

INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 22, 1980
INTERVIEWEE: ANN OPPENHEIMER HAMILTON
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mrs. Hamilton's office, Washington, D.C.

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G: Mrs. Hamilton, let's start briefly by sketching your background and explain how you ended up at the Peace Corps.

H: I was a graduate student in London until January of 1961 and came to the States at that time. It was a natural time for an eager young thing to come to Washington and start pounding the pavements, which I did, and ended up almost by accident being hired by the Peace Corps. I wanted a job in the international-type field in Washington.

G: Do you recall the circumstances of getting involved with the War on Poverty task force?

H: Yes. That, too, was accidental. I had sometime previously arranged to leave the Peace Corps in February of 1964 and had taken a job starting immediately at the Budget Bureau. During my last week at the Peace Corps the War on Poverty became very active. I let it be known through the grapevine that I would be very interested in working there, and therefore when I went to the Budget Bureau I was immediately seconded to the War on Poverty.

G: What sort of work had you done with the Peace Corps? Had you done budget work at all?

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H: Yes. I worked in the central programming office. It was called something like Program Planning and Coordination. It was, as I say, centralized; we did the budget, we did the congressional presentation, we did manpower allocations.

G: And did you envision doing the same sort of work with the War on Poverty task force?

H: I didn't envisage anything in particular. It was just obviously an exciting place to be and I was willing to go and do whatever I could to help, participate, be involved, be associated.

G: Who in particular were you working with or working under?

H: At the task force? As it evolved I worked most closely with Adam Yarmolinsky. I went over on the same day simultaneously with Chris [Christopher] Weeks, and he and I worked most closely together for the better part of my stay there. I was kind of a sidekick to Chris. As it developed I became also kind of a sidekick, dog's body, for Adam Yarmolinsky.

G: Did you specialize in one feature of the task force?

H: No, that was one of the interesting things about it in the very formative days, and one of the virtues of working with Adam was that I could be a dilettante.

G: Do you recall the first session or meeting of the task force that you attended? Where was it and who was there and that sort of thing?

H: No. In fact, I don't recall offhand any general meetings of the task force. I can only recall specific subject matter meetings.

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- G: Would the task force generally work in smaller groups, raising particular subjects?
- H: Yes, as I recall. At least that was my experience. I mean, there would be a meeting on the Job Corps and how it might work, or of the legislative drafting group, or people coming in and making presentations on proposals they had for various means to fight poverty. My recollection of the entire thing is extremely vague, but I only recall smaller meetings.
- G: Did you get any indication at all of the White House involvement in the task force period?
- H: The thing that I recall most clearly was their involvement at the message-drafting stage, when a condition of near panic emerged as the message got delayed.
- G: Why was the rush on that, do you recall? Was there a rush to get the message delivered or send the legislation up to the Hill?
- H: I'm sure there was, yes, but more important was it was delayed from whatever the target date was. That led in turn to considerable pressure after the date. There must have been a rush just to get it legitimized, just to lend credibility to all the big announcements which had been made.
- G: Do you recall who on the White House staff normally dealt with the task force?
- H: No. Give me some guesses.
- G: Well, say Myer Feldman or Bill Moyers, someone like that.

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- H: I can't remember who in particular. They were all around and involved at various [times].
- G: How actively did Sargent Shriver participate in the day-to-day workings of the task force?
- H: I'd say quite actively, especially considering that he still had his Peace Corps job at the time, I think. I was too junior to have much to do with him. Adam Yarmolinksy again was, as I recall, the continuity, the managing director, in effect, but Shriver was an extremely active chairman of the board. He was always coming up with new people, new ideas.
- G: I gather the membership of the task force was to some degree fluid, and people would come and go, and submit ideas, and stay for a while and then leave. But I have given you a list of the membership, or some of the members of the task force, and I wondered if you would look over that list and see if you consider these names all to have been members, these people. And anything in particular about the roles that any of them played. Norbert Schlei, for example, has been identified as a member of the drafting committee.
- H: Yes. Some of these people were much more actively involved than others as I perceived it. The big names here were, as far as I was aware, just in and out. Adam Yarmolinsky was there all the time as the chief honcho, I think. [Michael] Harrington I recall only being involved in legislative testimony and perhaps a meeting or two to share his ideas. But I don't recall his being actively

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involved. [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan was around a lot. He was at the Labor Department at the time.

