INTERVIEWEE: HERBERT KRAMER

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

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G: This is an interview with Mr. Herbert J. Kramer, formerly the Director of Public Affairs of the Office of Economic Opportunity, and presently consultant to OEO. Mr. Kramer was born in New York City in 1922, and twenty years later he graduated from Harvard University, Phi Beta Kappa, magnum cum laude. In 1946 he received a master's degree in English Literature at Harvard. In 1949 you received your doctorate in English?

K: English Literature.

G: In 1956, after having attended night school at the University of Connecticut, you received your law degree and were admitted to the Connecticut Bar. And until 1951 you served as an instructor in the English departments at Harvard and the University of California at Santa Barbara. In 1951 you joined the Travelers Insurance Company and were there until 1964. Is that correct?

K: '65.

G: '65. From 1964 until 1965 you were the vice president of Travelers in charge of public information and advertising. From September 1965 until June 1968, you were the Director of Public Affairs at OEO. And from June 1968 until the present, you were a consultant.

K: I am now again an employee of the agency--on a rather temporary occasional basis. My consultancy ran out, so I'm now an employee on special projects.

G: I see. I'd like to begin by asking you how it was that you came to OEO in September of 1965, what you knew about it, who you knew here,

what were the circumstances of your appointment and so on.

K: I can't say that I knew much about OEO. The program after all was very new. I had heard some things about it, about the Job Corps, and one or two other aspects. But you must remember that in September 1965, the first grants had not even begun to ripen. They had been made in November 1964, and they were still in the planning and development stage. So there really weren't any programs that had loomed large in the public consciousness.

I had been appointed about a year before to be the industry coordinator for the National Advertising Council's campaign on mental retardation. This was while I was vice president of advertising and public relations for the Travelers. And in the course of that service working with the volunteer advertising agency, Young and Rubicam--which by the way was also our corporate advertising agency--I naturally came to know Mr. and Mrs. Shriver, who are very dominant figures in the field of mental retardation. I gather that some of the work that I had done, and maybe some of the ideas I had, struck their fancy, especially a presentation I made to the Vice President on the Council's program and a brochure I had done for them.

In late July 1965 I received a telephone call from Mr. Shriver and he said, "How about coming down to Washington and serving?" I think at first he had thought of me in the capacity of Executive Director of the Kennedy Foundation, which had just lost its director. I indicated to him that I would not be interested in this; that I couldn't do it; that I was very flattered, but I had a very good life where I was and a very good job. He said, "Well, why don't you come down to Washington and let's talk anyway?"

I made the mistake, I guess, of listening to this siren call and came to Washington a few days later and spoke to him about possible employment either in the Peace Corps or in the War on Poverty. The War on Poverty had just moved over to its new headquarters in the Brown Building and we talked in a very barren corner office on the eighth floor. He had me meet people in the Job Corps and other programs. Then just as I left, he indicated that his Director of Public Relations was going to be leaving, and that this would be a most interesting, challenging and demanding job, and he thought it was something I might be interested in. Well, it about was the only thing he mentioned which caught my fancy.

I went back and spent about four weeks or more in agonizing re-appraisal because this would mean a tremendous change for me. It would mean that I would have to leave my family for awhile. The company was in agreement that if I returned within two years I would be able to get my job back at the Travelers. However, on Labor Day of 1965 I journeyed to Hyannis with my wife and made the decision to come down here. We decided not to move down until we found out what the job was like--and I had children who were seniors in high school. I got more of an idea of what the job was all about from him, and made the decision to come and reported for work on September 16, 1965.

G: Had you been involved in a local anti-poverty agency in Hartford?

K: Yes. I had been very active in a number of areas of Hartford's cultural and social and economic life. In addition to being one of the founding members of a local chapter of the Urban League, I also served on the policy committee of the Community Renewal Team,

the evaluating task force of that program, and that was the privately financed and later government financed CAP agency.

G: Who was your predecessor?

K: My predecessor for a period of somewhat less than one year was a gentlemen named Holmes Brown who had come down to Washington with McNamara. He had been the public relations director of Martin-Marietta and then Ford. He came down here and spent somewhat less than a year, and then retired to go to American Airlines as their public relations vice president; left American Airlines and went to Continental Can where he is today.

G: What did Mr. Shriver tell you about what your duties would be?

K: In recollection he told me that mine would be the job of being the voice of the agency, of interpreting the agency to the people. He felt that we had been doing a bad job in really enlisting the support of private enterprise, of the cities, of the middle-class public. He indicated that it would be the hottest spot of its kind in Washington--except perhaps for the Defense Department and the guy who was trying to justify the Vietnamese war.

G: In your first year of attempting to make this kind of communication or attempting to put across the kind of message that OEO felt it had to, what do you recall in a very general way were some of the major problems that you encountered?

K: It's a difficult thing to answer because I found when I came down here that Mr. Shriver had already appointed a deputy, a man named James Kelleher, a very brilliant man in his field, who had served as the Public Relations Officer of the Post Office under Day and had then gone down to Florida and had left his job there and been

recommended by John Brademus, a classmate of his at Notre Dame. So by the time I got down here I found that Mr. Kelleher had already dug in and had put himself in charge of the press relations and was acting as the voice of the agency. So I came down in a rather difficult position of having a deputy already established, and having to take over a department that had been considerably demoralized. On the day he left, my predecessor fired several people whom I brought back in again. He had a penchant for firing people.

Those were very difficult times and I felt that for the first few months at least, I should devote myself to rebuilding the department and organizing it and administering it--which I did, along the lines that I had been accustomed to in private enterprise. I found for example that there was no audio-visual division of the department, that while there were one or two people making movies and wildly contacting television stations, they were scattered around the agency in various places. There was a speakers' bureau which was in the Information Center, and there were lines of demarcation that were very unclear. The operating departments--Job Corps, VISTA, and CAP--were not on speaking terms with Public Affairs because the previous director had felt that he was the one who made policy for these divisions, and consequently ran head on into them at various points. So I brought the Audio-Visual unit into Public Affairs; I brought the Speakers' Bureau into Public Affairs; I reorganized along Divisional lines; I mended fences with the program officers and, I think, established a very solid and substantial line of communications with the directorate of the agency.

