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INTERVIEWEE: Covey T. Oliver

INTERVIEWER: Paige Mulhollan

DATE: December 2, 1968

M: Let's just identify you for the purposes of beginning. You're Covey T. Oliver, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and Coordinator for the Alliance for Progress.

O: U.S. Coordinator the Alliance for Progress.

M: And exactly what date did you assume this position, sir?

O: I took the oath on the 30th of June, 1967. In fact, I ran the Bureau throughout the month of June of that year while my predecessor, Dr. Lincoln Gordon, got a little rest before transferring to his position as President of Johns Hopkins. I was called by the President on the telephone on the evening of May 23, 1967, and asked to take the job. This call came as a complete surprise to me.

M: You were at that time teaching at the University of Pennsylvania?

O: Yes, I was back at the University of Pennsylvania Law School after having served as Mr. Johnson's Ambassador to Colombia from the first of May, 1964, until the end of September, 1966. I had felt that I had to leave Colombia to go back to the University of Pennsylvania in order to insure the education of my children. I frankly had a better arrangement as to fringe benefits and the like at the University than I had with the government. So I asked to be relieved, and the President knew why; and, nonetheless, he did ask me to take the position that you have described quite accurately as a "two-hatted

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position," as we say in government. One of Mr. Johnson's basic decisions about Latin America took place when he arranged for Ambassador Thomas C. Mann to come up from Mexico City to take the Assistant Secretaryship. At that time, Mr. Johnson also designated Mr. Mann as U. S. Coordinator of the Alliance for Progress, thus bringing into one man's area of responsibility both the conventional foreign relations with Latin America and the Alliance. I think that was quite wise and sound, because the Alliance for Progress did become, in the Johnson Administration--following the Kennedy administration initiatives--did become the keystone of our policy toward Latin America. Our foreign policy is very definitely oriented toward the pursuit of the national interest of the United States broadly viewed through doing all we can to help the neighboring countries of the Western Hemisphere to achieve total development. As they put it in Spanish, the objectives of the Alliance for Progress could be described as " bienestar" which is well being; "libertad" which is liberty; and "dignitad" or human dignity. And that reminds me, by free association that Mr. Johnson chose me twice, I think, for important representational positions in Latin America because of my rather complete mastery of Spanish. And I think he knew, too, especially from my check-out conversation with him after I left the Embassy, I talked to him on September 8, 1966, for well over an hour, and he listened attentively as I told him what I thought we ought to be doing that we were or were not doing as well as, in my view, I thought we could. And one of those matters, of course, was our awareness, or the need for greater

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awareness, of the psychological dimension in our relations with Latin America. Far too often, I think, North Americans, as they call us, with the best will in the world show a degree of insensitivity that actually causes difficulties in our relations. I hope that in the future the United States won't have to rely upon the few who grew up in an unusual environment and thus became, though of a blood and of religion Anglo-American, nonetheless did acquire a rather thorough understanding of the temperaments and outlooks of our Latin American neighbors. I believe that in the future many people who served in the Peace Corps, for example, in Latin America, will probably give us a very fine reservoir of Latin-sensitive North Americans.

M: You mentioned in your background there, did you have an early relationship with Mr. Johnson based on your Texas connections prior to your service in Colombia?

O: My first recollection of President Johnson was when he, as a beginning Congressman, stood on the back end of the Presidential train with Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the Missouri-Kansas and Texas railroad station in Austin in 1936. I knew by then that Mr. Johnson was the Congressman who represented Travis County in the Congress and I came to know him and to be well thought of by him, not through personal association with Mr. Johnson in those early years, but through the good offices, shall we say, the friendship of John and Nellie Connally. When I was the third-year class president of the Law School at the University of Texas in 1936, John Connally was a first year law student, and we formed a friendship then that continued over the years. It

