had become intolerable. The 1972 uprising began the socialist revolution which Didier Ratsiraka consolidated when he became President in 1975.

Initially, AID had supervised activities in Madagascar from Nairobi. Then in 1966 a Mission was established at Antan. Since an American presence was not welcome after the 1972 riots, we closed the Mission. But despite some 20 years of active interest there before 1981, AID had not been a key player in Madagascar. Our total assistance between 1962 and 1978 amounted to only \$20 million. Half of this had been devoted to a Food for Peace PL 480 Title II program, managed locally by Catholic Relief Services (CRS). When program management moved back to Nairobi in 1972, AID stopped making grants but continued humanitarian assistance through CRS. Our multi-year loans for capital projects in railways and telecommunications also continued but they were supervised from Nairobi by REDSO personnel on short visits to the island.

The loans were not renewed, however, when Ratsiraka in 1977 embarked on an all-out public investment program. The GDRM decided to take out high-cost foreign loans to pay for non-productive capital projects. The government did so just at the time when the world terms of trade were turning against Malagasy exports. Because this course of action seemed doomed to failure, the U.S. cut off all aid at that point, save always for the CRS food aid. Other Western donors did likewise. The Socialist countries saw an opportunity and moved in. But soon, by 1980, Madagascar was flat broke. President Ratsiraka was obliged to change policies abruptly and to come to terms with the IMF/World Bank.

Naturally, before reopening a development assistance program in Madagascar we wanted to make reasonably sure (a) that the GDRM meant what it said about economic reform and (b) that the GDRM was ready and able to bear the political costs of economic reform. If the answer to both questions turned out to be positive, we wanted to be in a position at that point to move quickly to implement a sound, long-term development program.

*Q: What did you do?*

REA: Washington had been alarmed by the anti-Western stance of the Ratsiraka government. Our concern had particularly to do with Madagascar's strategic location on the major shipping lane through the Mozambique Channel. So as soon as Ratsiraka declared that he was willing to deal again with the West and consider economic reform, we had a strong incentive to offer renewed short-term help. We provided this help in 1981 in the form of a \$5 million PL 480 Title I program. The commodity was rice, which became the centerpiece of our program throughout the entire decade to follow.

Why rice? Rice is the staple food of the Malagasy, who were said at the time to consume more rice per capita than any people on earth.—three heaping platefuls apiece, when it could be had, morning, noon, and night. Madagascar up until the revolution had exported a very high quality rice, but for a number of policy reasons found itself by the end of the Seventies a net importer. In 1980, with their foreign exchange reserves very low, the GDRM welcomed the Title I program. We repeated the program again in 1982 at the same level, and in 1983 increased the program to \$8 million, including this time some vegetable oil which had by then become a nutritional necessity. When I arrived in 1984, REDSO was negotiating a repeat of the 1983 program. All four of these Title I programs involved the allocation of counterpart funds to specified local capital development activities.

REDSO saw the supervision of the Title I counterpart program as one of my main tasks. This involved the selection with the GDRM of worthwhile local projects and the monitoring of their progress. At the same time, as I've said, REDSO wanted to design a program to position us so that, if the GDRM demonstrated its commitment to new reform policies, we would be able to step in quickly with appropriate long-term development support. My overall assignment was to establish a presence for AID in the country and, in day-to-day touch with the GDRM, with the other donors and private groups, to guide the evolution of a multi-year AID Program.

*Q: How did the program evolve, in what directions? Where did you come out?*

REA: As we had in Senegal in a similar economic emergency, the U.S. supported the IMF/World Bank policy reform package. But, as I've said, unlike our Senegal program, the U.S. was not yet ready in Madagascar in 1984 to commit fully to a sustained, long-term effort. REDSO and the Embassy saw our immediate objectives in Madagascar in different but complementary ways. In the Embassy's view, the AID program should demonstrate visible and timely support of the GDRM's opening to the West and to market reform. AID's preoccupation at first was with Basic Human Needs and with responding to urgent economic requirements.

Within these parameters, REDSO's preliminary CDSS of 1984 focused our assistance on the agriculture sector -- where 85% of Malagasy were employed and where private, small-holder production prevailed. REDSO's plan was to continue our balance of payments support under PL 480 Title I. We would use the counterpart funds to pay local costs to rehabilitate feeder roads and dikes, which were vital to production and which were in deplorable shape. The preliminary CDSS also directed us within the agriculture sector to pay special attention to rice production, for the reasons I've given. Included in this was financing for the first resident team in the sub-Saharan region from IRRI – the International Rice Research Institute, headquartered in the Philippines. Added to agriculture, the 1984 CDSS also included a note of concern over the absence of any family planning program in a country whose population growth was far outstripping economic growth.

That is where my four year tour began. On paper my reporting responsibilities looked a



great deal the same as they did when I worked in Botswana to open that program some twelve years before. My AID supervisor was located in another country while my Ambassador was, almost literally, in the next office. But the ambassadorial personalities and backgrounds were very different. In Gaborone, Ambassador Nelson had been a former AID Director who instinctively viewed diplomacy through the lense of economic development. By contrast, Ambassador Keating, who remained at the Embassy's helm for my first two years or so, was an Annapolis graduate and political appointee with some relevant World Bank experience. His most important moments, as he saw it, were his private discussions with President Ratsiraka (another former naval officer) about the global big-picture.

Whenever Ambassador Keating thought about the AID program, his principal interest was that it should be highly visible. He wanted to demonstrate with headlines and in pictures the concern of the American people for the distress of the Malagasy. He repeated to me often that what he wanted was a "Rapid Rea Ready Reaction" program, specially keyed to food imports, hurricane disaster aid (which was required after the cyclones each Spring), and to ribbon-cutting and flag-planting activities. An example was the Bailey bridge which the Ambassador insisted that AID should finance to replace a washed out structure in the Namakia area of NW Madagascar. After much hassle, the bridge was ceremonially opened just after I got to post.

I have little doubt that if it had not been for the stout presence of REDSO, which had the responsibility for aid to Madagascar, and for the quasi-autonomy of AID itself, that our work on the island might have amounted to a well-publicized relief and rehabilitation program. We would probably not have tackled the root problems of low agricultural production, environmental degradation, and surging population growth. I think of that keenly today when I see evidence of our Agency slipping closer to absorption into the State Department and to becoming the main manager of Presidential Initiatives in developing countries.

But as it was, I think we laid the foundations in 1984-88 for a balanced, effective long-term development program. I'll try to outline what it looked like without too much detail. Madagascar was a stand-alone program, after all, unlike what we did in Senegal under the Sahel Development Program. Senegal was part of a larger scheme of things and therefore, perhaps, of greater interest. Also, regrettably, our Madagascar program has suffered from subsequent political paralysis on the island, most acutely in 1991. The GDRM's political gridlock has partially prevented the program, at least so far, from becoming as effective as it might have been. Nevertheless, the Madagascar program is worth attention because it became something of a model for what our Africa Bureau as a whole was attempting to do at the time.

Stated briefly, the increased production of higher quality rice became our main focus, with two supporting program elements: family planning and, almost entirely missing from the initial 1984 plan, conservation of Madagascar's unique bio-diversity. These three elements fit together well and were, in the longer term, interdependent.

Our initial approach in 1984 was to learn as much as we could about agriculture on the island. This approach was embodied in the Madagascar Agriculture Rehabilitation and Support (MARS) project, signed in 1985 and amended in 1987. Deliberately designed as a “smorgasbord” program, MARS provided a total of \$7.5 million for training, technical assistance, and policy studies in virtually all areas of the agriculture sector, and it also helped with the import of critical commodities. MARS was designed to give us broad knowledge of the agriculture sector, so that later we could select the portion most conducive to long-term concentration. But rice production quickly emerged as the area in which AID could have the greatest long-term effect. We saw very soon that we could be useful there in two principal ways.

Our intervention through IRRI was designed to make a vital contribution: to improve the varieties of rice and the technical packages available to Malagasy farmers. Over the years since Independence, Madagascar had prohibited the import of the improved rice varieties developed at IRRI and elsewhere which had figured so prominently in Asia’s Green Revolution. Our IRRI activity was implemented by means of a two man team resident in Madagascar, backed up by training and expertise at IRRI headquarters. In close collaboration with their Malagasy counterparts, IRRI aimed at carrying out a classic sequence of activities: to select from the world seed bank those rice varieties with characteristics most germane to conditions in Madagascar, to import these varieties, cross them with local varieties to make them more hardy, test them on station and in farmers’ fields, then to make them available for wide distribution to farmers together with the most appropriate fertilizers, also as tested. At the same time, of course, IRRI would be making a concerted effort to prepare Malagasy research and technical staff and institutions to take entire responsibility for the rice program when IRRI departed. To accomplish all this in a reasonable span of time -- a decade or so -- given all the resistance built into the Malagasy research and production system, was a stiff challenge.

But our second contribution to rice production, an essential one, was even more ambitious. Looming over the failure of the rice sector in the years since 1972 was the policy question -- the set of policies by which the GDRM under Ratsiraka had kept careful control over the price of rice in urban markets, thereby creating price disincentives to Madagascar’s rice producers. A further effect of these market controls was to encourage rice traders on the island to hold their stocks in an attempt to force up consumer prices.

The World Bank’s VP for African operations, Kim Jaycox, came to Antan shortly after I arrived. His prime mission was to reach agreement with President Ratsiraka on a way to free up the market price of rice. The stakes were high on both sides. The Bank and the rest of the donor community realized that market liberalization reforms, essential to increasing agriculture production, would go nowhere if rice, the key staple, was left out of the program. The President saw just as clearly that to remove price controls on rice without absolute assurance that adequate rice stocks would be available in the event of a poor harvest could result in a rocketing of rice prices, public outrage, and the end of his government.

Ambassador Keating was invited to attend these discussions, and AID played a key part in the solution which emerged. Under the brand new PL 480 Food For Progress program, which Keating himself had helped devise even while he was Ambassador to Madagascar, the U.S. promised to provide a buffer stock of rice for each of three consecutive years until domestic rice production, in response to free market price incentives, could increase sufficiently to guarantee ample domestic supplies. As a respected, neutral observer to help determine if the program was working as planned, we invited Elliot Berg to come out for two or three visits and report on the progress, or lack of progress, of the program.

In early 1987 we delivered 30,000 metric tons of rice, the first tranche of the FFP program, to constitute a reserve stock as a complement to the April rice harvest. The GDRM decontrolled prices. Elliot came in June to inspect the results and file a report. His findings confirmed that the program was on the right track. His analysis ended with the comment that this event was probably the first time that an indirect policy instrument – the use of the market instead of direct controls – had “shown its power”. We experienced many frustrations with the GDRM over this program but we had no doubt after 1987 that we were headed in the right direction.

After research and policy reform, the third element of our rice production strategy, as I said a while ago, was repairing local infrastructure. As the economy had worsened, rural roads and water control dikes and the terracing necessary for rice production and marketing had suffered serious neglect. To help “fix what was broke” at local levels, we allocated a portion of the local currencies which accrued from the sale of the commodities which had been imported since 1981 under the PL 480 Title I program, under the MARS project, and from other activities of ours. These funds totaled over \$65 million by June 1988.

This was a considerable sum, and I should say here that we made two evaluations of the counterpart program. The first evaluation reported that the 166 local projects (dams, roads, etc.) we had completed by December 1987, with 200 more still on-going, had generated enormous good will for the U.S. at local levels. That was the good news. The second evaluation looked at the program from an economic angle and judged that these 166 projects, by and large, had done little to increase production – at least, not yet.

In either case, the process by which our counterpart funds were allocated needed to be adjusted. Reviewing and approving projects from extensive lists submitted each year by 13 different GDRM agencies was time consuming. The actual GDRM transfer of these funds to the project accounts was often and inexplicably delayed, in some cases by as much as two years. By the time I left we had reorganized the program to allocate the majority of our counterpart funds to a few, much larger projects which supported our overall program. These projects included, for example, the rehabilitation of rice research stations associated with IRRI and the repair of feeder roads under the multi-year World Bank Highway project. Also included were two or three other projects in the areas of family health and the environment, which I’ll get to in a minute. But in addition to making the allocation process much simpler, we also came to agreement with the GDRM that our counterpart funds would be placed “on budget,” that is, the funds would be part

of the regular, publically voted annual budget where they could be “found” and transferred in much more timely fashion.