I then began to find that Mr. Kelleher, for all his very great

and real skill and brilliance, was showing a singular lack of judgment in the kinds of statements that he was making in the public press. This was especially true in the Black Arts Theater case and the Job Corps riot in Camp Custer; and increasingly I began to find political divisions within the Public Affairs Department--those who were backing Mr. Kelleher and those who were backing me. I had been brought down to do a job and so I made it clear what that job was going to be and began increasingly to serve as an alternate spokesman for the Agency. Mr. Kelleher liked very much to get his name in the paper. Consequently there was a lot more aggressive and, I would say, smart-aleck, quick-trigger response to the press than I would have liked to see. Things deteriorated somewhat in the relationships here, and in June Mr. Kelleher finally resigned. I do not wish to detract at all from his very great brilliance. He later served admirably in a private firm here and died tragically in 1970. But his hard-line, shooting-from-the hip posture, I think, set the tone for a lot of the communication that was made at that point. Also, my predecessor in the job had been a very aggressive and somewhat inflationary type Public Affairs Director, and consequently, coupled with Mr. Shriver's natural inclinations at optimism and salesmanship, a great many things that were said about the program in that first year turned out not to be entirely the case. Numbers were inflated; hopes and promises were raised.

I think that the hallmarks in the first year of my regime here were an attempt to be open with the press and honest, to play down some of the more apparent exaggerations, to limit the number of dog-and-pony show press conferences, and to try to some extent to hold

down some of the attempts on the part of the agency to appear to be doing more than it actually was. I also found that relations between OEO and the Labor Department and the other delegate agencies or the other Cabinet departments were strained because OEO had been taking the lion's share of credit for programs which might have been shared with these other agencies, and I attemped to mend those fences.

G: If I could interrupt here a moment, there was an article in which you were interviewed--this Erwin Knoll and Jule Withover--

K: Yes. An article which appeared in the Columbia Journalism Review called "Maximum Feasible Publicity."

G: Right. This article implied that there was a cause and effect relationship between the Citizens Crusade against Poverty and the subsequent aftermath in which apparently there were letters written to the "Times" from people in OEO or other people--And this New York Times and Nan Robertson story. And this article seems to imply that Kelleher resigned after that--that there was a relationship between those.

K: I really don't know if in fact there was a relationship. That was a very unfortunate occurrence. It goes to a time when Mr. Shriver made a speech at the International Inn before the first poverty convention sponsored by the Citizens Crusade. The night before Mr. Shriver appeared, Bayard Rustin had been hooted off the platform, and there was no doubt about the fact that on that particular occasion there were people who had been primed to do the same for Mr. Shriver.

I was there. Mr. Kelleher was here. I attempted on the telephone to keep him apprised of what was taking place, and also arranged that afternoon for a meeting of young people with Mr. Shriver

here in the agency, which was conducted and which took some of the sting off, I thought, of the events of the previous day. Also, there were statements to be made by some of the directors which I helped them write on the spot, and then returned to the agency that afternoon.

The stories which appeared the next morning, especially Nan Robertson's story, got under Mr. Shriver's hide because they seemed to indicate that he had blown his cool and that he very cowardly permitted himself to be run out of the hall. I don't think there's anything that Mr. Shriver reacts to with such vehemence as affronts to his own personal integrity and courage.

He was on a trip to the West Coast that day, making a couple of stops along the way, and at each of the airport stops, he called me and gave me another list of people to call to attempt to vindicate him. It was not, I would say, his finest hour, and I attempted to do in my best conscience what he asked me to do without compromising myself.

My Kelleher was not involved in this in any sense, was not asked to participate in it, and this was not either the immediate or the proximate cause of his leaving. This happened I think some time in February or March, and Mr. Kelleher's resignation didn't take place until April, and with terminal leave and everything else, he didn't leave until June. I don't think that this was valid. Mr. Kelleher was in extreme disfavor by that time with some of the more responsible members of the agency, such as the Deputy Director, Mr. Boutin, and others; and there were other extenuating facts involved.

But as I say, this was not either my or Mr. Shriver's finest hour, although I think he behaved with some dignity at the meeting itself. Things became extremely tense as he was leaving, and I think there could have been bodily harm. As a matter of fact, one man hurled himself at Mr. Shriver, hitting me instead, and that moment was just enough to get him out of there.

G: Injured your arm at that time.

K: Yes, not very badly, but, nonetheless, it was an interesting event. I would say that the other event of that first year which was a kind of comedy of errors was a statement which was made at a staff meeting upstairs in which I asked all department heads simply to notify Public Affairs when they were being interviewed by a reporter simply to keep track of what reporters were interested in, and not in any sense to censor or to serve as a filter for the dissemination of truth in the agency.

G: This was the "thinking man's filter."

K: The thinking man's filter. Mr. Loftus was told about this. This office was a sieve at that point--this agency--and anything that happened inside immediately was handed out to reporters. He became, I thought at the time, almost paranoid about the fact that his sources of information were being cut off, that he was being followed, that his comings and goings were being reported to Public Affairs, which led me to issue a clarifying memorandum in Mr. Shriver's name in which I indicated that there was no attempt at censorship, and that anybody in this agency could speak to any reporter at any time at his own discretion.

G: Had you had much experience in dealing with reporters prior to coming here?

K: I had, as the man in charge of a large public relations department of a financial corporation, dealt with the press, but on an entirely different basis. In other words, if the Travelers Insurance Company got its name in the paper once or twice a year, it was great stuff. We had to fight to get mentioned. When I first came here, this agency was under constant scrutiny, constant attack, constant villification, constant questioning, and most of the time of many of us was spent simply in putting out fires and in answering questions from the whole country. I do believe that we maintained the freest flow of exchange of any public agency in Washington.

G: Why is it that OEO came under such heavy fire at that time? Was it a kind of ideological predisposition to challenge the basic assumptions of the War on Poverty, or was it just sensational headlines?