G: Did he more or less represent the views of Willard Wirtz on the task force?

H: I don't know.

G: Was he, for example, pushing for jobs rather than, say, community action?

H: I really don't recall the nature of those discussions. I remember that Moynihan, Eric Tolmach, who was around all the time, Wirtz, who was around only occasionally, were kind of the Labor Department's [representatives]. They were deeply involved in those issues but I absolutely cannot recall who took which point of view in an issue-oriented discussion.

Paul Jacobs I don't recall being around much; in point of fact, I don't even think I remember him in that context. I mean I remember him in other contexts.

Jim Sundquist was around, from Agriculture. Eric Tolmach, Richard Boone--what was the name of the program he was head of at the time?

G: Boone?

H: Yes. It was juvenile delinquency.

G: Let's see. Wasn't it the Grey Areas, wasn't he involved in that?

H: I think he was head of the juvenile delinquency program, I believe. Therefore it must have been a Job Corps. . . . Lloyd Ohlin I don't remember.

Frank Mankiewicz, again, I can't distinguish his role there.

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I've known him so well in so many capacities for so many years that I can't remember what he did there as distinct from all the other things he's done.

Paul Ylvisaker, like Harrington, I see as a testifier and not an active member.

Ronald Goldfarb was a member of the legislative drafting group.

Andrew Brimmer was around and I don't remember what he did. Similarly with [William] Capron from the Budget Bureau. See, I'm having a hard time.

Steve Pollak was a legislative drafter.

Vernon Alden was the Job Corps fellow.

Chris Weeks was a generalist in the early days who began focusing on the Job Corps.

The Labor people, [Hyman] Bookbinder, [Jack T.] Conway were very much around. Hal Horowitz was a lawyer.

Terry Sanford I don't remember anything other than just seeing him in the halls occasionally.

[John Kenneth] Galbraith was certainly not actively involved. I remember him well as the man who saved the message.

G: How so?

H: It had been through any number of drafts, each one not significantly better and sometimes worse than the one before. Nobody was quite satisfied with the drafting process, which was the principal reason that I recall that it got delayed. The whole thing was tied up together. First of all, the substantive issues were being sorted out

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at the same time that the message was being drafted. And secondly, the drafts weren't any good. Galbraith came in and in two days at the outside of what must have been marathon sessions on his part, all-night sessions, he redrafted it essentially into the message that was finally delivered. And it was qualitatively better. I mean, you could feel the difference. And then I don't remember ever seeing him again.

Now again you're once again back into a bunch of people whose specific roles I can't identify very clearly.

G: Did the task force take on a tone or a spirit that reflected Sargent Shriver's own personality? Was it at all a creature of Shriver? Was it something that you normally would identify with Sargent Shriver in terms of the way he worked?

H: I suppose so in terms of its--it was very open, very free-flowing, very unstructured in the early days, the kind of place where ideas were freely and hotly exchanged. Those are characteristics that I associate with Shriver. He came in, as he had done to the Peace Corps, without preconceptions, didn't mind, indeed encouraged, debate, brought in all kinds of people with all kinds of ideas.

Another interesting thing, in the early days I recall he turned an awful lot to his--another Shriverism--friends, colleagues and contacts in the business community for ideas on this kind of administrative thing on the theory that they knew how to solve problems. They were essentially problem solvers. You set yourself an objective in the business world and went out and achieved it, and

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there was no reason why that shouldn't apply to an administrative challenge like eradicating poverty. So there were all kinds of millionaires popping in and out for a day at a time.

G: Do you recall any in particular who had a significant input?

H: No. I don't. Indeed I recall thinking that if that's what it took to become a millionaire, we were all missing a golden opportunity. I mean, I remember not being very impressed with what they had to offer.

G: Well, Sargent Shriver himself used the metaphor, as I recall, that the Community Action Program was like the Buick division of General Motors. He saw the whole thing as business quotas.

H: He tended to see it as a problem-solving--your profit was measured in terms of the number of people who weren't poor anymore. But other than that he tried to bring to bear a kind of systematic approach.

G: Did you ever get any insights as to his attitude of what the program should become, what he wanted it to be?