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included my brother, John G. Oliver, who entered the Foreign Service of the United States in 1940, largely because when I sent him to Washington, I thought I had him set on the road of becoming a tax lawyer by working with the Internal Revenue Service for awhile. Instead, John Connally and Congressman Johnson pointed him toward the State Department, so I know from that that Mr. Johnson's interests in foreign affairs and especially in the inter-American aspect of foreign affairs goes back to his very earliest days as a Congressman. Well, the years went by. I haven't lived in Texas since 1941. I'm one of those who was called away by wartime service, and, as luck would have it, I never got back. But during those years, though we were out of touch for many years at a time, when the Kennedy Administration came in, in the early days of the talent search that was going on, none of my Eastern Ivy League friends--I was by then one of the leading professors at an Ivy League Law School, the University of Pennsylvania--but none of them got as far south as Philadelphia, apparently, in the talent search. So I wasn't tapped by any of my eastern friends, but it was John Connally, Secretary of the Navy, who rang me up in December before the Kennedy Administration came in and did me the honor of saying he would like for me to be Under-Secretary of the Navy, recalling that Vice President-elect Johnson had mentioned to him more than once that he thought that Covey Oliver ought to be brought back into government service sometime. I had left in 1949 to return to law teaching. So I know that all through those years with all the other people he knew, the names he added, the campaigns he carried on, that someway tucked off him mind--in the President's mind, in President Johnson's mind--was a general

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recollection of a Covey Oliver who had done well enough to be first man in his class at The University of Texas Law School, who came from Laredo, who knew Spanish and might be helpful in some way or another, and who had worked for the Department of State in Spain during World War II, and had carried on into European affairs. I'm very grateful to him for that. As to the relationship, though, it was always pretty much a Connally-based one. It was John Connally who took my younger brother, John Oliver, to see Congressman Johnson, and Congressman Johnson sent him over to the State Department. When I came up here, was called here in early war work, I, too, lived in the sub-basement of the Dodge Hotel. John Connally was still there then. I don't know whether he and Nellie had married, and he was up here without her or whether they married later. I just don't remember. I think they were married, though.

M: I believe they were married in the late 30's--'38, '39?

O: Yes, that's what I think. At any rate, several of us, including Tom Mann and Henry Holland and others that we had brought into do economic warfare work in Latin America, were all over there at the Dodge together where Mr. Johnson had lived when he was Administrative Assistant to Congressman Kleberg in his first appearance in Washington. So through John Connally over the years, the contact was maintained with the man who rose rapidly to his positions of political prominence and leadership prior to being nominated for the Vice Presidency. As to the position in Colombia, I know really very little. I recall that when Vice President Johnson was in Philadelphia, about 1962 or so, for a

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World Affairs Council luncheon at which he spoke, he said to me in the little reception that was held before the luncheon, calling me by name, "Covey, John Connally and I have talked several times about the desirability of your entering public service again." And I thanked him and said that I would be available for anything that the government needed me for. And that was the end of that. I should add that the job that Connally wanted me for in the Navy didn't eventuate because President Kennedy appointed Mr. [Paul] Fay, an old friend of his from San Francisco, to the Undersecretaryship. But I should add this--Connally persisted though in trying to get me in the Defense establishment, in the Defense Department here. He phoned me and said "Come down and let's talk about the General Counsel's job in the Navy." That's the other legal job--there are two. There's a Judge Advocate General of the Navy who is usually a uniformed career officer dealing with admiralty problems and international law problems and the like; and then there's the General Counsel who deals with the administrative, budget and organizational problems of the Navy department. As John Connally and I talked about the interest of his in trying to redescribe the office of General Counsel and put me in it, in the Navy Department, I think he came to see that I had become very much concerned about Latin America. You recall that this is the period of time when the Kennedy Administration had not yet named an Assistant Secretary. They went from inauguration until well into June before anybody was named to this position. So during that period I expressed, I talked I guess a little freely, to John about Latin America; and that resulted in his

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asking me for a quick resume which was dictated to his secretary in his office and sent by his messenger over to Attorney General Kennedy. It seems that Attorney General Kennedy had come calling on Connally and others asking them for suggestions for this Assistant Secretaryship side of the job that I am now in. So Connally put me forward for that. I was one of the, they say, twenty-three or twenty-four that were considered. As you know, it was offered to several, and after a somewhat confusing turndown by Dean Carl Spaeth of the Stanford Law School, the Kennedy Administration then assigned a career foreign service officer, Ambassador [Robert] Woodward, to the job. And it took some time for the position to shake down.