After rice production, the second of the three major components of the Madagascar program by the time I left in July 1988 was the conservation of the environment. Conservancy went hand-in-hand with our work in agriculture. The moonscape which greeted me on the morning I first flew into Antan had been the result of many years of over-grazing and slash-and-burn production techniques. Obviously, we needed to work out ways in which the local populations would see their interests best served by protecting their unique environment, at the same time as they were enabled to farm more intensively on adjacent areas.

Bio-diversity was not part of the original REDSO game plan when I arrived. But its importance grew clearer to us, and to the international community, very quickly. World Wildlife and many other groups listed Madagascar and the Brazilian rainforest together at the top of their global conservation “watch lists.” Madagascar as the world’s most exotic “living laboratory” of unique species was shrinking before our eyes.

Our initial approach, made on a low-cost, pilot basis, was to select several of the highest priority ecological areas on the island and then to arrange and support collaborative ventures in each of them between the local inhabitants and a Malagasy PVO, with the expert help of an international PVO. Their joint objective was to work out sustainable ways to conserve bio-diversity while at the same time achieving a satisfactory level of agriculture production or other means of supporting the local population.

We began by assisting the project which Allison Richards of Yale University had already started in the southwest at Beza Mahafaly in conjunction with the University of Madagascar. In June 1987 Donna Stauffer joined me as the second Direct Hire officer in the office. Donna had great enthusiasm for this environmental work, although she also had across-the-board responsibility for all our project design and management. Before I left we had arranged a combination of dollar grants and counterpart funding to support two more environmental pilot projects.

The first, located in the north at Amber Mountain, combined World Wildlife International and the local CRS organization in Madagascar. The second, in the island’s largest remaining virgin rain forest, the Masoala Peninsula on the northeast shore, supported collaboration between Missouri Botanical Gardens and the Madagascar Lutheran Church. In addition to these location-specific activities we pledged major support using our counterpart funds to cover local costs of the World Bank-assisted Environmental Action Plan process, which began in March 1987. Donna was particularly convinced of the importance of building collaborative relationships in the environmental area. She was largely responsible for carrying this work forward in a more consolidated projectized form after I left.

The third and final component of our program in Madagascar was family planning. The need for this was stark. As I’ve suggested, Madagascar’s population growth rate was one

of the highest in the world, estimated at over 3% per annum. In 1975 an uncompleted census indicated that there were 7.5 million Malagasy; in the mid-1980's the total was estimated at about 10.5 million; and the latest figures I've seen put today's population at some 14 million. These figures represent a doubling of population in 20 years. Add to this, that only about 15% of the land area of the Great Red Island is considered arable, with topsoil being washed into the sea – you've seen the satellite pictures – in spectacular quantities each year. The traditional Malagasy marriage blessing was “May you have seven sons and seven daughters.” Contraceptive use was among the lowest in the world. The World Bank called this high population growth rate Madagascar's most important long term issue.

Until the time I arrived, there had been no attempt by the government or local leaders to address this problem, although at least one private group was active -- but with little success. The REDSO survey in 1983, however, had detected some further inklings of interest in family planning, if it were introduced discreetly. I was confident from my experience in Senegal that our Agency had the central resources needed to respond in effective ways. Barbara Kennedy, REDSO's population officer, entirely agreed. We began with a population and family health survey which Barbara organized in 1985. Based on the findings of this survey, the RAPID project made an excellent presentation which was attended by a wide selection of national and local leaders. Many of them came away shaking their heads, saying they had never before conceived of the population phenomenon in Madagascar, nor considered its effects on national development ten and twenty years in the future. After this, with the encouragement of Madame Ratsiraka, we were told, the GDRM gave us a cautious green light to proceed.

We knew we would have our hands full, once population activities got underway. We could expect a stream of S&T/POP professional people who would be coming to follow up on the opportunity in conjunction with Malagasy from the private and public arenas. As a full-time coordinator within our office, we were most fortunate to employ Mr. Gerard Rakotondrainibe. He came to us with long experience abroad with UNFPA, as well as experience at home with the Malagasy private group engaged in the field. Gerard became the second Malagasy professional in our office after Agnes. He proved invaluable to us in orienting our outside specialists and linking them up with the right people in country. From 1985 to 1988 we received all the help we needed in working with the GDRM to formulate and draft a national population strategy, to disseminate and explain it, and to keep the plan updated on the basis of good demographic statistics. Our Bureau of the Census gave sound assistance in preparing a new national census. Specialists provided by S&T/POP's OPTIONS and IMPACT projects worked specifically on the development of the population policy and the building of its data base. S&T's FISA program supplied contraceptive materials to Malagasy private sector institutions which wanted to offer family planning services to their employees.

My work with Mike White in Senegal had persuaded me that family planning works best when it is part of a comprehensive program for family health, particularly to include young children. Given AID's “focus and concentrate” directives, it would have been out of the question to open a health program of our own at that time in Madagascar.

Fortunately, however, I found a way to team up with UNICEF, which in 1987 was preparing to design with the Ministry of Health a five year child support program. This program would provide ORT/immunization services to at least 80% of all Malagasy children on a phased basis, taking on a different section of the country in each successive year. At our request, S&T/Health provided a planner who had a strong track record with UNICEF, and he was most helpful in designing a practical plan which we all could support. We then pledged \$2.2 million in counterpart funds to pay the local costs of the program. This was the first time to my knowledge that AID and UNICEF had worked together in this way. I left before the program got underway, but the agreed plan, at least, was that our family planning effort would receive a family health complement, in effect, as the two programs proceeded side by side.

Our program in Madagascar, composed of these three elements – agriculture (with a focus on rice production), environmental protection, and family planning – was in place by 1987. The GDRM had continued to abide by the structural reform program of the World Bank sufficiently well, and had satisfied each of the annual IMF standby agreements since 1983. In consequence, Madagascar's budget deficit had fallen from 18% of GDP to 4% since the beginning of the decade.

Encouraged by all this, and by our REDSO reports, the AID Administrator acted in May 1987 to upgrade the REDSO program office in Antan to "the Office of the AID Representative in Madagascar." As the AID Rep, I now reported directly to the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa, Larry Saiers, who depended on REDSO for "advice" and on his East African desk in AID/W to give us administrative support. I was asked to revise the 1984 CDSS to offer a long-term strategy. A review of our program was scheduled for the Fall. A small team of impartial observers, led by Jim Kelly, a former Director of the Sahel Program, by then retired, came out to prepare a "concepts paper" to guide the review. The review took place between October 30 – November 18, 1987. Larry Saiers himself led the review, which included top REDSO personnel.

The review confirmed the main lines of the program we had developed and which I've described. In February 1988 I went to AID/W to present and defend the new CDSS, which I had prepared containing this plan. Despite a good deal of pressure at the meeting to eliminate one or two of the three elements, in favor of a total concentration on the rice sector, the complete, balanced plan was ultimately approved. Our Office received a clear policy mandate for the 1988-90 period to implement the three-legged program. As a consequence, later in 1988, the Administrator again upgraded the Office another notch to a full USAID Mission. This took effect just after my departure from Antan in July.

*Q: How big a Mission was it?*

REA: In my view the Mission grew too big after my departure, and this disappointed me. I believe we had a chance to establish a new and better model of doing business, but I think we blew it. I had thoroughly experienced a large mission during my years in Dakar, where we had some 26 US Direct Hire officers, plus contract Americans and Senegalese. I had regretted then how much time we spent just on dealing with our own internal

administration. I had often rued in Senegal how difficult it was for me as the Program Officer to get out of the office and into the field to see for myself what was going on. My experience in the small office in Antan, by contrast, was liberating. I was able to travel to every part of the large island, as REDSO encouraged me to do. Also in Antan, dealing closely with the World Bank resident office, I saw how a large program could be steered along by just a few good people, with plenty of help from Washington. Of course, the AID system is constructed to give our Missions more responsibility than the Bank's country offices have. I favor our system. But if the most responsible people in our Missions have trouble getting out to see what is going on, the purpose of our system is compromised. In Antan I was testing just how much we in AID could do with the leanest resident staff possible.

We began in September 1984 with just two full-time professionals, Agnes and me, and a driver.

Three or four months later, REDSO contracted for the half-time services of my wife, Julie Owen Rea. Julie was (and is) a direct hire career officer. She had taken a leave of absence to accompany me to post, where there was no established position apart from mine. Julie, who reported to REDSO, turned out to be a life-saver. Her experience in preparing the implementation (PIO) documents for the technical services, commodities and training under the MARS project was just what we needed to start the program quickly. In addition, we contracted locally with another American, Janet Crosthwaite, the wife of a British officer in the European Development Fund (FED). Janet served as our part-time administrative officer and received solid support and supervision from our regional controller's office in Nairobi, as well as from the Executive Officer in the Embassy, of which we were a part. The Embassy built an addition and we took one floor for our offices, including space for our TDY visitors. In the three years following, 1985-88, we added only one Direct Hire officer in addition to myself, Donna Stauffer, one Malagasy professional, Gerard, and two support people – a secretary and a second driver.

In this way we grew from a total of four to a total of eight full time equivalent (FTE) staff in 1988, including support staff. Our total annual program, meanwhile, increased from \$11 million in 1984 to \$28 million by 1986. The program leveled off at about this figure, not counting the counterpart funds which we supervised. This, I think, was the lowest ratio of USDH staff to total budget (OYB) in the Africa region. We could only do this, of course, thanks to the outstanding support we received from REDSO and AID/W. But the ratio was a bit too low, since the strain on REDSO and our office was showing. So before I left, the Ambassador, then Patricia Gates Lynch, and I recommended the addition of just two more Direct Hire officers: an economist to coordinate with the IMF/World Bank/GDRM on structural adjustment, and an agriculturalist to track our large sector program. I wrote the SPARS for these positions and worked with an architect and builder to provide the necessary additional office space. All was ready when I left.

By 1988 I felt we had a solid program in Madagascar, both in content and in staffing. Our Administrator apparently shared this view. In his annual March budget request to the House Appropriations Committee, the Administrator described the Madagascar program

at length as a leading example of how AID intended to use the new Development Fund for Africa which he was proposing. The Congress accepted and passed the DFA into legislation that year. The DFA itself, incidentally, was partially modeled on the Sahel Development Program.

I believed our Madagascar Office also provided a model for how a country program could be structured and managed, to use a minimum of Direct Hire personnel supplemented by local hire expatriates and host country nationals, and backed up by a REDSO regional office and AID/W. Ambassador Lynch and I resisted as strongly as we could a pell-mell increase in USDH staffing. We did so in the interest of economy, security, and most of all, from my stand point, to free up Direct Hire managers from a preoccupation with internal housekeeping so that they could concentrate on the assistance program itself, outside the confines of the office walls .

But I'm sorry to say that we were overruled by AID regulations. These stipulated that an AID Mission, once designated as such, must be staffed in a certain prescribed manner, to include a Director, a Deputy Director, a Program Officer, a Controller, a Management Officer, and so forth. As a result, I learned later that the staff at AID/Madagascar mushroomed within a year or two. This growth, in turn, required the arrangement of new and more spacious office facilities and the securing of more official residences. I did not envy my successors, especially in 1991, when the paralysis of the GDRM left them with a large staff and premises and a partial suspension of our program activities, with little to do.

*Q: How did you find the Malagasy people in the government to work with, compared to the Tanzanians and Senegalese?*

REA: The Malagasy were the most talented and, at the same time, the most conflicted people of any I have worked with. I remember talking with a former Executive Officer for the State Department, who made his living after retirement by pinch-hitting in embassies all over Africa. He told me that of all the local hire embassy staffs he knew in the African region, two stood head and shoulders above the rest in hard work and competence: those in Ethiopia and Madagascar. Agnes was an outstanding example of the intelligence and diligence of Malagasy staff, but there were also others with whom we worked in the GDRM and the Embassy who were remarkably disciplined and quick to learn.