H: Successful. But beyond that, no I don't.

G: How about President Johnson's [attitude]? Did you ever throughout the course of your work here have an insight as to what his image of the War on Poverty consisted of?

H: I may have done. I cannot recall it now.

G: Where did the task force normally meet when you worked with it?

H: I can't remember where we started out. It was very temporary and scotch tape and string. We moved at some point to the old Court of Claims Building, a beautiful old building which is now the--what

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is it called?--the handicrafts museum [Renwick Gallery] on the corner of 17th and Pennsylvania. Which we evacuated suddenly one afternoon when they determined that the construction of the New Executive Office Building was undermining the foundations and it was in risk of collapse. They wouldn't let us stay there ten minutes after they discovered that.

Then we all moved I think to the old hospital building on Virginia Avenue, C Street, some street, that street that runs behind the Old Executive Office Building. After that some people moved somewhere else. The thing got big enough that we had to move into two office buildings, and they were in another building somewhere, I don't know where. What I can't remember is where the first place was.

G: I gather the Peace Corps building initially. I have Peace Corps building, fifth floor and twelfth floor.

H: That's quite possible. I would be confused, because I had worked in the Peace Corps building anyway, so that one doesn't stand out in my mind as specifically associated with the War on Poverty.

G: Was there a shortage of planning and operating funds during this period?

H: Well, I'm sure there was. To the best of my knowledge, all the funds we had, all the people, which was basically the only thing--everything was scrounged, people and office space, and I presume typewriters and related things. All people were seconded from other departments. There is an example of White House involvement, I guess.

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(Interruption)

So everything. They must have had no budget of their own. I don't know whether they had any kind of White House contingency money or not. I suppose a little. Scrounging was an important part of the operation.

I was about to say that one of the evidences of White House involvement was that they did get the people they wanted, no matter how reluctant the department was.

G: That's an interesting [point]. Was there a maintenance of files? Did you have a central repository for working papers of the task force or correspondence?

H: I doubt it very seriously. I remember that was one of the things that Chris Weeks became concerned about early on. There was no institutional memory being developed, and he made an effort to do it, to at least have us keep in our little cubbyhole relevant papers.

G: Do you think that within the task force there was a feeling that the existent cabinet departments were not really addressing the problem of poverty?

H: Yes, I think so. There must have been such a feeling almost built in. Because of the very existence of a task force on the War on Poverty the implication was there, and by definition these were a bunch of people who thought they could do it better, free of the heavy hand of an existing, entrenched bureaucracy.

G: Was there a hesitancy at all to set up a new agency?

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- H: Almost certainly not, not that I recall, on the part of the members of the task force. The cabinet departments must have resisted it.
- G: Do you recall specifically any of this resistance, say, HEW wanting to run the program, or the Department of Labor?
- H: Only very, very vaguely. There are two levels there. One is whether they would want their own areas of expertise taken away. Whether the program should be unified or split up into several departmental responsibilities as it in effect had been in the past. Related activities at least had belonged to HEW, Labor, even the Defense Department I remember became involved in the Job Corps.
- And then the issue of whether, if all these elements were pulled together into a single agency, would it be separate, would it belong to an existing department? I don't recall the specifics of that debate, but I'm confident as a matter of principle that it existed, and it rings a kind of vague bell.
- G: Do you think that the task force had an urban orientation rather than rural? Did they tend to focus on urban poverty?
- H: I suppose to some extent that's true, because of an awful lot of the early emphasis was on the Job Corps, community action, and related things which are essentially urban in their orientation. I know the fact that Jim Sundquist was there says something, but I don't remember what rural programs we talked about.
- G: Well, there was land reform proposal. Do you remember that? It was ultimately discarded I think at the congressional level, the formula

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for buying farm land and reselling it to the rural poor. Do you recall?

H: I don't remember it, no.

G: I think the charge was that it smacked too much of the old New Deal program.

H: Yes.

G: To what extent was the relative appeal that a particular program would have to Congress considered in selecting programs, do you recall?

H: Substantial I'm sure. One of the objectives was to make the program a success, to make it work, to make it get off the ground quickly and successfully. So the congressional passage was obviously a key element.

G: Was there congressional input before the legislation was submitted? Did you have people, say, from the House committee or the Senate committee come over and work at all with the program?