M: I interviewed Ambassador Woodward not long ago, as a matter of fact.

O: Well, during that period of time, John Connally was quite active on my behalf for this position, for the Assistant Secretaryship. That isn't generally known.

I would have takent it certainly because I've known for years that it was <u>the</u> key position as to our relations with Latin America.

M: Did Kennedy appoint you Ambassador to Colombia?

O: No, Mr. Johnson did. The Kennedy appointment was one that was more modest but fitted well with my academic schedule. President Kennedy's administration asked me to become the American member of the Inter-American Juridical Committee of the OAS. I was in Brazil as a Fulbright-Hayes professor at the University of Sao Paulo when the U. S. Government in the Kennedy Administration asked me to take that job. It was just dandy because I could teach nine months in this country and then spend

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three in Rio, the way the schedule worked. And I could use my international legal research time to re-enforce the study work that we were doing in the Inter-American Juridical Committee. I could keep abreast of inter-American affairs by being in Rio for three months of the year. The reason--I think I should say this because Secretary Connally knew it and undoubtedly communicated it to Mr. Johnson. My concern about inter-American affairs was really a second-round sense of involvement in inter-American affairs. What started me off was this. With World War II coming along and with an Ensign's Reserve commission in the Office of Naval Intelligence, I was naturally interested in using what few specialized talents I had as a lawyer and law professor. I'd had about two, three I guess: one was some knowledge of the law; two, some experience as a teacher because I'd taught five years at a law school; and, three, a far better than average mastery of Spanish and some facility, some capability, of getting along well with Latin Americans. Well, the upshot of the Latin American side of my nature in World War II was that I got called from Columbia University where I was doing graduate work by the Board of Economic Warfare right after Pearl Harbor, the Monday after Pearl Harbor, and was put to work in the Economic Warfare Program. We were there much concerned about the penetration of Latin America by the Axis powers, especially Germany. One of my jobs was to get together a list of Spanish speaking, preferably law-trained men of less than class A military profile, to be engaged and trained and sent to Latin America to be the head of our economic warfare programs. This was one of

the first manifestations of an economic dimension of US foreign affairs. I helped on that. I put a good many Spanish-speaking Southwest Texans on the list, several of whom have served in the position that I am now in since. And then I got ready to go into something more active. The Navy had caught up with me by then and realized, they had found out that I was a teacher, so they decided to make a meteorology teacher out of me. That's what they wanted--that was it. And I was no longer in the running for battleship duty or aircraft carrier duty and the like, so they were going to send me to Corpus Christi to teach meteorology. I know what would have happened. I would have spent two years learning to be a meteorologist and I would have probably just barely started on my teaching when the war ended, you see. But as luck would have it--I had nothing to do with it--the State Department and BEW and Treasury--

M: What is the BEW?

O: Board of Economic Warfare-- decided that they would agree on me to go to Spain to be the head of the economic warfare there--agree in the sense that the three agencies would not insist each on sending their own man. There was one person--Oliver. They would agree on him to represent all three of them.

M: Remarkable--an agreement between three agencies!

O: So, I was sent to Spain. I was told, "Oliver, it's a lot tougher duty in Spain than whatever other duty you think you could pull with the Navy. The Germans are apt to invade the country, people are starving to death." This, that, and the other. Anyway, I went to Spain, and