K: I think it was sensational headline-making. OEO was news; the man who had brought the Peace Corps to such great prominence was at the head; Mr. Shriver did nothing privately really--everything he said and did was public. From the very moment OEO began, it was under investigation and scrutiny. There were many problems in the South, many problems with local communities. Governors and Mayors had it under attack from the beginning. It had exacerbated the welfare establishment, the educational establishment. It had experimented with this thing called Job Corps, running so-called paramilitary centers operated by educational establishments and private industry. For the first time ppor people, poor youth, black people, people who had heretofore been hidden, were coming up to the surface, and America wasn't liking everything it was seeing about them and about the agency that was doing this. OEO became the focus of disaffection,

of crackpots, of legitimate grievances, of militancy; and consequently we were in the forefront of attention--Plus the fact that we were proving from the very beginning that it was going to be a hell of a lot more expensive to fight poverty than anybody had thought; and therefore, budget estimates and operating expenditures, and the whole local thrust of the program were also items of great interest.

Now I might say that no reporter, when I got down here, really qualified, with very few exceptions--such as Marshall Peck of the Herald-Tribune in New York City, Paul Weeks in Los Angeles--both of whom by the way later joined the War on Poverty--there were no qualified poverty reporters in this country. Poverty simply hadn't been reported. Therefore, in October 1965 we started the first of five press seminars, inviting reporters from papers all over the country to come in at their own expense to learn about the War on Poverty. In the course of those five, we had probably 200 first-rate reporters from all over the country attend and learn something about our programs.

G: What evolved was what was called the "Poverty Beat?"

K: And what evolved was something called the poverty beat which now exists in almost every newspaper in the country.

G: From what you've been saying, I gather that OEO in a sense in that first year was doing among other things precisely what it was intended to do.

K: The mission of OEO, as stated explicitly in the legislation, was to disseminate to the public the knowledge of poverty in this country and the mechanisms for fighting poverty in this country. This is one of the reasons--and I think Erwin Knoll mentions this in the story that I agreed that in the first year a tremendous selling job had to

be done. I was asked whether I objected to the phrase "War on Poverty." Well, it's not the most felicitious expression I know; nonetheless it did exemplify in the beginning just what it was we were doing. We were fighting a war on poverty.

I think it should also be mentioned that in 1965, everybody in this agency had reason to believe that we would be able to carry out our expectations and our hopes for the War on Poverty, that we would get the appropriate budgetary amounts. It wasn't until the 1966 budget was returned by the Budget Bureau that the first shock of the impact of Viet Nam seeped in. It didn't seep in, it hit with a hammer blow! And I well recall that Joe Kershaw, the Director of Research Program Planning and Evaluation, indicated that he felt right then and there he wanted to resign because instead of expenditures of the three billion dollar magnitude we were held to expenditures of one-and-a-half billion dollars. Mr. Shriver did his best to put a good cloak on that and make it seem that these expenditures were adequate. He was at all times a loyal subject of Mr. Johnson, but there was no cloaking the fact that the program had to be drastically curtailed and cut back, and the expression "the War on Poverty" soon became rather a hollow mockery.

G: That seems to me raises two points: one, that if the criticism is made that OEO oversold at the beginning, I think that one could point to the very first speech President Johnson made, declaring an unconditional war on poverty. Perhaps the root source of it lies right there, rather than in anything that OEO subsequently did.

K: I don't think that anybody really knew how difficult it was going to be to eliminate poverty in this country. They spoke rather glibly

of the eleven billion or twelve billion dollar poverty gap, but that simply was a gap that could be bridged if you gave everybody who was below the poverty line enough money to get over the poverty line. But that still wouldn't do anything for the interlocking causes of poverty which we found existed. It was a very, very tough, dirty, mean, unpopular kind of war to fight. And we fought it with every weapon at our disposal, not having the Air Force, let's say, to supply the air cover to carry the war to its successful conclusion--and that was the money that would be necessary really to do the kind of job that was required.

G: The other point that you recalled was the whole money question. I have talked to some people in other divisions within OEO, and a member of the original task force in 1964 made the point that it wasn't a question of one billion as opposed to five billion--it was really one billion or five hundred billion; that you either were going to go for broke, or you were going to go half-way or a quarter of the way or not very far at all.

K: The OEO plan, the Five Year Plan, was never calculated to be the only thrust against poverty. This agency in its second year was to be spending at approximately the three-and-a-half billion dollar level; by the third year it might be five billion dollars. But that was only supposed to be the point, the spearhead, of major efforts that were being made. Well, by 1968 the nation was spending 25.7 billion dollars in the so-called Poverty Budget, but much of that was in transfer payments, welfare, Medicare, and so forth.

G: I had asked you earlier what experience you had had in dealing with the press. Let me ask you now, when you came to OEO was there a

procedure that you followed in dealing with adversity in the press?

K: My theory has always been that people in general are to be treated as decent and honorable human beings, and I never felt that I was in an adversary relationship with the press. Most of the reporters that I dealt with throughout the years, I think, became in a way my personal friends--not close social contacts, but even some of the meaner ones like Jack Carmody and Bob Walters of the Star and Nick von Hoffman and certain others, at least I think, felt that when they called here they would be treated with decency and with a real attempt to give them the facts that they wanted. It was not always easy to do this. Nonetheless, I think that as far as was conceivably possible we maintained a reasonably open shop. Carl Rowan, among others, said that he found this the easiest to deal with and the most honest and open public affairs division in Washington.

But it should be understood that dealing with the press, putting out press releases, answering questions, was only part of our responsibility. There was also another facet of it which was much more along the lines of what I had been familiar with in my experience in industry, and that was the preparation of the kinds of graphic materials, spots, advertising, recruiting materials, training materials, which could not be called press relations but were more in the area of the technical promotion of our programs.

G: Did this also serve as an educational function?

K: Very greatly as an educational function. For example, we began in 1966 to make first-quality motion pictures which were shown on television and before various organizational groups throughout the country, and which were not promotional films. They were not in any

sense "PR" films; they were training; they were recruiting; they had an educational function. As a matter of fact, one of the first things I did when I came to this agency was to repair a disastrous Head Start film that had been made and which was bottled up because nobody could figure out a way of resolving the film problems. I was able to take care of this and make it eminently releaseable.