On the other hand, the proliferation of factions in Malagasy society along lines of family cliques, ethnic groups, and political persuasions tended towards gridlock, and the uncompromising toughness of the people made the gridlock nearly intractable. At the same time, language also made it more difficult for us. The fact that Malagasy all speak with each other in Malagasy, a language which takes the American missionaries, for example, six years to learn, separated us further, even if we were able to do reasonably well in French. And certainly the insular island mentality and the suspicion the GDRM had of the U.S., even among folks disposed to trust us personally, did not help. Despite all this, we formed some very productive personal relationships with a few key members



of the GDRM, particularly in the Planning Ministry.

*Q: Anything more on your experience there?*

REA: My four years in Madagascar, I feel sure, were the most instructive and, at the same time, the most baffling of my career. I learned an enormous amount about the operation of an AID program in the field and about our organization itself in all its parts and people -- from a field perspective. And I learned this from soup to nuts, from the details of building an office and ordering equipment up to all the things that went into and could go wrong with a structural adjustment program. Learning-by-doing taught me a great deal. I was also fortunate to be involved with some areas in which our Agency as a whole did not have much experience: in working in Madagascar itself, of course, but also in taking part in launching the first Food For Progress program, in the auctioning (not just selling) of PL 480 imports for the first time, and in organizing local community participation in environmental programs through support to local and foreign PVOs. And, again, I can't stress too much the marvelous support we received from Nairobi and Washington.

But also it was in some ways a tortuous experience. We were dealing with a government which had led its people in one direction and now was in the process of renouncing its former principles to lead them back in the other direction, like a person trying to go both ways at once in a revolving door. This, plus the many conflicts within the Malagasy society, made for blockages and delays for no apparent reason and even led to under-the-table dealings against the terms of formal, signed agreements which we had reached with the GDRM. The President regularly used the economic arm of his Party, for example, to import rice and undercut the freeing up of the rice market. State production parastatals and the State controlled banking community crowded out other market reforms and retarded the growth of the private sector. Ratsiraka's leadership made for many contradictions which came to a head several years after I left.

What remains with me is the bizarre contrast between Madagascar's talented people and well-watered countryside on the one hand and, on the other, the stark poverty, desperation, even starvation of the poor, never far from view in town or country. This standing contradiction was before the eyes of all of us who worked there at that time. I was not reluctant to leave Madagascar by the time our four year tour ended. And I was more than ready at that time in my career to take a step back and try to form a larger view of our Agency and its worldwide operations, and to gain an overview of the international development effort as a whole.

**PATRICIA GATES LYNCH**  
**Ambassador**  
**Madagascar (1986-1989)**

*Ambassador Patricia Gates Lynch was raised in*

*Connecticut. In 1986 she was appointed ambassador to Madagascar and Comoro Islands. She was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.*

*Q: Okay, let's turn to the main focus now. How was your appointment to Madagascar and the Comoro Islands? You served there from 1986 to 1989.*

LYNCH: That is right, just a little over three years. Well, people had often said at VOA...especially after my trip to China and when I went out on a speaking grant. (One country I went to was the Philippines and it was having a very difficult time, I might say, when they were having riots before the fall of Marcos. I had been in the Philippines before with the Nixons.) Well, I was often referred to as an ambassador for the United States because of the programs and travels. The term had come into being, but not in my wildest dreams did I ever have it as a goal because it was not my career path.

However, thinking back to the International Women's Year, I remember that the woman who was the head of that, Ruth Bacon, was a retired Foreign Service officer. After we had worked together in that year she said to me, "You know you should be an ambassador. You know that don't you?" I said, "No, I never thought of it." She said, "Well, you should be but you will never be because you are a woman. I reached the deputy level." I tried very hard to call her at the time I knew that I could tell people about it and she had just died. I remember being so sad. I hadn't seen her for several years and I had wanted to tell her that women had really progressed to the point where amazing things could happen.

So I think it all happened because a number of people came together at the same time with the idea. And, you don't, as we all know, have special things happen in this world unless others help you. In this case there were two things. One, I had worked for the government. I certainly couldn't help on any campaign and I never had given any money so to be a political ambassador those are usually things that make the path rather quick. I had served many Presidents of all parties very gladly without any feeling of whether I was a Democrat or a Republican. It didn't make any difference what our VOA people were either, or USIA heads, whether they were Democrats or Republicans. When you work for the government you don't ordinarily have political allegiances, at least I didn't, because I felt the important thing I was selling was the United States.

So people wrote letters, not at my instigation, I might add. A wonderful man I did know well, by the name of Arthur Burns, I would say probably started it. He was, of course, head of the Federal Reserve, became Ambassador to Germany, and was one of our most highly thought of ambassadors. He thought I should become an ambassador and he wrote a letter to the head of USIA and it went to the White House. I had some interviews...all of this took quite a while, it doesn't happen overnight. But over the course of a year or more different things happened. I also had something rather nice happen in that the man who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs had said to me that they would certainly be glad to have me if my name did come in from the White House because of my background. But, I still knew it was a very difficult process and I didn't count on it.

So it actually came to pass. The White House proposed me for two countries, Ghana and Madagascar. Then I had the call from the White House saying that the President was sending my name to be Ambassador to Madagascar and the Comoros, which was a smaller country near by. Madagascar, itself, has 12 million people and is one of the larger spots. But the Comoros were also important to us because of its location. Now it is a separate embassy. At that time it was part of the Madagascar Ambassador's responsibilities.

I remember that from the time the White House proposed me...it was not public, this had to be kept very quiet...but I went over to the Department of State and thought I could continue my program and also be learning about Madagascar. But I found in the matter of just a couple of weeks that I really couldn't do a good job of preparation unless I gave it my fullest attention. So I told one or two people it was necessary to tell at VOA that I was going to be on temporary duty and that is the way we said it on the air. I was just off on a temporary assignment and I would be back. And I was back for my final program just a week or so before I left.

*Q: Did you announce what you were going to do and how one prepares to become an ambassador?*

LYNCH: I did a whole program about my becoming an Ambassador but not on how one prepares to be one. I did tell them a little bit about Madagascar and where it was, what its exports were, a little bit about it. I received right at the Embassy about a hundred letters a year coming in from people all over the world who had heard the last program and just wanted to touch base.

*Q: How did you prepare to be an Ambassador?*

LYNCH: I spent time at the Department of State in the African Bureau, in particular the East African Branch. I studied. I read cables. The big part was interviews. Probably as many as sixty. Constantly having consultation with people in the Department of State on numerous subjects. Then consultations with the various agencies I would be working with...AID, the intelligence people, the Pentagon, etc.

The aim was to get to know the people you would be working with from afar and also so that you would learn yourself the mission of AID, for example. That was always an interesting one for me, the Agency for International Development. I had heard that in many Embassies it was a great bone of contention between the Ambassador and the AID director. There was bad feeling. I said to myself that it was not going to be that way if I could help it where I am going. I learned on the scene that the AID people help an Ambassador with the mission. The AID people have the money you want to have to help an emerging country with difficulties. You want to be able to help them build a hydroelectric plant or help with their banking system, as part of your mission.

I had extremely good fortune because perhaps with all my good intentions if I hadn't had the two directors I had from AID it wouldn't have worked as well as it did. In the first instance I had a wonderful man who had a very small staff. His wife also worked. We worked together just perfectly and accomplished, I think, a great deal. Well, testimony to what happened later, we did accomplish a great deal. He had been there three or four years and was reassigned. Someone new came out. I thought, oh, I have lost this wonderful man and it will never be quite the same. And along came an equally wonderful man. So I was very lucky on that. We worked just as well together as the first one and I had worked.

AID was so pleased in Washington that they decided to make Madagascar a real showcase. The consequence of that was that just before I was leaving AID started to build it up to enormous (relatively speaking) proportions. I disagreed with that because I think it works better in a smaller country on a smaller scale. The first thing you know you have logistical problems, two administrative officers competing for housing space in the same city. I understand that problems have arisen because of the large staff.

*Q: Small countries can't take it. We tend to come in and take over.*

LYNCH: I am giving you my frank opinion. On a platform I would support AID to the hilt because I believe very strongly in what they are doing and I think they have very good people. But as in all instances, the bureaucracy is apt to...the tail wags the dog. I think that can happen when things build up too much.

Now in my Embassy, when I arrived we had too small a staff and we doubled it while I was there, but only because that was the way State wanted it, and they understood our needs. We needed a political officer very badly and didn't have one. A good one came in. We needed a good economic officer. The staff was built up to be a very fine one. It isn't the most important place in the world, but for its size of 12 million people, and its strategic spot off the east coast of Africa and with the straits running by and with possible troubles in South Africa and perhaps tankers having to come up our way, it is important to have it do well.

Also there was a very strong Soviet influence there and I think that is one of the main reasons we wanted it to be a good working embassy.

It is a wonderful job.

*Q: When you went out what were your implicit or explicit instructions? What were American interests in Madagascar?*

LYNCH: Economic interests were almost at a standstill because it was a Marxist oriented government. Everything had been nationalized. American firms had had to pull out. AMOCO, the oil company, was there, but that was the only big enterprise at that point. One of the things that I interpreted I was to do was to lay the groundwork for future investment. We did a great deal of that. We tried to interest people in this country, I

talked endlessly to the President of Madagascar about a new investment code. He said that he had one and why did he need another one. I said, "You need a new one because the one you have isn't good enough. You are not going to attract people until you give them some profit. You can't keep the 51%." He would say that I sounded like the French. The French and the Americans and the Soviet were the big influences there.

So I did a great deal with the President trying to improve the investment code and improve his attitude towards the United States which was not very good when I went out. I had very good relations with the President. I admired him for his intelligence..."admire," he is still alive. The other President, the one in the Comoros, was assassinated right after I left. President Ratsiraka, in Madagascar, was attracted, in his youth, to the communist system, having gone to university in Paris. He went into the French navy and became a captain. He promoted himself to admiral after he became President. This is a man of great intelligence. I was always sorry that he wasn't more oriented towards us. I think one of my chief jobs was to orient him more in our direction. During my tour, conditions were good with him and the ministers, I think they were improved. So I felt good about that. You can't make massive changes but I had helped a little bit for the future.

*Q: What was the political situation when you arrived? Was it a one party situation?*

LYNCH: Pretty much a one party system. The President starting loosening up to where he said he wanted it to be a democracy. You see, our strength started to become obvious in those years...I must say that President Reagan could never have enough credit for building up the defense because I think, taking just Madagascar, the President of Madagascar after Vietnam had written us off as weak. The Soviets were the people he should hitch his wagon to because he felt the Soviets were stronger. He had his limited military equipment from them. As we became stronger he had more respect for us. So I went in at a good time to help further relations because I had the backing of this superpower that he was beginning to have more respect for than he had had in the past, even though he still ranted and raved about what the United States had done to him.

The day I presented my credentials he went on and on, not on the television part, about all these awful things that America had done to him.

*Q: What had we done?*

LYNCH: We had corrupted his students, we had done things with our ships that we shouldn't have done, just all kinds of things. I knew what some of the basis of his charges were, they were not good charges at all. This was in front of his staff and a couple of my staff. After that, I always met with him face to face with no interpreter, no staff, because that was the way the relationship could build the best. I liked him. I didn't agree with him and I told him and this was really the foundation of our relationship.

Early on I said that I would start with a new beginning and I knew all these things he was feeling strongly about. I said that I would start with a clean slate and we would start from

here. I said that I wouldn't always agree with him, but I would respect his view. He liked that attitude. He was a very strong man with a big ego. He liked that I would speak up.

I remember that someone told me in the Department before I left that this man was probably going to be very condescending to me because I was a woman. That wasn't the case at all. I always felt he treated me exactly the same as he would have treated a male ambassador.

A little anecdote, what I did for my country. He smoked long Cuban cigars and I am allergic to cigarette smoke much less the cigar smoke. The purer our air becomes the more allergic I am. I sat on one side of his desk and the cigar smoke would come pouring out. My anecdote is that one day he stopped to answer the phone. He put his cigar in the ashtray and it all came right at me and I started to sneeze. I sneezed all the way through his phone call. I managed to pull out of the sneezing session when he returned and picked up his cigar. The next time I went to his office he said, "How are you? When you were here last time you had a terrible cold."