H: Not that I recall. We did work closely with some of the people on the committees, but I think it was after submission.

G: I gather, for example, that there was no provision for women's Job Corps until Edith Green raised the subject the first day of the hearings.

H: Yes, I think that's true.

G: Chris Weeks, in his book on the Job Corps [Job Corps; Dollars and Dropouts], described the crisis of maintaining communications between the leadership and the working groups on the task force. That Shriver was deeply involved in mobilizing congressional support, and Adam Yarmolinsky was in that car accident and was out of pocket

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for a month. Do you recall such a phase here where there was a breakdown in communications? It would have been mid-April.

H: Yes. First of all, with a bunch of prima donnas, like the task force was, failures of communication were inevitable in any circumstances, people disagreed strongly about the relative merits of their own cases. I do recall that Adam's absence was very disruptive. He was to a very large extent the glue which held the thing together, kept it working together to many people's satisfaction and many other people's dismay. But he was the strong central focus of the thing. He was out for a long time.

G: How did the task force function day to day? Did you just go into a meeting room and sit there for half a day and discuss these various ideas?

H: Once again, I think different parts of it functioned very differently.

G: Well, the part that you were associated with.

H: Well, my problem was I wasn't really associated with any part, I was more of a jack of all trades, a dilettante. So that I don't recall specifically. But I just have the feeling I would go in in the morning and see what needed doing, or see what I wanted to do, what somebody else wanted me to do, what I was interested in that day, and go do it. [It was] completely unstructured and flexible on my own part.

G: How were the decisions made in the task force, do you recall? Would they take votes on recommendations?

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- H: No. I'd say ultimately Yarmolinsky and Shriver, they'd listen to all the arguments and make up their minds.
- G: Were any of the programs, do you recall, rejected because of funding levels and limitations of funding? For example, the massive jobs proposal, which would have required a much larger allocation.
- H: We were talking big money in those days. I don't recall that in the task force itself we considered funding levels as a constraint. We were ready to shoot for the moon. I think, as I keep saying, the more active constraint was keep it manageable, increase its probability of success. One of the better lines which I have quoted repeatedly since was in one of the early discussions of the Job Corps. The issue was how to tackle the really hard core unemployed, almost untrainable young people and get them back on the ladder of economic development, as the expression was. How to get them on the bottom rung, and did we try for that? Did we try to tackle the problem of real hard core poverty, or did we take the easier cases, who just happened to be suffering from a much more superficial combination of adverse circumstances and give them the little boost that was necessary, the ones that were already motivated, willing and only poor. Somebody, I believe it was Vern Alden in a meeting on one occasion, in support of the same theory I'm expounding, said that he really felt we ought to start with the cream of the crop.

And it was true, that was a philosophy which tended to prevail for very obvious reasons. I mean, you don't go for the most difficult cases first because your chances of failure--and therefore the failure

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of the whole program--are greater. You go for areas where your chances of success are greater and hope that once you've gotten the program established you will learn enough and develop enough of a basis of support to go for the harder cases later. I don't recall funding being an issue, it was only how difficult was the challenge implied, keep the challenges manageable.

G: How about the criminal records? Do you recall the issue here of getting kids who had criminal records as opposed to those who didn't?

H: I think I recall it being discussed but I don't recall it in any detail.

G: Was there a recognition that Sargent Shriver would head the OEO?

H: I think so.

G: It was more or less assumed by all of you that [he would]?

H: I think so. I'm not certain about that, but I think so.

G: Do you recall any input by the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy?

H: Not that I was aware of. A lot of his people, a lot of the people from the Justice Department were on the task force, and they must have--I never saw him around.

G: There was an indication that here for the first time was the notion of attacking poverty by simultaneously attacking all of its causes. Rather than just an employment program or a housing program, trying to get all of these various causes of poverty. Did you see yourselves as doing this and did you regard this as something new, a multi-faceted [approach]?