Since that time we have entered the Academy Awards in three successive years, and I think unprecedented in the history of any government agency or private agency for that matter or even private firm, we have received three nominations for Academy Awards in the documentary field--three in a row--and we won the Academy Award in 1967. We published a weekly news summary; we published a monthly magazine on the war on poverty, which is disseminated very widely throughout the country; and in addition put out brochures and booklets and fact materials on every program in the agency.

G: What was the documentary that won that Academy Award?

K: That was called "The Year Towards Tomorrow." It was a film about VISTA, and it was intended to be a recruiting film.

G: Is there any way of measuring the success or the impact of this kind of educational attempt?

K: I think the only way you can measure it is in the kind of support your program gets when it's under attack. In 1967 when everyone thought that OEO was going to go down the drain, that it was going to be dismembered, that it was going to fail, when the agency failed to receive a pay raise, when our funds were cut off and programs were being shut down, more than 650 editorials appeared in newspapers throughout the country defending the program, and defending various

specific parts of the program like VISTA, like Head Start, like Job Corps even. And I think that this indicates the fact that this educational process was taking place.

Now, one thing that I instituted during my tenure here was a periodic letter that might go out every two or three weeks to a list of about 200 newspaper editors and publishers and columnists throughout the country, simply apprising them of what was happening in the program, making available to them items of interest, documents of interest; and this also served to keep them current with what was happening and make them feel that they had people here they could know, they could reach and contact.

G: Was this kind of an effort duplicated in other agencies in government, or was this a kind of unique thing?

K: I really think that what we did here was unique. I don't think any other agency was as aggressive as we in getting our story across. And of course a great deal of this stemmed from Mr. Shriver's own almost instinctive awareness of the communications values and requirements of everything that was done.

G: Along the lines of this educational effort, one question which I haven't yet resolved in my mind focuses around who the Poverty Program attempts to reach. I can't recall offhand what year it was, but the issue did come up that people with, for example, arrest records, or the real unworthy poor--the people who could cause trouble--if they were taken into the poverty program, usually there was sort of a negative reaction in the press. How do you deal with this kind of thing? Was the Poverty Program designed to get to these people? For example, in the Job Corps.

K: Yes. Well, I think the Poverty Program was designed to get to these people, but the problem was that we found that if you did not screen the people who got into the Job Corps, what you were getting was hoodlums, dope takers, and those who were capable of crimes of violence. Therefore, more rigid requirements for screening had to be set up. But even so, the Job Corps was reaching the hardest core of the poor youth.

Now I think that one problem that has to be remembered, or one issue that has to be remembered, is that for the life of this agency and for the period that I was involved in the agency, our major struggle was to get a bill through Congress every year and to get an authorization--much less an appropriation. This was tragic, but what it meant was that, for example, in the year 1967-68 almost the entire effort for a whole year of Mr. Shriver and his senior staff was an effort to get a bill through Congress to get the program passed. This divided his attention. It meant that he couldn't devote himself really to substantive and programmatic issues. So naturally the program slid because he was the kind of leader who inspired great personal loyalty and following; and yet, when his attention was focused elsewhere things had a tendency to slip and become careless. So because of his requirement of passing a bill every year, of getting it through Congress--of getting the authorization, much less the appropriation--we had to be much more careful and cognizant of our public image, of things that would be held against us, than the ordinary agency would be. So when somebody in Houston, Texas, ordered seven telescopic rifle sights and claimed that he wanted to beat them not into plowshares, but microscope sights to be used in

the Manpower Program, this was a cause celebre and became a tremendous issue that we had to resolve. So what it meant was getting the man to dress up in his cowboy suit and go on television in Houston and explain with rugged integrity what he was really doing, and getting the story out to the press, and finding out that actually, yes, rifle sights could be converted. The same thing happened with the "Hate Whitey" school in Nashville; the congressional committees--the McLellan Committee and the Eastland Committee which were pursuing us. So everything became a public relations problem. And instead of being able to focus attention on substantive programmatic issues, we were constantly on the periphery dealing with the inconsequentials that became the scandals of the day--the Black Arts Theater, the rifle sights, Willie Wright in Newark, saying, "Everybody get a gun," and the International Inn incident, Syracuse. They occurred over and over and over again, and these were the things that the press seized upon.

G: Can you add to this, and I'm asking I think for an opinion which you may not have any direct knowledge about, but that is, you say that Shriver had to devote a good portion of his time to getting the bill through Congress. Was this the result of the absence of the necessary White House support for OEO in Congress?

K: My own feeling is that beginning with the year 1966 and carrying through to the beginning of 1968, the President lost heart in this program. His attentions were diverted elsewhere. I think he was trying to create a unified nation around our struggle in Viet Nam. He also felt that he had done more for the poor, more for the black, than anybody in history; and I think he was alarmed and discouraged

when black militancy, black violence, press criticism of the Poverty Program began to come forth. I think that for a period of more than a year, Mr. Shriver himself, and the agency itself, felt personna non grata in the White House.

In the debate over the appropriations for 1966, I believe, when there was an opportunity for the Senate to come in with a higher figure and then have it compromised down to the one-and-a-half billion that the House had recommended, Senator Dirksen reported on the floor of the Senate that when President Johnson found out that the Senate was going to approve a 1.75 billion dollar appropriation, he fulminated like Hurricane Inez.

Well, this kind of political judgment which prevented the agency from having any kind of wiggle room, as it was called at that time, was an indication to me that the President was seeking a noncontroversial way out; that he wanted to hold the budget and hold the line; and we never felt that we were being given particular support in the White House.

Now it is true that when we had the premier showing of our film about Head Start, "Pancho," about a Mexican-American boy, it was shown in the White House. President Johnson was there and spoke movingly about education, but Head Start was always a program that was noncontroversial and popular. These were the things that he wanted to be identified with; these were the things that Mrs. Johnson identified herself with. The miseries of CAP and of Job Corps were something he wouldn't touch.