A couple of years later a government official came for the inauguration. A man this time from the Department, a deputy assistant secretary, and he said to me, "Oh, I was so worried because I didn't think I could get through my speech because I am so allergic to tobacco and he pulled out a cigar and I thought I was going to sneeze." So it wasn't just a female thing!

We had a program called Food for Progress and it was wonderful. The Ambassador just before me had laid the groundwork.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador just before you?*

LYNCH: Robert Keating. Life is such that one Ambassador sets up something and the next one takes the credit for it. I like to say I really received credit for our big import of rice coming in. It all went well and it really started the economy on a new turn. But it is because the Ambassador just before me had really organized the program, had set it up and had it all ready to roll, and I came in and made it roll. I hope the efforts I made helped the next Ambassador who came in. That is the way it goes in the Foreign Service, as you know. One sets it up and the next one gets the credit. But that is all right because it passes on and all turns out even in the end.

The economy was in terrible shape in Madagascar. The farmer wouldn't grow rice because he wouldn't make any money. People couldn't buy because the price of rice was too high. We brought in rice to go into government silos. The black market was buying up all the rice and would release it around Christmas time. We brought in tons of rice and the government had to keep it until Christmas time and then release it and sell it at a price that we set with the World Bank. Then the black market was left holding its silos with their rice. This worked because suddenly the people had enough rice when what we had brought in was being released. The farmer by the time I left was starting to grow more rice because he was getting a better price for it in the marketplace. It was the old wheel

starting to turn, but ever so gently. It never really took off. But there were many more goods in the stores than when I had arrived. It was starting.

And now the tragedy of Africa and of small countries is that there have been riots, not a coup, because the President still is in partial power...he is in his Palace with 2,000 guards and the rest of the government has been taken over by opposing sides. There is a new Prime Minister and all Cabinet members are new. The President is ruling with the new people but everything is at a standstill. All the investment that the Ambassador who had followed me had very carefully set up...he was going to have people come over from the Overseas Investment Corporation...all had to be canceled because of a strike. The strike has been going on from this point for more than six months. But things are starting to roll again. The mails are starting to work better. The planes are starting to fly better internally.

I am always hopeful that there will be a great turn around because you have very intelligent people, the Malagasy are extremely intelligent. They are industrious. They have vanilla and coffee and minerals. The markets are low now, but they have the wherewithal and they have skills. This country can be very successful.

*Q: They are basically of Malaysian stock aren't they?*

LYNCH: Yes they are. They are more Asian than African.

*Q: What is their orientation? Do they look towards Africa?*

LYNCH: Not really. It is amazing. I didn't know until I arrived there how little they looked toward Africa. They don't consider themselves African. Now they do send people to conferences there. The President had hopes of being very important in the Organization of African States, but he didn't make president of it. There were no ambassadors there from African countries when I first arrived, although there were 20 or so embassies from Eastern Europe, Iran, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, etc. It was rather a large diplomatic community because they all figured it was a rather important place to send someone. But Africa, no.

The people are very Asian in their thinking and looks. Their rice paddies reminded me of Nepal when I first arrived, with all the terraces. The look of the country is very much like Nepal. These are wonderful people. Really lovely. Very passive people, but they can be aroused and then can be angry, in fights between themselves, cut off heads if necessary.

*Q: The old Malaya business.*

LYNCH: That's right. But basically they will absorb a great deal of hardship without complaining. The FSNs were fine people to work with and outstanding. We had a great many of them and without them an embassy couldn't run.

*Q: We were competing with the Soviets there. This was sort of at the end of Soviet influence overseas, things starting collapsing around 1989.*

LYNCH: Yes, that is right. Let's even take it to late 1988. When was the first summit here in Washington? I believe that was December 7, 1988, if I remember properly. Among the many things that an ambassador does, one reason it makes it such an interesting job is that you are operating on so many different levels all the time. You have the political level which is all important. You have running the Embassy. You have your relationships with the different agencies. And then you have the entertaining. I did a great deal of that also. I had a beautiful residence and an outstanding household staff. I did a great deal of entertaining, always with the Malagasy. And also I liked to have the Embassy people there. Then I would integrate the Embassy people with the Malagasy.

Then I was interested in the wildlife there...the preservation there...because the burning of the forests and the danger of the lemur, a unique animal, becoming extinct. I always had World Wildlife people come to dinner when they were visiting from the United States, or from anywhere. I would have people from the Ministry of Scientific Affairs come...not just ministries, but many people from the university.

I worked very closely with the university. My next door neighbor was the President...not in the beginning, he was the head of the law school. He became one of my closest friends in Madagascar. The university, of course, politically, was very important, because that is where your riots start. The marching students brought down the government in 1975 and when I was there we had a couple of very bad times when it looked as if the government might be overthrown. My concern was for the Embassy personnel. The students were not against the United States. As a matter of fact, the Malagasy are very much oriented towards the U.S. They love us. They are French, culturally.

In my entertaining, I would sometimes include the Soviet Ambassador, and he would come if it were a special dinner, for example. He would bring his interpreter. He had a great many KGB in his embassy as Madagascar was a very important place for the Soviets because of its location...in the Indian Ocean, etc. He would come with his interpreter and I would talk with him, wherever we were. I would talk to his interpreter in French and he would interpret to the ambassador in Russian. We became rather adept at it. I always asked him if he would bring one particular interpreter who spoke beautiful French rather than with a heavy Russian accent, because I could then understand better. Never was I invited back. This is an important point to show you the changing times. But always he was very friendly and we would talk and I would go to the Soviet Embassy to sign the book if there was an earthquake, any kind of national day, etc.

But at the time of the first summit between the President and Gorbachev I invited the Soviet Ambassador ...this was not something Washington said to do, but I thought this was a good time to have the ambassador, with his wife, come to the Embassy the morning of December 7. I had a bottle of champagne and some cakes and I had my DCM sit in...she was also a very good political officer (as was the designated political officer). He brought his political officer. I also had my husband there because I thought it would be



good to have the two spouses there. (As it turned out, his wife did not come.) We had a nice talk. It wasn't anything revolutionary but it was just a gesture I wanted to make because I could see the rapport in Washington coming. It went very well. We toasted the two Presidents.

That same week, the day the summit was to be over here, he invited me to come to his residence in the compound. Of course they were all living in a compound. It was the first time, according to the other ambassadors, that a Western ambassador had even gone into the compound. So that was a step.

Then we had a pianist...in the Arts in the Embassy program of sending over an artistic ambassador type...coming and there was only one good piano and that was in our residence. I was going to have the political people come to the house for a special recital but also we wanted to give one for the overall international and government structure. It was a revolutionary idea, but my USIA man, the PAO, suggested to me..."Do you think it would be possible for us to ask the Soviets and possibly use their piano and cultural center?" I thought this was a wonderful idea. Their cultural center had an interesting location, it looked out right on top of our Embassy and we know there were many unusual things going on there besides cultural events. But I did ask and they said, "Yes."

We gave a joint affair with our pianist and their piano and cultural center. I had the invitations made up with the crest of the US Embassy and the crest of the Soviet Embassy on it. They went out and people said they thought they would never live to see the day. The Minister of Cultural Affairs, who was a very pronounced communist, a woman...I always got on well with her but I told her I didn't agree with her at all in her ideology, but I was glad to see a woman in high places. She said no American Ambassador had ever called on her before. She came to this event. From then on everything changed. She allowed us to use her library for exhibits, which she never had before. It changed the whole situation.

*Q: Did you find a weakening in the zeal of the French-inspired far left socialism as they started looking at the Soviet Union?*

LYNCH: Well, it was, but it was slow and subtle. The Soviet Ambassador after our cultural affairs and our visits back and forth between residences...the next thing was that he invited everyone for a sports day within the compound. This was truly revolutionary. Then I had everybody for an American, western picnic at the residence. It started to rain during the picnic and I remember inviting everyone inside. The men, many of whom were obviously KGB, were astonished that we would let them in our house. They just couldn't get over it. The Soviets were much friendlier towards us but they did not lessen their subversive activity. I don't want it to seem as if it did, and I am afraid sometimes people think all the danger disappeared, because it didn't. It was good for us, though, to get to know them better.

But I must say that they used some of the contacts that we made in a way that we had to be very wary of...because we were visiting back and forth and because relations were

better they were able to meet some of our FSNs more easily and that is always dangerous ground. We were very much aware and alert to that fact. And it was fascinating. The friendship forming on the top, but the old ways continuing on the bottom.

*Q: Still playing some of the games.*

LYNCH: Even now.

Q: Did you see the weakening in the ideology of the Malagasy?

LYNCH: Yes, I think disillusionment would be the word. The spare parts not working. I left in September 1989 and the big fall didn't come until November/December 1989. When the Wall came down and the Romanian revolution in December 1989. This is when President Ratsiraka, again being an extremely intelligent man, had to reassess things a little bit. He must have taken a good look. I think he knows that things have changed. I think the people in the country do and they want very much to have a free enterprise. They were pushing hard for it when I was there. The President was going along with it. I must say that President Ratsiraka was good about going along with the World Bank, the IMF, and with our plans. That was important and why we supported him in election time of the spring of 1989. He was making the effort. The problem was that he was not making it fast enough for the people in his country who wanted private enterprise, wanted to get the wheel turning, wanted to get food on the streets for the poor, faster. I think for him it was difficult and he was dragging his feet, but he was doing it, but not fast enough for his own country's satisfaction.

*Q: What about your USIA operations? Were these going along fairly well?*

LYNCH: Very well. I had good people from USIA, two people. A junior officer. We had an acting PAO because I had taken away the chief one, Marilyn Hulbert, and made her my DCM, and we could never get another one out there. They were always due to come and something would happen. We did have two splendid acting ones. One had to move on to Morocco and the new one who came was young, but outstanding. So I was very fortunate on that. They had good press relations. The press by the time I had arrived had opened up. Not that they didn't have misinformation columns. The most difficult part, and I think this is true in other countries that had their Marxist orientation...the radio was where you would get your anti-West propaganda. Television was not so bad, but radio which was always in Malagasy rather than French was where you would get your vitriolic talk about Libya, Iran and things that were anti-West. We would try whatever we could to set the misinformation straight. Things were going pretty well. We had to go pick up the press for things we wanted them to cover because their transportation just wasn't there. They would say, "Yes, we want to come," and we would go pick them up.

*Q: But it wasn't the situation you find in some countries where you almost have to pay to get your stories into the press?*

LYNCH: No. I think through the years we had been building and when the President started to ease up on us the press did too. They liked the people we brought in from USIA, visiting scholars, arts, etc. We would get excellent press, wonderful reviews when we would have speakers come.

*Q: What was your impression of the African Bureau in Washington, the Department of State, as far as support, etc.?*

LYNCH: Well, they were the best. That was my impression and I heard this from everybody in Africa. I have heard that it is better than any other Bureau for support. We are so far out there, so removed. Even when budget problems were pressing, if we presented our case properly, we would get help. If we really needed something we would get it from the African Bureau. I felt in close contact. Good desk officers. Just outstanding support. When I would come back for briefings and debriefings, the African Bureau was right there solidly behind me. There was never any feeling that I was political and they were regular. There was just tremendous rapport. I was always relieved that they would say that they heard I was doing very well...they would hear that from the Madagascar Ambassador here and others. That was encouraging to me because I would come home and they would tell me I was making relations better out there, etc. I tell you that because I am so pleased that a political ambassador can be treated and regarded as well as a Foreign Service officer. There is something to be said for the infusion.

*Q: I think any thinking Foreign Service officer feels that way. It does bring in good solid new blood. When somebody comes in with no qualifications and no interests, these are the horror stories.*

LYNCH: For the most part that is not the case. Certainly a non-political officer can stick his or her neck out a little more because you are not quite as confined to the bureaucratic channel, if you are not unreasonable about it. I think that is important too, that you can make changes that need doing and then you can sell them to the Department and tell them why...back it up with facts. Maybe you can do some things that you might not be able to do as a Foreign Service officer.