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thanks to the fortunes of war, none of the bad things happened. I spent two years becoming very, very attracted to one of the world's finest and most fantastic people, the Spanish. I used Spanish continuously, and I got to where I could speak it with a Castilian accent as well as with a Mexican-American one, or a Mexican one, I should say, or a Latin American one. And I could use one or the other as I saw fit. And, anyway, I'm slowly getting to my point, here: despite the French jest that Europe ends at the Pyrenees, the two years in Spain got me involved in the settlement of World War II. I could go into the details. It was because the Treasury Department and others felt that the crumbling Germans had hidden assets in Spain and in other neutral countries and the hidden assets tied into reparations and restitution of looted property. And I was soon drawn into our occupation problems in Euorpe including reparation and all that, and into the making of the peace treaties. So, the rest of the time I was in government, I was in European affairs. There were years, the years went by which I didn't speak a word of Spanish, didn't see anybody who spoke Spanish, began to learn conference Russian by ear because we heard the same phrases so many times. And all during that period I kept worrying; I'm wondering what's happening in Latin America. But I didn't worry about it very keenly, keenly enough to go back to it, even when I went back to university life in 1949. I was invited to the law faculty at Berkeley then. And I carried with me a set of developed interests in Europe. Some important things were happening there--NATO, Coal and Steel Community, Marshall Plan; and the Ford Foundation gave my

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law school some money so I could go back and forth to Europe and lecture at the Hague Academy in International Law, do research work in Luxenbourg on the Coal and Steel Community and so forth. So the years slipped by until 1958 came and the now-Vice-President-elect of the United States, Mr. Nixon, was received badly in several countries in Latin America. And the way that Nixon was received in Latin America caused me very grave concern. It brought to the fore all of the latent concern that I had had about our inter-American relations. What were the bases of my concern? We courted the Latin Americans during World War II. We couldn't live without their products. We told them we would pay them high prices for them. We were grateful to them for their collaboration, those that broke relations with the Axis, those who fought with us in Europe as the Brazilians did, and the Mexicans. And as soon as the war was over, we dropped them.

M: More apathy then--

O: That's right. We were engaged in other parts of the world--Europe, and facing problems in Asia. We were at long last taking our place as a responsible leader on a world-wide basis. We didn't do much for the Latin Americans, certainly not much was done by Truman and Dean Acheson, both men whom I admire greatly.

M: European-oriented, primarily.

O: That's right. And practically nothing was done in either the Eisenhower Administration, in my view, except that the Eisenhower Administration, because of its rhetoric, all of this talk against creeping socialism and undoing TVA and all of that, managed to leave the Latin

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Americans with the feeling that the United States was an old-fashioned, soulless, capitalistic country of about an 1870 model, which we aren't. The Latin Americans had loved Franklin Roosevelt, though he didn't do much for them except they got good prices during World War II for their commodities. He had no specific program; but he did have, Franklin Roosevelt did have sensitivity. He is the author of the Good Neighbor Policy, which didn't cost us one red cent. All it required was sending Cordell Hull to Montevideo in 1933 to renounce the unilateral Monroe Doctrine; which a lot of people seem to forget we did, but we did renounce it in 1933. Roosevelt had caught the attention of the Latin Americans. They truly believed that the United States was on the march. That we were engaged in social reform and change, as we certainly were, and Lyndon Johnson was a part of that as a vigorous young Congressman from Texas. But along came the Eisenhower Administration and communicated the wrong image of the United States and didn't do anything for them either. I know Milton Eisenhower tried to help. I know he realized this, but that wasn't enough. I respect everything that Dr. Milton Eisenhower has done, and I understand why the Administration as a whole didn't do much more. I understand those things, but, nonetheless, it didn't. Mr. Dulles's concern about the communist menace sometimes seemed to the Latin Americans to be pushing them farther than they wanted to go more rapidly. And there wasn't much in the way of really close links between the United States and Latin America during this period. And along came, almost as a flash of summer lightning, the happenings concerning Vice President Nixon. Well, at that time, I looked around in American legal education