For example, in Christmas of 1965, the boys of the Job Corps in nearby camps had signed a huge Christmas card for the President

with a thousand signatures, or whatever it was, on it. We stood by waiting for a White House call for one or two Job Corps boys to come up and give this card to the President. The event was made more poignant by the fact that a Job Corps boy who lived here, had worked here in this office in Washington, had gone up to Camp Catoctin to deliver presents from the Vice President's office, and had been killed in an automobile accident on his return. He was the one who was supposed to have given the card to the President. We never got a call from the White House. In November of 1965 celebrating the first anniversary of the first grants, there was supposed to be a White House ceremony. We prepared for it, waited until the last minute. We were never called for it. So events of this kind transpired over and over again, and with rumors and reports that the President was extremely unhappy with us, and that Shriver was going to be replaced. That was the kind of aura and climate in which we worked.

G: What prompted that question were several things, one of which was Moynihan's statement in his latest book, "Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding," where he says that within the first year of OEO's life, it was in serious trouble with the White House. I was wondering what kind of evidence would support this kind of statement. He doesn't cite any evidence, but he does make the statement.

K: I think at the very beginning when the President realized what Community Action and maximum feasible participation were going to mean, and that federal money for the first time would be going to private, non-profit corporations, he, being a good politician, knew that it would be very difficult to make it work; that it would set

up rival organizations to the Mayors; that the Governors would rebel against having their turf invaded. And of course the President was right. I think his defense against that was to kind of back-step and say, "Well, I really don't have anything to do with it."

G: Curiously, I have asked other people--I'm not sure whether you want to answer this--but if the President is that politically astute a person--he has been called a political animal, living, breathing, and always living in a political environment--did he have an understanding of what Community Action was in 1964 when the bill was passed under his aegis?

K: No, I don't really think he did. I don't think anybody fully had an understanding of what Community Action was. I think that the President was wary of Communtiy Action. It may or may not be apocryphal, maybe you'll hear it again, but the President is said to have said to Mr. Shriver or others, "I just want you to make sure that no crooks, Communists, or cocksuckers get into this program." And we were plagued by all three at various times in our career.

G: I thought it was kooks and sociologists.

K: No.

G: Or is that another one?

K: That's the cleansed version of this story. The other sounds much more in the vein of the President.

G: Are you saying that what was politically controversial and could have a backlash that affected him directly lost his support?

K: I think the President was in a very unenviable spot. Number one, he was saddled with Viet Nam which, during the second year of the program in 1965, started to draw us in and require much more of our resources

to be expended. Number two, I think he was unpleasantly surprised by the reaction that the program was having, by the controversy that surrounded it, by the fact that people were just not saying, "Boy, isn't this great; finally we're being done for," and that they didn't shout hosannas of gratitude to the President. I also think that around that time he was becoming somewhat irritated by the criticisms of Bobby Kennedy on Viet Nam; and having a Kennedy relative in this agency, I think, made him feel somewhat distrustful of its goals and its purposes.

G: If I could continue that point, it is my own observation at the very outset, and I don't think that it's a unique thing--after all, the President had inherited the Kennedy Administration--but at the outset there were a lot of people who subsequently became Bobby Kennedy people in OEO. I was wondering if there was any discussion of this very point, if perhaps the President identified OEO with the Kennedy clique.

K: I think just from Shriver's presence here and the fact that this agency attracted people who were ardent enthusiasts and supporters of its social theories, and who didn't feel loyalty to the President above their commitment to their social theories. And as I say, when I came down here, this place was a sieve. Nothing could be kept a secret, even things which rightfully should have been kept secret. There was no such thing as an internal memorandum; there was no such thing as loyalty. Everybody had his own line to some reporter, and that's the way things were being done here. And the President would get furious when stories would be leaked around him of things that he knew nothing about. Now, this does not mean that the President

was right in the kind of watchfulness, almost fanatic watchfulness, he kept on the news ticker. I think Mr. Nixon has done a very wise thing in getting the ticker out of his office. The President would watch this thing like a hawk and if something came over the ticker that he didn't like, bang! He'd be on the telephone to Shriver or to somebody else in the agency to get a story out, to get a story squashed, to get things corrected. I don't think that has to exist that way. I think--

G: And that would come right to you then.

K: And that would come right to me, that's right. I remember several of those.

G: Would you comment on some of those, please?

K: I don't remember them in detail, but there was one occasion when Maurice Dawkins, the Director of Civil Rights of this agency, was making a speech and said in a statement to the press that we were supporting the ten-billion dollar Marshall Plan, and that what we were spending now on poverty was not enough. This came over the wire in somewhat garbled form. The President responded immediately, called Shriver who called me and said, "You've got to stop Dawkins." I called Dawkins and told him to shut up and come home from his trip--in polite terms--and what he could and couldn't say in the future, and this was it.

I know there were other occasions. People in Wasington, D.C., who had said things about the President or about the program, and there was this, I think, almost paranoia about getting the story straight, or getting the story the way <u>he</u> wanted it. I always felt that there should be a far more open society involved in the

dissemination of news about domestic issues. But I can understand the President. I think the President's great failing was that he confused the country with himself. I don't think this permitted him to always exercise the best and most objective judgment about the value of controversy.

G: Which Saul Alinsky calls the "music of democracy."

K: It's not always very musical, and it can be very hurtful. I think when you're playing that piano the way Alinsky is, you think it's music. When you're trying to read or trying to do an abstract mathematical problem, it's noise. So it all depends on who was behind the piano and who is trying to do something else, and the President was trying to do something else at that time.

G: The Office of Public Affairs was also to provide to Congress--as well as the White House--speeches, information and satisfy other kinds of requests. Were there other than the kinds of things that you've just talked about--requests from the White House for information, speeches--?

K: There was a constant flow of requests from the White House. First of all, we submitted to the White House every week a full report on all stories that appeared in the press that week, all major happenings. Second, any grant that was to be given out over a million dollars, or any grant which we thought of interest to the White House, was reported to it so that the White House could make the announcement if necessary. We were continuously furnishing the White House with ideas of questions and answers for press conferences. Whenever there was a major statement that the President made in the domestic field, there was a White House man who would call us and request that we

get the story out to our constituency and asking for a full report on whom we spoke to and what the impact was.

G: Do you know of the President's having been surrounded by people--I'm thinking specifically of his White House staff--who might have been able to soften the blows that would seem to be coming in?