*Q: The Foreign Service is basically a practical bunch and if your ambassador arrives and has clout, it really doesn't matter where they come from. The clout is the important element.*

*Summing up this period as Ambassador, I wonder if you could tell us what gave you the greatest satisfaction and what were some of the greatest disappointments?*

LYNCH: You remind me of a question that I was asked by Mike Armacost, somebody I knew and admired so much. He was Under Secretary for Political Affairs when I first went out. I saw him on my first trip back and we were talking in his office. He said, "Pat, how do you like it?" I said, "Oh, I love it. It just couldn't be a better job, more interesting place. I am so glad I am there." He said, "I knew you would. What is the most interesting part of it?" I said, "I think it is the diversity. There is so much on so many different levels.

You are working with the people in the Embassy; you are working with people back in Washington; you are working with the Malagasy; you are working with the government, which is such a high priority. Everyday is different and a challenge."

There were, of course, crises, but I don't mind them, I get very calm in a crisis. I seem to do things almost on automatic pilot during such periods. So it was the diversity. I like the challenge. To be truly happy you need to be challenged to live up to your greatest potential. That is really happiness in a job or in life when you can be taxed at every level of your potential and that certainly is what comes with the job in an interesting country.

*Q: Was there anything that you wished you could have done but just couldn't get done there?*

LYNCH: Oh, yes. I wish I could have done it before so that the second time I would know everything to start with. But you don't, you certainly have to learn, at least the first year, on the job no matter how much you have studied. I did a lot of studying. The second year you know what you are doing and you can be effective. The third year you are really geared up for it. I think three years is probably right because you are working at top speed at high tension whether one is conscious of it or not. If I had it to do again I would know so many things. It would have been easier. I don't think I would have done it differently, it just would have been easier.

**HOWARD K. WALKER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Madagascar (1989-1992)**

*Ambassador Harold K. Walker was born in Virginia in 1935. He attended the University of Michigan and later Boston University to earn a PhD before serving in the US Air Force. After briefly serving with the CIA, Walker joined the Foreign Service and served overseas in Zaire, Nigeria, Jordan, Tanzania, South Africa and as ambassador to Madagascar and Togo. Ambassador Walker also worked in the Inspection Corps and as vice president of the National Defense University. Walker was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

WALKER: I might say something here about my departure for Madagascar, which is an interesting little vignette on President Bush (the elder). Normally ambassadors get invited over to the White House to have a photo opportunity with the President before they go out. That is a useful thing. That photograph in your office at the embassy gives the impression of what good personal relations you have with the President, and you like to have your host country officials and other nationals see that. President Bush did that, but he did something else. He did something different. He invited over about six of us newly

outgoing ambassadors to the White House not for a photo opportunity in the Oval Office - we had that at another occasion separately - but invited us up to the private quarters upstairs in a very personal way. That was a really splendid touch. We got some photos out of that, not only the photos in the private quarters with the President and the First Lady and that was very useful in representation, but it was something to our ego, but you had a sense of this being a President you're proud to represent, he had that touch. It made me proud to represent this President not only because he had that kind of personal touch, which encouraged you to have that kind of personal touch with your own people, but also because he invited each of us out onto the veranda upstairs overlooking the South Lawn for our five minute private chat. I was just amazed at how much this man knew about Madagascar. We talked about it. He said he remembered when he was over visiting President Mitterrand in Paris at some sort of occasion and some of the chiefs of state of Francophone countries came. Mitterrand said, "I want to introduce you to Ratsiraka of Madagascar" and he told him something about his ideological movement from left to center. I was very impressed by what President Bush knew without a 3x5 card on these matters.

Anyhow, I finished my briefings in Washington and went off to Madagascar. Our son and daughter, Greg and Wendy, were at university by this time. I'm terribly proud of my children and my wife for how they were able to be very creative in the use of their time in some of these hardship posts we were in. I said at my retirement ceremony that I hoped I could be as creative with the use of my spare time in retirement as my wife had been throughout our career. But the children in these posts had to adapt to a different culture and education system and so on. They were with us through our postings in Jordan. When we were leaving Jordan to go to Tanzania, it was the first place we had been where there wasn't adequate schooling for one of my children, my son. He would have to go off to boarding school. That was much more difficult for my wife and for me, it turned out, than it was for him. But I'm very proud of his adjustment as the first in the family to go away to boarding school.

*Q: Where did he go?*

WALKER: He went off to Northfield - Mount Herman in Massachusetts. We took him up there. We fortunately were back to do that. It was a heartwrenching moment for all of us, leaving there. In terms of education, he was always a very bright guy, but we found that the education that he had received in math and science in Jordan, where he got all As, did not stand him in that good a stead. So, he had to really do some buckling down. He was all alone at that time. That was a very difficult time. But his character came through. He didn't get all As and Bs during that time and that was a difficult adjustment. Part of what helped for him and for our daughter's decision to go off to boarding school the next year was when Greg came out at Christmas to visit us in Dar Es Salaam. He came out through London and was bumped from the flight from London to Dar Es Salaam. I was furious. I told British Airways, "Go find my son!" They found him and did very well by him. They put him up at a first-rate hotel in Piccadilly Circus and brought him out the next day and gave him 100 pounds to spend, which he used to buy a new bike. So that did it for our daughter, Wendy, "I'm going to boarding school. I want to get

bumped and get a bike.” But, she had a difficult time in Tanzania that year on her own, going to the American School. The following year she went off to boarding school. She went to the same place.

Back to Madagascar. We left them here in school and went out to Antananarivo. The drive in from the airport shocked my wife, the poverty there. I had the benefit of briefings and we had been in poor places. We had been in Lagos, Lome, and Dar Es Salaam. But she was rather shocked by the poverty we saw there. But we got to the residence, which was quite nice. I immediately got very busy at the embassy. There was a lot to do, and it was very interesting to me and soon became interesting to my wife as well. Madagascar is an interesting place. All of the places we’ve served are interesting. But the people are the most interesting. I found out that there are more members of the French Academy from Madagascar than any other place in France d’Outre Mer. They are a very clever and talented people in literature, the sciences, music, dance... Madagascar was France’s jewel in the Indian Ocean before independence. I’m told that into the ‘50s, the fashions that came out in Paris were in the boutiques of Antananarivo within two weeks. I found the work very interesting. What were our interests? Like in most places in the Africa Bureau, not frontburner, but we had some things of interest professionally there.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

WALKER: I was there from mid-’89 to ‘92. The interests were... The Soviets at that time, believe it or not, still were trying to use that as a listening post against us. They had some high intelligence collection on us there. Someone must have missed a promotion in the Soviet Union because there was nothing really that interesting to get there. But also because of some interests we were developing in the Southwest Indian Ocean and in Southern African places. For us, there was also a test case of whether or not we could turn around a leader like Ratsiraka, who had been a strong socialist in development policy and leftist in foreign policy, and whether one could change that not only for the benefit of Madagascar but as another model for other countries in similar situations. It was interesting for me to try to do that with Ratsiraka in establishing a personal relationship with him. That was a fascinating relationship. He is a very smart guy. He graduated first in his class at the French naval academy, an achievement for which I think the French have never forgiven him. He is very smart, very bright, intellectually agile, articulate, and appreciated a chance to have a give and take and a banter on a one on one basis with the American Ambassador or anyone else in discussing not only questions of bilateral relations but supply side economics. This guy had read Milton Friedman. Our economic discussions were about Madagascar’s compliance with some of the conditionalities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and some of the economic reforms that we were encouraging for Madagascar’s economic growth... So, I found that a very interesting part of my assignment there.

*Q: What was Ratsiraka’s hold on power? How did he gain power and how did he run the country?*

WALKER: He gained power a decade or so earlier in an election. He was a nationalist

and a leftist nationalist replacing an establishment, French-friendly regime. He then came back and won an election again on that basis. His basis of power was not the military. It was not a power dictatorship during my period of time - as was the case in Togo, for example, by contrast. But it was a well-developed political organization, which was based on a number of things - one, its organization, but also because it had developed support among people in the coastal areas. As different from many other places in Africa as Madagascar is in many ways, it still shares with it, as it does with a number of societies around the world, a fragmented group consciousness. In Madagascar, that's not so much tribal as it is highland versus lowland coastal areas, which corresponds with some ethnic differences. The Merne, people in the highland area who came initially from Indonesia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, have somewhat intermarried with the coastal people, who are a mixture of Africans and Arabs and Greeks and Persians and the rest. So, he held that kind of power. During my stay, towards the end, some opposition grew based on a number of things - part of it, these group differences; part of it, criticism of the ineffectiveness of the socialist economic policies of the Ratsiraka government, which were beginning to change toward a market economy, but not fast enough - they weren't effective. The opposition, in addition to having this group appeal to highlanders, although some opposition leaders were from the coast, developed into a popular movement called the Force Vivre: the popular movement of people who were a combination of some intellectuals and middle class, but also some very poor people, opposing the ineffectiveness of the economic policies of this very poor country. It combined with the other things you find in the political mix of the politics in any country, and combined with the group politics that I mentioned earlier, but also the personal ambitions of some people who had once known power and now were out and wanted back in - some of the people who were opposing Ratsiraka 10-15 years ago and lost. Curiously enough, some of that same mix earlier this year in the disturbances that one read about in Madagascar. Let me say that Ratsiraka's power was not based on military force but force was applied at some loss of life and injury during this Force Vivre conflict. When the Force Vivre assembled a huge number of people in demonstrations and they marched on the president's compound, they began to charge the compound, and some people were killed. There are mixed indications of whether or not it was at his order. He certainly directed that they protect the safety of his officials, himself included. There is one report that he may have said, "Fire at their legs." But in any event, some people were killed.

*Q: Were there any particular issues when you went out there or while you were there that you dealt with? Did the Gulf War change the relationship?*

WALKER: Those are some interesting stories. The Gulf War... We, like every American embassy around the world, had to explain our position to the government and seek its support, and we did that with some measure of success. We had a number of successes in that regard. One of the things we did a little later in the Gulf War when the refugees in the north of Iraq were having some real problems with fleeing the Saddam forces and with surviving - this was during the winter - I suggested to Ratsiraka, "You make good blankets here. Why don't you offer blankets to these people and make a statement of some kind that their human rights conditions should be respected." He did that. But there were some other aspects of the Gulf War. For example, our personal security concerns

increased. I was a target, we knew from intelligence sources. I was very impressed that the Department sent out a special team to help us enhance our security and our evacuation, including the equivalent of a swat team to know where the evacuation helicopter would land and where to position sharpshooters in the trees of the residence gardens, to instruct my driver on evasive measures. I began to take certain evasion procedures there. So I was very impressed with the support in those kinds of matters. Not overbearing.

Let me mention something else in regard to Washington's support for security matters. During this period that I was discussing a moment ago when things heated up between the Ratsiraka's government and the Force Vive opposition, there were demonstrations in the town, there was conflict between the opposition and the government, it was building up towards more of a physical confrontation to the point where Washington had us consider evacuation. It reached a point where we had various stages of evacuation, where it was voluntary for dependents... I never had to order any people to leave, but those who did leave, we had to tell them they couldn't come back until a certain time. That then brought up all the kinds of problems an embassy runs into of how do you run on less than full staff when people are evacuated? How do you maintain the morale of those who are still there without dependents, not so say one's own? Then meeting with the American community. I had to meet after with the expatriate American community - there were missionaries, not many businesspeople - give them briefings on development, set up an evacuation mechanism, radio communications. We got very good support from the Department and from neighboring embassies when we thought that we might have a big influx of people coming in to help with the possibility of a large-scale evacuation. There is no way out of that island other than by sea or air. So, we had offers from our counterparts at our American embassy in Mauritius and in South Africa to send over some consular help to do that. I was very impressed by that kind of cooperation. We liaised very closely with the French in terms of arranging - because they had a much larger expatriate community than we did - if we had to evacuate by air, how we would do it. We liaised with CINCPAC, the American commander in chief in the Pacific, whose area of responsibility went as far west as Madagascar. So that was an interesting process to participate in.