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of which I was a part. I don't know how many law professors there are in the United States, maybe 2500, maybe less, maybe 2000. But as a group they are very able men; very able men because, well they have to be at the very top two or three of their classes even to be considered. And in my little world of American legal education, I couldn't count, literally couldn't count, five men who were seriously involved in the public service side of their law professorships full-time on Latin American affairs. And in my own little world, I said to myself, "You've got to try to help generate more interest in Latin America, train the graduate students, point some young lawyers toward work in Latin America." I knew that my young colleagues by then at the University of Pennsylvania were very much interested in and were involved in going to the new African countries to help them create legal institutions. I had four or five bright young colleagues and a dean all going to Africa to help create law schools and the judicial systems and the administrative systems in the new countries south of the Sahara. All to the good. The only thing that worried me was that there wasn't a single one in that faculty or any comparable faculty interested in Latin America. So that's how I got back--it was because of the way Nixon was received. Otherwise, I suppose I would have continued rocking along in Atlantic community affairs. Any my intention in getting back was to induce and train others to do the jobs. Instead, maybe for want of competition--if so, this is worse--I got reinvolved myself. I suppose my basic decision there, one that shows the nature of the involvement, I remember calling my wife and five children together to consider whether we should accept an invitation from the University of

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Paris to spend a Sabbatical lecturing there, and there was also one in from a Middle Eastern university. And we decided that if we were serious about Latin America, that we ought to turn both of these down and apply for an invitation from a Latin American university. And then I chose Brazil for the simple reason that any way you look at that map over there of South America, Brazil is over half the area, over half the population, over half the promise, and at least half the problem. And yet Brazil was a country that I didn't know in the way that I knew the hispanic countries. So I got appointed, thanks to the generosity of the law faculty of the University of Sao Paulo, as a Fulbright-Hayes Professor there. This was known to John Connally. It was quite unusual, as a matter of fact, here in Foggy Bottom. I don't know anyone else with a background of having been an Ambassador and an Assistant Secretary who has lived in one of these countries without the benefit of any diplomatic privilege, automobile, cheap whiskey, or any of the rest of it. I am very proud that my wife and five children, dog, and I went on our own to Brazil, made our way in the Brazilian economy and Brazilian society with no diplomatic privileges.

M: It gives you a good appreciation of some of the realities.

O: Well, yes it does. It gives you an appreciation of them, certainly. It gives you a feel for the common people. Well, here I am back in inter-American affairs, Brazil--this is where I started this ramble a minute ago. The Kennedy Administration asked me to become the American member of the Inter-American Juridical Committee. That was just fine. I could continue my university work, I could develop some courses in inter-American affairs, attract some students, get some support from the

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Ford Foundation for research projects and the like, and so it went until February 4, 1964, when I was called and told that President Johnson wanted me to be his Ambassador in Colombia. And I'm coming to the Johnson reminiscences. Truthfully, my feeling was that I'd rather continue doing what I was doing. So I said to myself, President Johnson doesn't know in detail what I'm up to. He knows in general terms that I'm perhaps a reasonably estimable fellow. He certainly doesn't owe me anything politically. I've got to explain or have someone explain to him what I'm doing, because I really think that it would be better for me to stay in the university environment and try to develop these non-governmental ties than to get into government. And after all, there are lots of fine foreign officers who speak Spanish and lots of other people around the country he can get for one of these jobs.

So I decided I had two choices, at least I thought, of channels--how to get the word to the President. One was to ask my wife's uncle, Thurman Arnold, to ask his partner, Abe Fortas, to talk to the President. Abe Fortas knew me, too. This is the opposite of influence--it's, you know, just to try to get the story to him. And the other choice, of course, was the President's then personal assistant, whom I have known for many years and always favorably, Walter Jenkins. So I asked Thurman Arnold to talk to Abe. Nearly a week went by and on a Friday evening Thurman Arnold called me up from his home in Alexandria and said, "We're not going to ask the President to let you off the hook. When I was called down here from Yale by President Roosevelt, I came; and when a man is asked to do a job by the President, he ought to do it.