K: I think that while Moyers was over there, Moyers was able to soften these blows to some extent. I think when Moyers left, there was nobody. Califano was ostensibly the person who was the champion of this program, and as a matter of fact in our fourth or fifth press seminar when there were vast and hard line rumors that OEO was going to be cut apart by the President, Califano even went so far as to come over to this agency and speak to the press and answer questions and deny that this was being done, which was an unprecedented move. Jim Gaither, Califano's assistant, I worked with in the preparation of Presidential messages and statements about poverty. But, on the whole, I did not feel that there was anybody at the White House who really supported this program, who really understood it, and was really trying to speak up for it in the highest councils.

G: They didn't have the kind of sympathy then, not only for the programs, but for the people who were running these programs?

K: I did not feel that.

G: Could you go in a little bit to the relationship between this Office of Public Affairs, or OEO generally, and the Congress and those congressional sessions? What did you have to do?

K: I myself prepared Mr. Shriver's statements for every session, every congressional hearing, every congressional presentation, in the three years that I was here. With the cooperation of the Management

Division and the program heads, we would write the congressional presentation. We would make ourselves available at the hearings to give texts to the press and to explain to the press what was going on. We would call press conferences in which Mr. Shriver could explain, let's say, the budget or the appropriation or the authorization or changes that were made. Also, when congressmen called and wanted us to furnish them with texts or materials or anything like that, we hastily responded.

G: Would they call this office, or would they operate through the Office of Congressional Relations?

K: If they called this office, we would put it through the Office of Congressional Relations.

G: In the history, the section on Public Affairs said that it provided a channel of communications between headquarters and the field. What was this kind of operation?

K: I established in the seven regional offices a public affairs division which was made up of a public affairs director and maybe one assistant--it was very small. Nonetheless, on a regular basis we would communicate with these people what was happening of national interest, and especially in the year 1967-68 they would furnish me every morning with a teletyped report on what was happening in their region and what had happened, both for good or for ill, during the previous day.

G: So it does coordinate.

K: Oh, yes.

G: Also, I noticed in the history that Public Affairs has a Program and Evaluation Section. What did this do, and what areas of need have you found, and what kind of improvements have come out of this

enterprise?

K: The Program and Evaluation Section was established since my departure as Director of Public Affairs. Kenny Sparks, who succeeded me, was in charge of evaluation of public information programs of USIA, and is much more oriented in this direction than I was. However, at various times under my aegis--during my regime, if you want to call it--we would send out questionnaires to Community Action agencies to find out how well our communications were being received, to find out what they wanted in the way of communications, asked them to comment on what their problems were in communications--how we could help resolve them. This led to the weekly news summary, to the various newsletters that were created for Head Start, for rural Programs, and so forth, and to the magazine, Communities in Action, which was to fill a specific need, to the motion pictures and filmstrips which we made available. Then when they were sent out, we would send a questionnaire back evaluating their content and their effectiveness.

G: This gets back to the press again and I'd like to ask you this. One can't help but notice that some of the opposition ot OEO took the form of a statement which would receive a headline in the press, and it wouldn't matter whether that statement were true or false because the damage would be done, particularly if it made page one. And the OEO rebuttal, if it was published at all, would make page twenty-six. Besides, the charge was always more sensational than the reply and so on. Why, in the case for example of congressmen, was this kind of thing done, and could you comment generally on the impact?

K: Because this made good headlines. Because many, many--most congressmen, I would say, represent relatively conservative areas, either in the suburbs or in the South or what have you. And to show their opposition to OEO or to cudgel the program for waste or what have you was just good politics for the folks back home. As I say, there were ideological fanatics here in the agency who would leak to a reporter anything that was going on that he didn't like, and all of this made good grist for the reportorial mill. What we tried to build eventually was not only a rapidity of response which would mean that we would come out in the same story or another story, but reporters in general became accustomed to calling us and say, "Hey, we have a hot one here, what have you got to say about it?" So we gave it to them in the same story. This was our goal.

G: Could you cite, and you have already--you're sort of preempting some of this--but could you cite examples of what you think are balanced responsible reporting?

K: I think by and large the Christian Science Monitor series, the Washington Post series--we published a compendium of, or a volume which compiled a compilation of series on the War on Poverty which came out in these early years, and there was much balanced reporting that was done.

G: Is this the William Selover Christian Science--?

K: Well, Bill Selover's Christian Science Monitor series; there was one in the Washington Post under the direction of Al Friendly; there was one in Columbus--most of the major papers, I think, conducted pretty good, well reported, and honest evaluations of the programs. Any time reporters actually went out in the field and bothered to look at programs, I would say that they came out with pretty good reporting.

I think that in my tenure here, there were very, very few really irresponsible jobs of reporting of some of the major stories. I would say that of the magazines only Nation's Business, which is an organ of the United States Chamber of Commerce--which from the beginning to end never gave a kind word to the OEO--that remained intransigent. And I would say that the St. Louis Globe-Democrat and the Chicago Tribune also remained intransigent in their opposition to the programs. But by-and-large I would say that every other major newspaper in the country, and most of the minor ones, were fair and accurate in their reporting. Of the columnists I think a woman named Shirley Scherblo, who writes a column and is also an author, who wrote a book called Poverty Is Where the Money Is for Barron's, and Scott Allen of the Scott Allen Report, were about the only intransigent editorialists.

G: How would you classify Joseph Loftus? You mentioned him earlier.

K: Joe Loftus, who is now in the government as special assistant to the Secretary of Labor for Communications, I think was [a] hard, critical, disinterested, and detached reporter who did much more good on balance for this program in keeping it honest than he did it harm by releasing embarrassing details.

G: It was Loftus, I think, who released the Kilmer report.

K: That was the Kilmer report on the Job Corps reflecting the criticisms of a Rutgers professor that we were running a paramilitary installation and so forth--yes, that was Loftus.

G: I was just wondering, if a reporter who gets a hold of this information feels that it can do some damage to the program if it's publicized--are there ever instances where that reporter would contact OEO people and not so much clear it, but to find out what kind of repercussion

it would have?

K: Oh, yes. But, generally if he has got a scoop, he'll print it first and then wait and see what the reaction is.