*Q: How did you find the political structure in Madagascar? Did you go to the president? Were you able to monitor the political temperature?*

WALKER: Yes, we were. It's always important in a country where one person is so powerful for the ambassador to have good access to that person. The double edge of that sword is not to do so in a way that you close off access to opposition. I think we pulled that off not only in my own contacts but the contacts of other people in the embassy elsewhere within the government, with opposition figures, or among students, the media, and intellectuals at the university... We did that fairly well. At my own level, part of the trick was to try to pick who the next leadership would be. We happened to pick right, the person who was the mayor of Antananarivo, at the time with whom I had developed a personal relationship. He would come to my residence for drinks and we would chat. Not only the mayor, but other people as well. As it happened, people within Ratsiraka's



own inner circle who I felt could give him some sensible advice on how to deal not only with the economy but with the changing political situation, I had very good relations with them. One guy in particular had been the minister of finance at one time who had become a major figure in the ruling political party. But I referred earlier to my relationship with the mayor of Antananarivo. An interesting thing happened with regard to that. Both my relationship with him and my relationship with Ratsiraka, with whom I was over two years having these personal meetings and actually graduate seminars in economics and political science - and it wasn't a one way conversation; it was one that we both enjoyed. I developed that kind of personal relationship, and I like to think, respect on his part, so that during political crisis when we would talk, one of the points I was getting across is, "You really should preempt the criticism of the resulting change, acknowledging that you made some mistakes as a socialist, and you won't be alone because all the world is acknowledging that - the Russians, the Europeans, everyone else is acknowledging that you have to look more to market economics and open societies that go with that. You want to lead that movement instead of be dragged along by it." We got some mileage in that. He asked me one day, "Who would you suggest as my prime minister?" The president asking the American ambassador that. For reasons that I thought were very good for Madagascar, not to say the United States, I suggested the mayor of Antananarivo. He was appointed. So I had good access not only to the president but with the mayor, which paid off later when he became Prime Minister. When the mayor was, as now, prime minister, was organizing his cabinet, he called me over there to see him. As I was waiting outside in my car, up pulled a Malagasy whom I had known as an intellectual and head of their intellectual organization that spanned science, literature, and everything else.

*Q: Like the Academy.*

WALKER: That's right. So we were both waiting to go in. We said, "Why don't we sit in the car together and chat?" I said, "I bet you've been called to be foreign minister." He said, "Oh, no, I wouldn't get that." Sure enough, the next day, he was appointed foreign minister, which helped my access to the new foreign minister as well. It was about a week or so later. I had gone in to see the new prime minister on an issue that I was asked by Washington to see him on. That had to do with a vote that was coming up in the UN in which we were trying to get the UN to reverse its resolution of a decade or so before branding Zionism as a form of racism. Our point was that, aside from the merits of that case, it certainly didn't help negotiating the peace process in the Middle East. I explained this to the prime minister. I was leaving his office. I was in my car. He came running out and said, "Ambassador, come back. I want to see you again." He was meeting with his new foreign service team - this new foreign minister and the equivalent of his NSC chairman and so on. He said, "We are discussing this issue of what position we should take on this UN Resolution. I would like you to speak to them as you spoke to me on this issue." I did. They debated among themselves for a while. I made my case and just sat there and listened. It was an unbelievable experience. You often would like to be a fly on the wall when things like that are happening. Here I was sitting and listening to this government's inner cabinet make its decision and was given a chance to put an oar in the water. As it turned out, they reversed Madagascar's earlier position and voted as we

wanted, against the old resolution. Madagascar was one of the supporters of the resolution earlier branding Zionism as racism and they voted against it. It was another case where contacts pay off. I do a course now that I am retired at a number of universities on diplomacy. One of the points we look at is, are embassies any longer necessary in this day of rapid communication and transportation? One of the points I make is that the day to day contacts build up not only an ability to better assess the situation but also to represent your government's position. Those were some of the highlights of my time in Madagascar. There are some others we could talk about.

One was this curious personality of Ratsiraka. He was a very bright guy. In my own experience, he was among the top three intellectually with whom I dealt. The first was Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. During my period as charge there, I got to have similar kinds of conversations with him. He had a first-class mind. The other was the foreign minister in South Africa, Pik Botha. There were a number of aspects to his personality. Don't we all? One of them was his showmanship - I began to understand when I learned that at university he had been drum major of the college band. But he also was a quick and sharp mind. But getting back to Ratsiraka, some of the conversations I had with him on economics, on social and political organization, on world affairs, he loved to talk about these things. He obviously was a man who felt that he was on a smaller stage than he was capable of. So we had interesting conversations on those broad issues. But sometimes he would go way off and get really quite flaky. I wondered what he was smoking. I had no indication that he really ever was. I just say that as a way of speech. We were talking once about the Middle East and he went into this long monologue about how the tribes of Israel centuries ago came down to Madagascar and he had researched this personally and found by tracing gemstones that he could trace how they had gone, how those ancient Israelis had gotten back to other places where the Israeli tribes were. I sat there and listened to that. I had nothing to add to it.

*Q: Something like the lost tent tribes of Israel?*

WALKER: Yes, and how they went to Madagascar and then over the litoral of the Indian Ocean and so on. I just sat there amazed and looked at him. Is this the guy with whom I have these rational discussions on Keynesian economics and so on? I couldn't explain it.

Let me mention another thing. I mentioned this to Secretary Eagleburger when I came back on my end of tour debriefing. Eagleburger at that time was Acting Secretary or still Deputy Secretary. But one of the problems I had as ambassador in Madagascar was, how do you deal with dissent within your own embassy on the question of human rights and how do you deal with people on a hobby horse on this issue back in the Department? The question of human rights for me came up when this Force Vivre dissidence was growing. My initial assessment to Washington was, "This growing opposition group is something we want to watch, but we don't have a big dog in that fight. We have some others here. Watch it for a number of reasons. There are things we should say and do to show that we are on the side of reform and human rights." Some of the things that I was doing privately along those lines with the president I couldn't talk about, we couldn't use that publicly, but we could do things like, for example, meet with members of the Force Vivre at an

appropriate level. This was generally at the level of my political officer, but eventually I met privately with the leader of this group. We decided to give them some computers for their offices. The president didn't like that, but we did it. But I had always to manage my political officer who was a junior officer - this was her first assignment abroad - and to encourage her to make these contacts but also to keep in mind the larger political picture in doing this and in her reporting, to send back to Washington accurately what the opposition was saying but to make some kind of evaluation of whether or not these were valid points or how widespread they were and so on. That was always a difficult thing I had to do. I could manage that within my own embassy. But the more difficult thing was the Madagascar desk officer in the Department of State who also - I don't think she had had but one or two foreign assignments - who was pushing us to do more and more on the human rights side and open criticism of government and support of this opposition in a way that I thought was unbalanced in terms of the full range of our interests there and in what was practicably doable in a constructive engagement way for bringing about change. I was never certain that I could get my desk officer supervisor, the country director, or his supervisor, the Deputy Assistant Secretary, to fully understand what this was. In fact, I became convinced I was unable to do it. The country director came out on his tour of a number of countries and came to Madagascar as well. I just had this vibe that this person came out there to find out why Walker wasn't getting the message in terms of prioritizing this human rights issue. I never felt that we had the same wavelength exchange on this, that the embassy and the country directorate and the desk had this. I was convinced of that when the country director came out. I was not convinced that this person had a balanced view, that it wasn't a preconceived view. In any event, we got him to meet all of the people, including opposition leaders, who he wanted to meet with one exception, which gets to a point of diplomatic conduct in places like Madagascar. This person wanted to see the president. My question was, why? It was a question that had a number of dimensions, not the least of which was the pride of the president. He is president. He is a very intelligent guy. He could well raise the question, "I can't even get my ambassador to see your Assistant Secretary. Why should you send a desk officer or a country director in to see the president?" This is something that you expect professional diplomats back in Washington to understand. Now, I understand that to the extent that Washington has an issue in Washington with human rights, that's one aspect of foreign policy and the constituency of foreign policy that must be accommodated, and people in the field, like myself, have to understand that. But at the same time, there are other aspects of foreign policy. If we want to get certain U.S. interests achieved or served, we've got to take them into account and to manage it. I was not convinced that I had a Foreign Service officer who came out to visit me as country director that lacked that professional balance and that professional judgement. My other bigger concern in this context was that there are so many ways in which an ambassador's access to and communication with and policy input at the sixth floor level and above - that is, the Assistant Secretary level and above - is limited bureaucratically and by people's time that I felt in this case my communication was being bottlenecked at the level of a desk officer because the higher levels have a bunch of higher items on their agenda than Madagascar. But on this issue of the balance between human rights and other U.S. interest concerns there, Washington was abdicating to this desk officer with very little field experience, not to say foreign policy experience, was abdicating the communication link with the

ambassador and the ambassador's proposals and views. I took this point up with Larry Eagleburger when I came back. He smiled and said, "Tell me about it" and acknowledged it's a problem. It is a problem. It's a problem that won't go away. But it's a problem that everyone's going to have to have and manage, but it's a problem that managers in the field and managers back in Washington need to spend more time talking to each other about and those of us in the field have to talk with Washington about this before we go out to understand that Washington has constituency concerns in foreign policy that may not always be front burner or as apparent in the field, whereas Washington has to understand that the field knows a little bit about the tactics of the conduct of an agreed foreign policy set of objectives, and when there develops a difference on those, an ambassador must be heard at an appropriate level and that level should not be particularly at a desk officer level. So, this is a problem of the coordination of foreign policy that our State Department is not alone in foreign ministries in having to grapple with.

*Q: So often, too, you have a generational thing - young people tend to be idealistic and singleminded. After a while, they learn the broader issues. In foreign policy, often if they get in or go running off and feel they're going to change the world.*

WALKER: That is certainly true. The other side of that is that experienced Foreign Service officers sometimes get crusty and lose a sense of idealism. But even worse is, officers in the field can miss what's going on back at home and that certain kinds of issues may have increased in importance since they were back there. Or the state of bureaucratic play back in the Department or Washington as a whole may be such that requires some kind of adjustment in increase in importance on what we are talking about now, these idealistic matters, and the field has to take into account those changes back in Washington. How do we do that? We do that by trips back home from time to time to learn about the country. But you count on your backup. The first line of backup is the desk officer. You have to have confidence in that desk officer. If you don't have confidence in that desk officer, you have to look to your country director to bring in that level and you have to have a country director who understands this from both ends of the telescope and comes to grips with it. You also need a Deputy Assistant Secretary and an Assistant Secretary to help make that happen. These matters of the coordination of policy have to be given more thought in the Department and in embassies or in chiefs of mission conferences of how to make this coordination work more smoothly.

*Q: In Madagascar, how did you find the French influence? I would imagine that you have the president looking to someone beyond the French and this must have set the French establishment off.*

WALKER: Yes and no. How did I find the French? I found them French - on the one hand, smug, at times arrogant, and at times brutal. I'll come back to that in a moment. Ratsiraka knew the extent to which the French were influential in that country. He also was a Francophone, though he speaks English well. Most of our conversations one on one were in English. He is brilliant in the use of language. But he also had his contacts. Like many people in Africa, he was very close to Jacques Chirac and others in France. How did I get on with the French? Personally well, but the French were smug in a sense of still

resenting that they were kicked out of that country, but still played a big role in terms of the levels of their aid and other kinds of assistance they did. Also, many of the Malagasy elite, even though some of them had some Anglo proclivities, all the way from their Protestantism to their language, saw that the British lost out in Madagascar or gave up, gave away, as they did, and that their own training had been in France. They were very Francophone themselves in not only their language but in some of their values and traits and behavior.