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- H: I think so. I think so, yes. That was certainly part of the philosophy and approach, an integrated multi-faceted approach.
- G: Let me ask you about the origin of the Community Action Program. Do you recall how that idea was [originated]?
- H: No. Give me some hints. I associate--Dick Boone was very active in it.
- G: I gather the idea was there almost before the task force, well, literally before the task force was there. Who promoted the idea within the task force? It would have been people like Dick Boone.
- H: Yes. Also it was a Peace Corps concept, remember. Frank Mankiewicz was the chief proponent in the Peace Corps. Shriver was very familiar with it and supportive of it. That's probably to a large extent why he involved Frank in the task force so heavily.
- G: What were the underlying assumptions of community action? Do you recall the thinking behind it?
- H: Not very clearly. I recall it more clearly in the Peace Corps than I do in the poverty program. I would assume that it was the same again, integrated, multi-faceted, define the range of problems which exist in a given area. There were enormous issues over membership and participation, but those were not related to the underlying concept. That was entirely the political manifestation.
- G: Did you see it as a vehicle for bypassing local government, local power structures?
- H: Well, those are different questions. Local government, no, they would have to be involved to make it effective. They're in too

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good a position to undercut it. Local power structures, where they are destructive of the objectives, yes, to a certain degree. I mean, you wanted to get together a series of community leaders who could at least counterbalance any particular interest.

G: Do you recall the origin of the phrase "maximum feasible participation"?

H: No, I don't. My instinctive reaction is that it probably came out of the Justice Department fellows, but that's not a precise recollection.

G: Well, there seems to have been some "maximum feasible" language in other parts of the act. Perhaps the drafters used that term. Did you yourself have an idea of a precise formula, say one-third, one-third, and one-third? What did you consider maximum feasible participation?

H: I did not have any particular ideas myself. My own views were all derivative; this was not a field in which I had any experience or expertise, as I said. I was basically an international economist. So I just listened to other people and supported those who made sense.

G: Did the task force members anticipate the turmoil that would arise between local residents and local governmental institutions?

H: I think so, yes, to a large extent. Perhaps not quite as much turmoil as there actually was, but I think that was an integral part of the assumption from the beginning. I mean, when you're trying to change existing social structures, you're going to get turmoil.

G: They didn't feel that this would create any problem with the funding or the congressional acceptance of the program?

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H: The task force by its very nature consisted of a fair number of zealots who probably were not excessively realistic in assessing the real negative consequences of their ideas. They realized of course they would make some problems. This was a gauntlet. I think they thought probably that the intensity of its political support would help carry it through more easily than it in fact did. And anyway, problems were inevitable.

G: The people who formulated community action, would you really describe them as zealots? And who were they who worked primarily on this?

H: I don't remember. Boone, [Sanford] Kravitz--I feel like I'm playing a guessing game. Tell me when I'm right.

G: Jack Conway's name is mentioned.

H: Sure. Yes. I think that's what Bookbinder was working on, I'm not sure.

G: Moynihan in this book [Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding] perceives almost a radicalization of community action, contending that the most radical of the planners gathered and formulated the plans to implement community action. Would you think that accurate?

H: I suspect so, in a way. I mean, it was the most radical, the most explicitly radical of the programs, the one designed to change the status quo. I would expect that it would attract the most radical of the people involved. But as I say, since I can't even recall who the people involved were, that's a pretty ex post guess.

G: Did the task force consider the issue of whether the poor should actually control the Community Action Agency?

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- H: Not that I recall. Once again, I must remind you that my participation in any single subset was peripheral.
- G: Anything else on community action that we haven't discussed?
- H: Not that I can remember, but you can see how little I can remember.
- G: Anything on Job Corps? We've discussed that to some extent. Say the decision to have the Labor Department run the Neighborhood Youth Corps while OEO would run the Job Corps?
- H: No bells are ringing.
- G: I gather there was a cutback in the military's role. At first the Department of Defense was scheduled to have a rather large role in the planning of Job Corps, and the liberals really objected. Military participation was toned down.
- H: I guess that's true. I remember a couple of meetings at the Pentagon. They were mostly in terms of just how you handle the logistics. And indeed you're right, training camps I remember, and then it was decided not to use them, not to use military camps for training purposes. Yes, it must have been. What I distinctly remember is just getting their advice on how you handle hordes of people at any given time, in which they were extremely useful. Who was the assistant secretary of defense for manpower? I think it was Bill Graham.
- G: Anything on education as discussed in the task force sessions?
- H: Prod my memory some more.
- G: Well, Head Start was not initially included.