G: Which can do some harm to the program.

K: There's no question about it--no question that it can do some harm. Nonetheless, this was a report. The corporation which received it had made an attempt to keep it secret. OEO had not even received a copy of the report. So Loftus had a good story and he wrote it.

G: Did you ever feel overwhelmed in this office?

K: I think that one was constantly overwhelmed. The work was from 8 o'clock in the morning until any time of night we went home. I had a telephone switchover which put a telephone in my apartment so that we had twenty-four hour service, and that call rang at least once or twice every night--on a hot story, a lot more than that. We were constantly under pressure from Mr. Shriver to get a good story, to get the story right; constantly under pressure to tell our story better. Mr. Shriver was very critical of the job that was being done, and was not ever overly generous of his praise. At one point, as a matter of fact [he] so criticized this office and our failure to do the job that I took personal exception to it, and he was forced, in a way, to come down here to speak to a meeting of the entire staff and let them know how much he thought of what they were doing. It was an overwhelming job. Shriver was right. This was the hottest spot in Washington by far.

G: Again, to go to that maximum feasible publicity article, do you believe that the rhetoric did oversell the product? I mean, the charge is made over and over again that the high expectations of the poor were

impelled or exacerbated by the rhetoric.

K: My own feeling is that what happened to the program happened not as a result of heightened rhetoric, but of lessened appropriations. If we had been able to get the appropriations we had anticipated, and had every reason to believe would be ours, these hopes would have been able to be realized. I think also that this program coincided with the beginnings of militancy and separatism between black and white in this country, of violence, and of the new attempts to gain power by means other than simply the opening of representative doors for participation. And it is this that has been the cause, not the effect of what this program has tried to achieve. If you go back over the rhetoric, sure, some of it was inflated; some of it was overly optimistic. But by and large, I think that the story we told from the very beginning was balanced.

Nobody made a promise that everybody was going to become rich overnight. From the very beginning it was emphasized that these were going to be self-help programs. Now, sure, we put out figures that the programs have reached so many millions and so many millions were helped. It was difficult to define precisely what these terms meant. Record-keeping was very hard to come by; we were dealing with the software programs, not hardware programs; we were dealing with people. How could you say how many folks were brought out of poverty by a neighborhood health center or by a Head Start program, by a literacy program. I think by and large the problem was that in the putting together of initial legislation most of the programs involving OEO were slow to mature. They were not the kinds of things which could show a paycheck or an immediate raise in income and

produce an end to poverty that way. The patience of, especially the black militants, simply began to run out on us.

G: This is a bit difficult to phrase, but you mentioned the coincidence of the rise of black militancy with the program. I'm just wondering if OEO had operated under the Kennedy Administration as opposed to the Johnson Administration where, if there were any charges of the so-called credibility gap were made, I wonder if OEO would have gotten this overlap--just the very fact that it was a Johnson program. I'm wondering if some of the criticism came from that.

K: I think we would have gotten the overlap because in a sense we stimulated black power. We gave black people in this country more power, more opportunity to get on a platform, more opportunity to take positions of leadership, than any other program in the government. Consequently, we both bred this and brought it down upon us.

G: Again, this article--I'd like to have you reply to it. Did you ever write in reply to that Columbia article?

K: I never wrote in reply to it, because I thought that by and large it was fair and reasonably accurate, and I was reasonably well quoted in it. And I didn't feel it really was a criticism. I felt that it demonstrated the fact that here was a group of professionals in the field of communications who were trying to do a job.

G: They wrote in the article that a credibility gap comparable to the one that existed in the Viet Nam war existed at OEO, and I'm going to quote them, "that it was a result of excessive eagerness to please the White House." I'd like to have your reply to that.

K: All I can say is that in the first year that may have been true, but I think that starting in 1965, as I said, in that article we tried to

to tell an honest story insofar as we could and insofar as we ourselves knew the facts. We opened our doors and our books to reporters; we brought them in and let them talk to anybody they wanted to; we conducted educational seminars; we got the message out through the field offices. I don't know what more you can do to tell a decent factual story. Basically, what we said to reporters was: "If you want to know the truth about the War on Poverty, go out and see it for yourselves."

G: Did many do that?

K: Yes, many did it. And as I said, when they came back and reported on what they found, by-and-large their accounts were fair--not altogether favorable because there were things wrong with the program, but in general very supportive of what we were trying to do.

G: Has OEO consulted with its critics, such as people like Michael Harrington or even Daniel Patrick Moynihan, or Sanford Kravetz--people who were either with OEO and left and wrote articles, or never were with OEO?

K: Number one, what these people have criticized fundamentally is the fact that the program never mounted enough of an impact because of the dollar shortage. This is what Harrington says--it never became a war on poverty; it was always a skirmish on poverty. Kravetz, after all, was responsible for many of the demonstrations programs which became ongoing national emphasis programs. He was here during the period in which OEO was making its moves and experimenting. Mr. Moynihan, to my knowledge, didn't set foot in the doors of this agency from the time he left Washington to the present. I think his book is balderdash; I think it is poorly conceived; it is not factual;

it is built on prejudice; and I think that, unfortunately, Mr. Moynihan is still trying to vindicate his original Moynihan report and that this has become more-or-less his King Charles' head.

G: Did the Public Affairs office have anything to do, either in response to or in providing information for, the kinds of investigation such as that of the GAO?

K: When any investigating agency, including GAO, requested information of any kind, generally Public Affairs had a hand in putting it together because we were the repository of files, facts, reports, and could write them up.

G: What about the latest GAO report? I don't think it has been published.

K: The latest GAO report was based on investigations of field programs by-and-large.

G: How did this office work with the Information Office?

K: This office uses the Information Office as a resource. It supplies the Information Office with talent in projecting and presenting statistical information. It works in close cooperation with the Information Office; it does not feel that it is in conflict with it or competition to that office.

G: How would you, having been here since 1965, describe the quality of OEO personnel, people you've come into contact with?