I said the French were smug, arrogant, and sometimes brutal. This came up in a particular conflict I had there on something I was pushing. That is, Madagascar was about to buy a new long distance aircraft for Air Madagascar. Would it be Boeing or Airbus? You know our position. We can't push any American product if there is an American competitor. We must give them both a chance. But if there's not, as in this case there wasn't, I decided one of my main responsibilities there was to get involved in this. I did it by not so much promoting Boeing myself but by providing occasion for Boeing to promote itself. How did I do this? The head of Air Madagascar's board of directors was the brother of the prime minister, who had been the mayor, who had been my good friend. I was able to arrange a private dinner in my residence one evening between the senior representative of Boeing, who came out from Paris, and this guy. It was just the three of us. Boeing was able to lay out its case to this person. It had a case not only in the merits of the aircraft but a number of other things in terms of servicing - I don't want to discuss what were the exact terms laid out-

*Q: Spare parts, the whole thing.*

WALKER: Parts, training, maybe Madagascar could have become a regional center for maintenance of Boeing aircraft, which were in a number of places around there. He talked about runway lengths and fuel consumption and a number of these things. But I provided occasion for him to make a very good case. What I did was also to make a very good case with the prime minister's new minister of transportation, who I had also cultivated out of power, not only on the tennis court but here is where other assets come out, cultivated through our wives and even children when they came out to visit. I presented Boeing's case there, what it had to offer. The Malagasy new government decided to buy Boeing. So much so that they put down a huge deposit for that aircraft. When the minister of transport told me that's what the decision was, that was one of the greatest cables I had ever written and we got kudos for that and all the rest of it. I must say, the story didn't end there. Not long after that, the minister of transport called me at home and said, "We've got a real problem." I went over to see him. I don't want to violate here confidentiality of those conversations, which I think may still be important to this minister there, but I learned that the French were putting on the pressure. In effect, and I won't say where I learned this, I learned it from reliable Malagasy contacts the French had threatened. I won't identify the contacts, and I'm not identifying the minister of transport in that case. Once they had learned about this back in Paris, where there were a number of interests in the sale of Airbus, some very personal and at a very high level. They, in effect, told the Malagasy authorities, "This is how much you get from us and how much the Americans give to you. This will be in jeopardy." I reported that. We had a

smoking gun. I must say, to Larry Eagleburger's credit, they called in the French ambassador, but not before the Department of Commerce or a high level at the Treasury insisted that we call the French on this. I feel that it was this other department that really pushed State into confronting the French. But in the end, Larry called this guy in and read him the riot act, at which time the French ambassador here in Washington complained about Walker out in Madagascar. One of the things I had done, I was coming back on either R&R or consultations about this time and it was my idea to give a press interview before I left. I cleared this with Washington first. I said, "And I'm going to give them the questions to ask me." The questions had to do with... I made a number of points. One, it's up to Madagascar to decide what their decision on aircraft purchase would be, but they want into take into consideration a number of things. One, the cost effectiveness of that decision to Air Madagascar because I knew that the director and the key officials in Air Madagascar wanted that Boeing for their own professional reasons. Madagascar would have to take into account which was the best aircraft for them in terms of the cost effectiveness for Air Madagascar. It would want to take into account on a larger canvas whether or not the government of Madagascar made its decisions on economic grounds or political grounds and if the latter, what that would mean to potential foreign investors and economic partners. Finally, I said, "Madagascar and the U.S. have very good relations. We're good friends in a number of ways, not only economically" and then I listed off not only our levels of foreign assistance but our contributions to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, our percentage of that contribution, and if you add to our bilateral aid that percentage of what Madagascar gets from those international financial institutions, we are way up there, a big contributor to Madagascar. They printed that in the press. Apparently, the French ambassador and Paris were furious at this. The French ambassador in Washington mentioned to Eagleburger, "How dare your ambassador go public on this kind of thing!" To Larry's credit, he said, "We're going to give Walker a commendation for that. He's doing exactly what he is supposed to do." He didn't tell the French ambassador that I had cleared this first with Washington and gotten its approval for it. So we had a difficult time with the French on this commercial deal, but we weren't the only ones. My namesake, Lannon Walker, had a problem with them in Senegal as well, dealing with what kind of wheat - American or French - they should use and import to make baguettes.

*Q: Was there the equivalent, as there is in Paris, of the intellectuals, the chattering class? Was this an influential group - not people in the government but the commentary?*

WALKER: No, it wasn't influential. Madagascar didn't have that developed a civil society. They had a media which was more or less open. While I was there, it grew more open both in the printed media and television media. They were interesting for me to talk to, but, when I was there, I wouldn't call them politically influential and not all that widespread. It was just that they were very interesting people to talk to, not just about political issues and economic issues, but literature, music, all kinds of things.

*Q: You were there during the dying days of the soviet Empire. Was that reflected in Madagascar?*

WALKER: In many ways. First of all, that contributed, as it did all over the world, to the president's turn away from his youthful socialism to more market economy and in his foreign policy towards the United States. Ratsiraka was a guy that was responsible for kicking our NASA space station out of Madagascar. He was the guy who was largely responsible for voting against us in the UN in a number of ways. One of the things I set out as an objective when I first went out to Madagascar - and people in the Department said, "You're crazy. Don't set yourself these kind of objectives that are unattainable - I decided I was going to get the Peace Corps into Madagascar and we did it. That's one of the achievements I'm proud of. It's a great success there now. But he had to approve the return of the Peace Corps, which was a big ideological step for him to take. The way we did that was interesting, all of the different levers we pulled on him, aside from my conversation with him, mapping out with his minister of secondary education and him, where they would go, what parts of the country Peace Corps volunteers would go to, there has to be something in it politically for everyone without being a captive of local politics, and other ways as well.

*Q: The soviets shut down their operations while you were there?*

WALKER: No, but they greatly decreased them. When I was there, the soviets were building the biggest diplomatic compound they would have in Africa - a huge, enormous place, elephantine, and put a lot of money into it. This was to be their listening post for southern Africa and their operations center for southern Africa. It was an enormous thing. The soviet ambassador, who I had good relations with - we played tennis every weekend - that was his grand achievement to get this. He got artworks from an "Art in the Embassy" equivalent program and every other thing. But they pulled the plug on him. They said, "We're not going to have this. Our resources aren't going there." So, they quickly were looking for what they were going to do with this place. There was even one rumor once that South African businesspeople who wanted to look at the Malagasy market would maybe rent some of this. but, no, the soviets went down very, very quickly.

*Q: Is there anything else we should talk about?*

WALKER: I can't think of anything. I left there in '92.

*Q: During the election period?*

WALKER: No, these disturbances were pretty much over.

*Q: I'm talking about our election period.*

WALKER: Yes. The elections were in November. I came back in August or September.

**SHIRLEY ELIZABETH BARNES**  
**Ambassador**

## **Madagascar (1998-2001)**

*Ambassador Barnes was born in Florida and raised in Florida and New York City. She was educated at City College of New York and at Columbia and Boston Universities. Before entering the Foreign Service in 1984, Ambassador Barnes worked with the Ford Foundation in Africa and was active in African American women's organizations and in the advertising business. In the Foreign Service she served in Strasbourg, Dakar, East Berlin and in the State Department in Washington. In 1998 she was appointed Ambassador to Madagascar, where she served until 2001. Ambassador Barnes was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

*Q: Well then, when you left there in '98 whither?*

BARNES: I have never found out who my godmother or father was but one day I was sitting in my office, deciding, you know I think I'm going to put in my retirement papers and someone called and said, "We'd like to put you on our list as our choice for Ambassador to Madagascar." And I said, "What?" I was really quite surprised. I had not even bid on another assignment. So I hadn't even turned in a bid list. So I said, "Can I call you back?" I didn't say, "Yeah go for it!" I was very overwhelmed by it. It took me almost ten days before I called them back. They said, "Oh wow, you called us back, we thought you weren't interested." I said, "Well I thought it over and I talked to friends and family about it." They said, "Well we were really shocked when you said, 'I'll call you back I'll think about it!'" So I don't know who was instrumental because I didn't ask for it. So I got this from the assignment as Director of Western European Affairs. I was nominated as the State Department's choice as Ambassador to Madagascar.

*Q: You were in Madagascar from when to when?*

BARNES: From August 30, 1998 until July 2001.

*Q: Did you have any problems getting confirmed?*

BARNES: None whatsoever. Except that it was just a long delay with everybody.

*Q: I don't imagine you working after bureau ... Madagascar is sort of really off to one side, isn't it? Had you ever had any dealings with Madagascar?*

BARNES: Well before I worked with the State Department I was at the African-American Institute, which is now called the Africa-American Institute. In AAI I worked in what was known as the Women's Africa Committee. But there was a group—they used to bring groups over on what they called "leadership training programs." These were women who were either leaders or potential leaders that were selected to come to the United States. They were programmed around the United States to meet with women leaders either through established organizations like the girl scouts. These women leaders, these African leaders were programmed. They would select a country every year



to bring these women leaders and we did have the Malagasy women came over as a group. So I had some idea or notion of, there was a Madagascar and where it was located and more or less what the people looked like and some historical background. But that was just put into the recesses of my memory. So literally I had to educate myself on where it was. I knew it was off of the coast of East Africa. But to really become oriented ... I now know as much about Madagascar I think, or more than most Malagasies do.

*Q: How did you read and learn your way in to the job?*

BARNES: Someone who had been the DCM there told ... we went to lunch and he told me that if you can get this book, get this book called A History of Madagascar by Sir Mervyn Brown. Sir Mervyn Brown had been the UK ambassador to Madagascar twice in his Foreign Service career. He knew the language and knew the people. He wrote one of the most authoritative, one of the best books I've ever—it's like a bible to me I still read it—and through reading that book I also started—through his references and what he read—I started picking up a lot of material.

When I was in Madagascar I also became very interested in the people, the culture, the tremendous schisms in their tribal groups and I got to know a lot about the history of Madagascar. For example, one of the first consul generals from the United States was an African American man. It's a tremendously interesting story of a man named John Waller. He was a Republican from Kansas that was very, very instrumental. I think Grover Cleveland was President and later sat there and said, "So what are you going to do for me now?" And so they said, oh man there's this black man, "well you're going to be the Consul General in Madagascar." And he went to Madagascar and when he went there he signed an agreement with the Queen of Madagascar, the last queen in fact, for property to bring African Americans over. We got all this land in Southern Madagascar. He was going to bring a whole colony of African Americans.

*Q: A little bit like Liberia or something.*

BARNES: Yes. So very few people know all of these kinds of historical facts about Madagascar and it's still a very, very unknown place. But so was Chad. Most of Africa, yes, to most people. [Laugh] Unless you're there and you develop a real interest. The French have archives and archives on Madagascar but most of us don't know about it. So I became self-educated.

*Q: Did we have a policy towards Madagascar going in there, is there anything that...*

BARNES: Well the prior policy had been literally based on the Cold War as it was for most of those African states. After that it just fell off the planet of the Earth as far as the United States is concerned in American foreign policy. Nobody cared about Madagascar. All they wanted is, don't make many waves, just get in there and get out of there. When we need you it will be for a vote. Sure enough that's what happened. Madagascar at one point had some significance in that they had a massive transmitting station there. So, on that sense it was important but again it was dismantled after the Cold War. Then it fell off

the chart again and it was completely operating under the radar screen. Nobody cared about it, leave it to the French and that was it. Some missionaries were there and that was the height of our interest. One of the significant things that happened to me and it shows how these micro-states do become important is when there's an important vote that comes up. This had to do with of course the Human Rights Commission in Geneva that comes up every year about Castro and condemning Cuba for his "blatant atrocities" or whatever they called it in terms of human rights. They have all now defined who's going to vote how and it's always then that the charm comes in with the Africans now to get their vote, or at least their abstentions. So we have to launch a whole campaign, demarche, etc., to get Madagascar to vote with the United States or to at least abstain and become a really full-frontal assault on all of the African countries to get them to vote. In Madagascar I went to the foreign minister, etc., the President wouldn't see me on that. He's an ex-socialist, Communist who's now a born-again whatever. I don't know at that point but Ratsiraka was president. So I talked to the foreign minister, etc., but I wrote a letter back, I wrote a cable that said, "Look, we demarched everybody. We don't know what Madagascar is going to do but we think they may just abstain and that is the best we can ask. We don't see them voting for us." Oh no, I did see the President. The President told me in no certain terms. It was, "If you want me to vote," because he got a call from Al Larson, for example, that was how low it was.