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And anyway we've made a rule in the firm that Abe won't be asked to deal with any personnel matters." I said, "Judge, thank you very much. That second reason sounds awfully bureaucratic to me, but I respect the first." I went to sleep on a Friday night saying to myself, "I've got to call Walter Jenkins in the morning." But I got around to it, while I was at lunch, in a hotel in Philadelphia, a call came through. The White House wanted to know if I could be in Washington to see the President that afternoon at 3:30. It was then 1:15 in Philadelphia. He had a free afternoon and he wanted to see me. So I roared out to the airport and got on the Allegheny Airlines and got down here and was taken to the White House and I found myself shortly thereafter explaining to the President myself why it was that he should leave me where I was. The President listened. He always listens very carefully, I've noticed. I'm sure other people have noted the same thing. And I gave him my little explanation of what I was trying to do in the university world and how I had come back to inter-American affairs after this reception of Nixon and so on.

And he didn't reply to my plea. He simply said, "Covey, from all I can hear Colombia's in pretty good shape." (This was the country to which he had assigned me.) "But you can't go by that. When I came in here not long ago, I thought the whole area was in pretty good shape and I'll be god damned if all hell hasn't broken loose." He was referring to Panama, you see. Well, we talked of other things and I left the office knowing that I was Ambassador-designate to Colombia despite my effort not to be, and I also felt that I, a professional communicator, a law professor, had just not communicated to the President.

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He must have thought this was a modest man's effort to be diffident; or for some other reason I hadn't effectively communicated. So as I went about my business of arranging to go to Colombia, the modalities that occur in getting an Ambassador named and publicly appointed went on. And in due course I realized something about President Johnson that I hadn't known before. And that is, when he wants to be, he can be, he is, the master of the art of non-reply. When he announced my appointment to the press he said: "Professor Oliver tried to talk me out of it, but I wouldn't let him do it because I was convinced, I am convinced, that he is the best man for the job."

So I know from that that the President realized all the way along what I was trying to do, but he didn't choose to get into discourse with me about this particular point. It is a very interesting aspect, I suppose, of high-level managerial skill. Well, for the time I was in Colombia the President did me the honor of wanting me to report personally and periodically every two weeks on a fiscal crisis situation that developed in that country. I had always fine support from him when I was there.

M: You mean report directly to him as opposed to the State Department?

O: Through the Department. But he told the Department that he wanted a report from his Ambassador every two weeks on how things were going in our crisis period in Colombia. The report was sent through the Department of State, but it was also passed over to the White House. At least the Department of State people felt the presidential interest in my personal appraisal of the situation in Colombia for the President keenly enough that I think that I hold, if not the record, at least almost the record, for not being allowed to come home in consultation. I was in Colombia seventeen

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months without coming back to the United States, and the major reason for that was the people here felt that the President wanted me right there on the spot. A curious thing occurred, in speaking of records, one that I hope will remain a record is this. I was asked on very short order to get Colombian government agreement to my successor, agrément it's called. And I had to do it by going to the President-elect of Colombia, Dr. Lleras [Camargo] and it's not the sort of thing you do normally. Every government wants to consult its own embassy in Washington and get a reasonably good line in on the fellow. I spoke to the President about this when I checked out after finishing in Colombia. I spoke to him, too a little bit about the tone of some of the State Department messages. They were asking the Ambassadors personally to do things in the way of informing foreign governments of our attitude and policy objectives in Vietnam and elsewhere at almost any hour of the day or night. And I figured--I think--that this was probably the result of Departmental response here to White House pressures; that it, in turn, reflected the President's wish to get information to his opposite numbers as quickly as possible. It's very laudable and very understandable, but it also asks the American Ambassadors to use more often than an Ambassador should his particular entree with the chiefs of state of a foreign government. I had excellent entree in Colombia, very fortunately; my interpersonal relationships with Latins have always been good, and they were never better than in Colombia. I left Colombia feeling that the most successful thing I had ever done in my whole life was to be President Johnson's Ambassador in that country for two years. But I

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thought that was the end of it, and I went back to the University and began the adjustment to doing my own work, blowing the dust off the law books, catching up with my courses. I had just barely finished an academic year when the President called me back in May, 1967. I want to record my feeling about the President's outlook as it came through to me. I had spoken very, very straightforwardly to the President in September previously about my concern about the balance between the economic growth and the social and political reform and change aspects of the Alliance. I found them seriously out of balance.