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- H: That was an Edith Green addition?
- G: No, I gather it was included under community action in 1965.
- H: I don't remember much about it. Who were some of the people involved?
Given my people orientation, that might help.
- G: Wilbur Cohen I gather worked with the task force to some extent.
- H: Yes. And also the Commissioner of Education. That was not Wilbur Cohen, was it? Was that what he was?
- G: No, let's see, there was [Francis] Keppel. I guess it was Keppel at this point.
- H: He succeeded Wilbur Cohen, right, and he was involved--that's right, Cohen had left the job. I still don't remember what the issues were.
- G: VISTA? Now here was a program that had been around--the National Service Corps--and had not been passed by the Congress. Do you recall the work to develop this into the VISTA program, domestic Peace Corps?
- H: Not much. The only thing I can remember again offhand was a big debate about the name, because there is some charitable organization which calls itself VISTA and there were very strong feelings on whether. . . .
- G: It was Volunteers for America or something like that, people that go around and pick up spare clothes.
- H: Yes, exactly. I remember a long debate about the name, very little about the substance.
- G: Do you think that the Peace Corps felt competition from VISTA and opposed it at all?

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H: I don't recall anything specific about it. They would have been correct to do so.

G: Did you play a role at all in the legislative submission?

H: Yes. And I can't remember what it was. I know I did. I know that I hung around a lot with the legislative drafting group. I considered myself a past master at legislative drafting even though I was not a lawyer, because I had been involved in the same kind of thing at the Peace Corps, mostly I think because I liked the people. But I worked with them, totally without qualification, a fair amount. Chris Weeks and I spent a lot of time on the Hill, along with others. We were more the generalists. I mean the specialists came up. We prepared position papers like mad on every single subject and every question. We did a lot of talking and discussion with congressional staffers. And once again, I was trying to think about that. I can't remember anything very specific in terms of issues. I spent a lot of time listening to testimony. It was more back-home work, I mean work at headquarters, for both of us. I was kind of following Chris there. He was taking all kinds of initiatives. He, too, had had a lot of experience from the Budget Bureau on exactly that kind of thing.

G: Did you attempt to influence any particular congressman or senators?

H: Certainly through their staff at my level, but I can't remember in particular which ones. Obviously this was happening at two levels: one the Shriver-type level on the political side, and the staff level on the substantive side, trying to persuade them of the

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incredible wisdom of what it was that we had proposed, and to put to rest any reservations they might have about that wisdom.

G: I wonder how Phil Landrum happened to become the sponsor of the bill in the House.

H: I don't know.

G: Did Adam Clayton Powell present any special problems?

H: I don't remember. I mean, he was very much there, but I just don't remember his role. Also I left long before the bill was passed. I'm not sure, when did the bill pass?

G: It passed in August.

H: So it wasn't that long before. When did Yarmolinsky get the ax?

G: Right at the point of passage.

H: That was just about--that was when I left, too. I remember a party.

G: You were there, you went to the party that night?

H: Yes. At Steve Pollak's house.

G: And that's when it was learned by many I understand that Yarmolinsky had been sacrificed presumably to pass the bill. Did you ever understand how that happened?

H: I think I did but I don't think I can remember now. At least one congressman, and I don't know who, can't remember who, took an intense dislike to Adam, either because of his abrasive personality or because of his Defense Department role, or both. And he was traded by Shriver and Johnson, I think.

G: Was this disheartening to the task force people at all?

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H: Yes. I think so. I mean, Adam aroused strong feelings, likes and dislikes. I'm sure that there were those in the task force who were delighted on a personal basis. There were a lot of people who didn't like him. But the political expediency of the act was disheartening, no matter how you felt about him personally. I mean, I remember at that party, there was just an evening of doom and gloom. I made an ass of myself by crying in public.

G: You left after that?

H: Very soon after that.

G: Was there a causal relationship?

H: No. The Budget Bureau had called up and said, "Get back here if you want us to keep paying your salary. Come work for us."

G: Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you feel is significant in the planning of this program?

H: Not that occurs to me offhand. As I say, I would like to read any of the other interviews that are available, and lights may go on like crazy. But since I can't remember what I had for breakfast this morning, it's very hard for me to remember what happened sixteen years ago.

G: Well, I certainly thank you for your time.

H: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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