*Q: Al Larson is...*

BARNES: Al Larson was the econ Poobah at the State Department. But he was always the econ stream. At that point he was Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs and they had him call this guy who was the President of Madagascar and ask him to vote for us. The President of Madagascar said, "I'm not taking a call from him. Who's he? You want me to consider our country voting, I want a call from George Bush." So I throw back and said the President says he wants to talk to the President of the United States. Somebody at the White House picked it up because all of our cables would stream through there.

So they said, somebody must have picked it up over at the White House. As I said, all our cables ... they get it. So somebody, because it certainly wasn't ... the State Department wasn't going that way at all. Somebody called and said, "Hey we got a call from the White House and they said, arrange a call for 9:30 the President of the United States wants to talk to Ratsiraka, 9:30." We said, "What?" So sure enough, the President of the United States and Ratsiraka talked. Ratsiraka the next day, said "okay." And he wrote the letter saying now he supports the United States, not only was he not going to abstain but he was going to vote with us. That was because, and then I said, well I'd like to get something in writing. And sure enough I was in the President's office and I had to go back because he lives ... the traffic was so bad, it gets two hours to get out to where he lives in this palace which was sealed off from the rest of the population; that was how unpopular he was. That was back and forth and got a letter that he signed because when I called his foreign ministry, she didn't know anything about it. When I called our offices in Geneva, George Moose, I said, "George, they said okay, they'll vote with us." He said, "Why?" I said, "Okay, I'm going to get it in writing." I had to go back up there two hour trip through the traffic because I called and asked would you have the President of

Madagascar sign ... “this is what we’re going to vote” because his foreign minister hasn’t been informed. So I got a letter and said, “Look George.” He said, “I need something.” I said, “I’m faxing it to the State Department. You guys can take it over from here.” Through our State Department here is a faxed letter from Ratsiraka, instructing his people ... because George Moose, they were just about to vote and was like, a half hour or 20 minutes away from the vote in Geneva.

So apparently their foreign minister hadn’t informed their ambassador there to vote with the United States. I got the letter. It was easy to have me fax the letter to our people in Washington and get it to George Moose. And he ran over to the Madagascan ambassador and say, “your President says vote ... here it is signed in writing.” At that moment, everybody’s vote was counting and they were tallying and they were expecting Madagascar to abstain and Madagascar voted with the United States and there a gasp, an audible gasp in this whole forum. In that letter that Ratsiraka wrote, what did he say? He said, “I’m going to vote with the United States on this because you, Mr. President,” speaking of George Bush, “because you and your father, are the only Presidents that have ever taken me seriously and have ever spent any time even talking to me.” It’s all there in writing. I said, “I can’t believe this is the way you run the country.” Your own idea of what the foreign policy should be. His foreign minister, his ambassador, he decided that Madagascar was going to vote on the Cuban human rights issue. Because I had said in this cable, I don’t think you’re going get them to vote and someone at the White House convinced George W. Bush, “give them a call, why not?”

*Q: Yeah.*

BARNES: And I’ve gotten more kudos out of that. Oh I was walking on water.

*Q: What was the political situation on Madagascar?*

BARNES: Everybody hated the President and the President ... I think didn’t like them. Now I guess, [laugh] but the only man that had been President was kicked out. Went up, got out of there and ran to France and in a way sat back and let the country deteriorate and the Madagascans are very ... I think fickle people. They don’t like to sit for anything to much. They had always had a President from the coastal area. The highlanders, the people up in the mountains, they’re the Merina people, were all successfully the prime minister. So this is the way they kept this ethnic balance because they really hate each other. They’re always fighting. There’s historically been fighting. It’s an island, it’s not that tiny, the fourth largest in the world, but they did nothing to get along, they didn’t get along. And he’d been kicked out; he had to take refuge in France. Then he got back in again because they kicked the other guy out, so he became president again. So in all he had been president for 25 years. The first time he was president and then went abroad and then the second time.

I think he had gotten really comfortable with saying, “I know the Madagascans. I know them, inside and out, etc. And I’m staying here forever.” Then there was Marc Ravalomanana, a brash guy that had become a multimillionaire from milk. And he used

to sell milk on his bicycle. I used to call him the milk man. He first of all became their mayor of Antananarivo and he said, "Hey I'm going to run for president." And he did. And I think Ratsiraka just flipped him off. Number one he's from the highland, he's a Merina of low class because they have an almost slave to upper class system where they are ... the people their bloodlines count. So you can only have certain blood lines and be recognized to be worthy. Anybody from the coastal area were ... Ratsiraka was from the coastal area.

*Q: The coastal area tends to be more black and the upper area is more Polynesian or am I wrong?*

BARNES: For the most part is. The coastal area is more black and look indigenously African but that varies too because Ratsiraka looks a lot like ... he's got a lot of that Malaysian, Polynesian. The intermixture is just phenomenal there. But he is a coastie. He's from the east coast which is called Tamatave so he's from that area. He's disdained by the royalty, distained. But he knew how to grab votes from all those people who were non-Merina. So there's this ethnic thing that's always brewing underneath everything. He thought he was going to relax and get elected again because there is the unwritten rule that a coastie is always president and someone from the highland is always the prime minister. When Ravalomanana came in saying, I'm running for President and he was a Merina, well Ratsiraka didn't do anything until the last minute to go out and campaign. He just knew that this guy couldn't get the vote, but he did get the vote and he won. Ratsiraka and his followers contested that he won. He had enough votes when they counted up to say that he won. A lot of the African nations said that they would never recognize him so for the next two years after he won, there was a lot of contention. For the first time the Madagascans traded barbs and insults. They hardly ever go to war and kill each other. But this became something where they started a fight that wound up an armed fight. This is very unMadagash. People got killed and bridges were blown up and the whole strategy of war ensued. Ratsiraka fled the country again and he's now in France. Ravalomanana has been in for the past two years. The tension is still there. At this point I've been out of there; in fact the new ambassador had taken over just at the height of when they were going through all this struggle. I kept up through all my contacts and my friends and reading the local newspaper which is censored though.

Madagascar has less than a dollar a day than per capita income. Less. They say it's around 270 dollars a year that the Madagascans live in dire, dire, poverty. It is unnecessary poverty. So people are still not happy but they were getting Ravalomanana and the new guy at least, a little, they don't give much, he's only been in two years or less but I don't know when the situation is going to get any better. There are too many people who are too unhappy and they don't want to give the guy a chance. I don't think the Malagasy army is considered the big silent one, if you translate it from French, *la grand mute*. The silent one is that the Army, you never know, they've never gone in and taken over. They've always, they let the crowds in the streets do it. Madagascar has changed all the time when the crowds in the streets get out and whoever is in the palace, it's time for you to leave. So I think a lot of this might happen again. It happened to get Ratsiraka out. They just came out silently in the streets and then after all they started having ... it was

obvious that they were drawing a protest again and they were throwing stuff at them. Because he wouldn't concede that Ravalomanana had won the election. So they both couldn't send anybody to any of the international meetings because one said, "I'm the President." And the other, "No, I'm the President."

So it's been rough and they lost money because of course the stabilities after when the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act which I was very instrumental in making sure Madagascar became one of the very first signatures, I was there then ... their foreign trade picked up by something like 70 to 80 percent. Now it's even gone higher because they've got a great textile manufacturing potential there. Textile manufacturing clothing. A lot of people started coming in because their things come in duty-free to the United States. People had started investing. There was a lot of activity and trading commerce. Now there's instability again, so you just don't know. A lot of people pulled out again, this has led to instability and then with the oil crisis again, what's going on with Iraq. A lot of these nations, these poor nations, are the first ones to get ground up because they can't afford the oil prices.

*Q: How were you received as an African American diplomat? Was this a new thing for them or?*

BARNES: No, they had ... well they have had one there who was very light-skinned and I never made much of a comment about being an African American. I'm so prominently African American that there's no getting around it with me and I made it a point to bring out a lot of the culture of African Americans. Also, again, a lot of the Malagasy that were Merina that didn't have this Indonesian, Malaysian ... I think they're very hesitant in a way because you look at my physical features and I don't look like them. Although I am, I have color in my skin, I don't have their features. I didn't have more of the features of the people from the coast, so sometimes this was an issue, but in general my enthusiasm and my ability to get all of them so much of what they wanted, they come in to my office and I really push for programs that they were interested in. I became an extremely popular person. Being single, I didn't have much else to do there anyway except get out to every invitation that I thought was worthwhile. I was all over the place, up the coast, down the coast. I was always featured in television and newspapers, what else was there? Some of the other ambassadors they come to me and they say, "You know you're too active, now you're making me have to get active." [Laugh]

*Q: [laugh]*

BARNES: And they didn't really get upset. The American ambassador is everywhere! I did a lot there. It became almost, one of my duties to see how much I could get accomplished that was good for the United States and good for the Malagasy. So I was always in some hospital or doing something. I had more projects going. I told everybody that I really wanted to work with women's groups. So women's groups, everybody. I had more people petitioning me. I got as much done with the ambassador's self-help fund which was my little ... you know, every staff that the ambassadors have in some of these developing countries in Africa. I could get as much done with a thousand dollars as five

thousand now. USAID would have to go through this cumbersome price kind of thing to get done. Also, I would just push the World Bank in the IMS people, but maybe the World Bank to come on, come on, do this. I mean we don't have any money usually. The other donors give proportionally much more than the United States. But my presence there said, look we need to do this and that. I know they wanted to say, "I wish she'd shut up." But that would get them in too ... they had to start rivalry with just my presence. They didn't give much money but my presence was a motivation and catalytic for those others to come out. The Japanese probably gave more in real dollars than I did. But I made sure that they'd have to up the ante. So I [laugh] would go there with all these groups of ladies, with all these Malagasy women and the farm women and others. And it worked out well because they all benefited from it.

I even remember one project ... the market one. There are a lot of women mayors. One came; it's a little, something like a suburb event. She had a plan she wanted a latrine built and a shower built for the market women. Because she said, they're sitting in a market all day and they don't even have a place to go to the bathroom. So I said, come back with the plan and how much it's going to cost to construct and I'll have my econ officer who also managed my ambassador's self help fund, I think maybe a thousand dollars ... a thousand five hundred. We built this latrine and a shower for these market women. I became the most heroic figure in this whole place because I sat down and listened to this lady. You think the French ambassador would ever have time to do this? These are the kinds of things that I was able to accomplish. But once they knew about it, they said to their development officer, go out and do something before this American ambassador is doing it! So it turned out to be a help for everybody.

*Q: Did you find yourself at all in competition with the French?*

BARNES: Oh, all the time you'd ask, what are they doing out there? We knew, I knew more or less that the French has been there for the last 200 years. The place is a dump! It's like Haiti or whatever. So I know whatever they're doing, all they're doing, mainly was extracting wealth from the country; that was obvious. So it wasn't much competition for me, going with these little drib-drib projects and they were high-profile and it was the United States! The French ambassador used to come out to things because he'd know I'd be there. Things they normally wouldn't come to. The opening of this and that. And they started, "she's going to be there" and so the French ambassador would be there. You know, he had better things to do. Sometimes I didn't ... I was single, I was, "hey this was fine." I'd go out to these things and you're sitting in these stadiums and you're hot and sweaty and you'd come with your umbrella and they'd go through a hundred speeches, about 75% of them in Malagasy and they'd say, the French ambassador came! Well I come hopping in and he'd be there, sweating and he had to be there because he knew I was going to be there! It was fun! [Laugh] Then they started their own programs; a lot of things they normally did not do. They started doing a lot more visible development programs. Their idea of development has always been to export the French language and to get the elite, or those who could pass the test to go to France and become model French people and to maintain that cultural hegemony in their ex-colony. So a lot of their development money went to this kind of thing, the stream of promoting French culture

and the French language. Then they started doing broader things and then through the donor funds and usually their most prominent presence is through the EU. The EU is dominated by the French and is in most of these ex-French colonies. If you're going to any of these places it's the EU funds that are the development funds and that's dominated by the French. And that's a strategy that I think we, our American foreign policy should really track the way the French and these countries are able to get so much out of their dominance presence in the European Union. And they extract funds from the European Union into whatever they want in the development policies of the developing countries. We don't do enough of how they track what they're doing and how they do this.

*Q: Well I was wondering, when did you ... you left there in... ?*

BARNES: 2001.

*End of reader*