K: I think, in the beginning of the program, there were unique and rather formidable individuals here--individuals as individualists, for better or for worse. I think that over the past years, especially in the last year, many of those giants have departed for a variety of reasons. They have become disaffected. They have received more challenging opportunities elsewhere. They have felt that the goals

of the program could not be carried out with the minimal funds that were produced for it. And I would say that what we have now, with some notable exceptions, is a rather secondary group of skilled but somewhat bloodless administrative types and bureaucrats--and maybe this is appropriate.

G: Is this a deliberate policy--to bring in more so-called skilled administrators?

K: I think so. I think this has been Mr. Harding's desire. You just don't find too many Sandy Kravetzes and people like that running around loose.

G: Or Adam Yarmolinskys.

K: Or Adam Yarmolinskys.

G: Would you concur in the judgment that had Yarmolinsky been here from the beginning that perhaps OEO wouldn't have suffered the kind of problems that it did simply because certain policy decision or some actions wouldn't have gone in that direction?

K: I concur with the thesis expressed by many that from the very beginning, with Mr. Shriver dividing his time for two years with the Peace Corps--spending three days a week here, two days a week at the Peace Corps, trying to run both operations and without a strong deputy of his own choosing, the program suffered greatly. Internecine warfare was permitted to be carried out; assassinations in the night; cloak and dagger activities; and a general failure, I think, really to subject programs and procedures to hard evaluative judgments. I think obviously the program suffered from this.

Now I wasn't here at that time. I can only judge Yarmolinsky's qualifications by hearsay, but evidently he was a man that you could

not fool, he had great courage, he was hard as they come, and he had great feeling for what the programs were trying to do, and he would not have let some of the things happen which did happen and which hurt the agency considerably.

G: Would you say that the almost brutal jettisoning of Yarmolinsky at the very beginning somewhat typified the kind of treatment that OEO was to get whenever a political controversial issue such as that arose?

K: I guess the point is that, at every stage of the game, it was necessary to get the bill through. There were sacrifices that had to be made, and Mr. Yarmolinsky was one of those sacrifices. And it was the President who sacrificed him.

G: You've mentioned that you feel that the type of person and the type of administrator at OEO or the type of bureaucrat and so on has changed--you've seen an observeable change. Would you say the same thing about OEO generally--its programs, its direction, the way it's going, and so on?

K: Yes, I think that there were critical benchmarks in this program, watersheds in which the original thrust changed and was blunted. I don't think there's any question about the fact that, let's say, Haryou Act, in New York and at Syracuse brought community action in the sense of community competition, community warfare, the challenge of the community, of city hall--brought it to its high water mark, and it retreated from that. There's no question about it in my mind. That's not to say that that retreat was either wrong or inadvisable or shouldn't have taken place, but that's what happened.

G: What kind of a man is Shriver?

K: I think he is an extremely intuitive man. I think he is an intelligent man who is much more of an intellectual than he lets one believe. He is a very good man in the sense of being a practicing Christian. He has great respect and admiration and affection for congressmen because he shares with the Kennedy family, I think, a great respect for people who get elected to office. He does not have any patience with bureaucrats, professional administrators, budgeteers, sycophants, and so forth. He demands an extremely high quality of work and a total devotion to the job. He is a man who does not normally think of such niceties as family responsibility or the need of tired men to get time off because he himself has a seemingly endless and inexhaustible supply of energy. I think that Mr. Shriver tends to be an enthusiast. He has the reputation of being a salesman, but I don't think he really is a salesman as such. I think he gets excited about something, enthusiastic about it, and can transmit this excitement or enthusiasm to someone else. He has a memory for numbers and for details which is quite wonderful--not as perfect as he thinks it is, which led him to come out with I think one of the classical and typical remarks of his which said, "If you can't be accurate, be precise." And I think it's one of these characteristics which underminds some confidence in him when figures turned out to be more precise than accurate.

G: Do you know why he left OEO?

K: Good Lord, he had been in this agency for four years. He'd been in the Peace Corps for five years. At the point when the legislation for 1968 passed the Congress, he had achieved a political miracle. And where do you go from there! He also had hopes and thoughts, I

think, of running for political office in Illinois. He was tired, and I believe made the right decision in getting out of OEO.

G: You mentioned before we turned on the tape that you had met Lyndon Johnson in official capacities, either at meetings and so on. I wonder if you would like to provide for this tape any insight that you might have about the man.

K: Everytime I saw Lyndon Johnson--and I can't pretend to be a close associate, confidant or anything else--I always felt that he was singularly detached from the event that was taking place. I felt that he was troubled; I felt that he was not a happy man in the times I saw him. I always felt that he was a man who acted and looked as if he were under deep sedation; that he had been given tranquilizers, and he had that look in his eye. He looked through you and around you rather than at you. When he talked, it was out of preoccupation with what was happening to him that was wrong. Even in the ten minute private conversation I had with him, I didn't feel that he was really listening--and he had no reason to listen to me. But in all the times I saw him, except on the occasion when he got up and spoke movingly and feelingly and deeply about his early days as a teacher and his early days in education, I always got the feeling that in the role of President of the United States, he was vastly troubled and vastly unhappy and that he was much better suited to being in his environment on the banks of the Pedernales rather than in the White House.

G: Is there anything you'd like to add to this tape?

K: I don't really know what this tape has accomplished in the way of contributing to the oral history of the Johnson years or of Johnson

himself. I think that what it may refer to more than any particular Administration is the public's insatiable knowledge for dirt, for gossip, for stories that titillate because they reveal all--the Administration, the White House's preoccupation with tidiness and orderliness, and of news management, the zeal of any public administrator to protect what he himself is doing, and the desire of the Congress to maintain control. I think all of these come to a single point of focus in the Office of Public Affairs, which is misunderstood by the bureaucracy--but one which I think is extremely necessary in a democracy in holding the doors of truth open, not serving as a screen of truth. I know, for example, that when we were having a problem in this agency with the release of evaluative reports, it was this office that wrote the guidelines which said that all evaluation reports will be made available to the press, and there were other instances of this. So I think a public affairs office should be the prod and the conscience of the agency. It should lead the agency rather than follow the agency. And even if it has to leak at times information to do this, I think this is the responsibility that it has.

G: Thank you very much.

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By Herbert J. Kramer

to the

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