M: In which direction?

O: In favor of economic growth and development. The Alliance for Progress is a most unusual aid program. There's no other aid program like it, and there hasn't been, and the Marshall Plan was not the model. The Alliance for Progress, if you look at the twelve points, the twelve objectives of Punta del Este, is evenly distributed as between economic growth (this is, increased productivity) and social and political modernization and change, reform. It's a program undertaken by Latin America as a whole for the purpose of, in effect, giving the ordinary Latin America a better deal. But for a variety of reasons our programs had come more and more to emphasize the economic aspects of growth and development to the point that I thought there was something to the beginnings of criticism in Latin America that our program was becoming almost a banker's program, not with the old-fashioned banker's hard terms; but that it concerned itself with balanced budgets, tax collections, foreign exchange management, and on the whole a kind of "trickle-down" approach which I, as a Democrat

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object to.

In other words, the trickle down idea is that if you can get the economy going in a good and orderly way, in time everybody will benefit somewhat. Well, that's not good enough. The Democratic ideology in this country, of which Johnson has been a part, has been one that accepts the needs of some assists, shall we say, from law, that is, legislation and administration, to hasten this process a bit and to assure its happening. All right. So the President had understood my concern the preceding September. When I was called back on his new offer, I pointed out to him that he better be sure that he understood that I regarded myself as a true free liberal, not as the prisoner of any ideology but as a man who had been--thanks to the fortune of having been a university man, not committed to any particular group--who could be objective about what needed to be done in Latin America. He listened and said, "I know that, and what I want you to do is follow a policy of trying to help our friends in this hemisphere in all aspects of the Alliance for Progress." I intended also to make it clear that I was not basically oriented toward macroeconomic perfection in the operation of the Alliance, nor was I a "The-private-sector-has-the-key-to-development" determinist either. And I wanted him to know that what I would say and do, unless he ordered me otherwise. At least I wanted this clear, because there are some differences certainly between my outlook and the outlook of some of my distinguished predecessors as to what the Alliance should be doing and I think I'm more "liberal"

than anyone that has been in this position before me except Jack Vaughn; and Jack Vaughn was not here really long enough.

M: I wanted to ask you about that. There have been, what, five men, five different men held this position in three or four years there? Does that hurt?

O: It does indeed. Yes, I'm glad you mentioned that. I told the President, "Mr. President, the job needs a four-year man." He told me he wanted me to take the job. He told me that he had not, contrary to what the press had said, considered anyone else for it. There are some who say that I'm here because Jerry O'Leary said that Ed Martin was going to be appointed and the President pulled back on Martin and called me for that reason. The President denied that when he telephoned me. I didn't even know what he was talking about; I had just come in from Tucson where I had talked to a Council of Foreign Relations and I didn't know what the Eastern papers had been saying. But that's what he told me. Then the President, in this conversation asked me to take the job, and I said that I wanted to consult my wife because the problems that had sent me back to the university before were still with me. There was a little pause on his side when I said that I wanted to consult my wife. I explained she was away at a concert. He said, "All right. You talk to her, but you call me before seven tomorrow morning, you hear!"

So I thought about it, and of course I called him the following morning and said yes and told him that I thought it was one of the most important jobs and possibly the single job that I could do best in government, and I told him that I would do my very best to stay

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on the job because I felt that the position had suffered by too much turnover. And I told him that to that end I would apply for a lateral entry into the foreign service, resign from the University of Pennsylvania, and plan to stay on the job as long as he could stand me. He said, "All right. That's what I want."

And we both knew what the statistics were; that before my time the average tenure in this position has been around fourteen months for the last six or seven people. I've been here longer now than any of my predecessors on the average. I will have been here eighteen months when I finish, you see. So I told him that.

But back to the big point--that is, the President's outlook toward real reform and change in the Western Hemisphere. He heard me, and in June before I was sworn in the last day of June, I had to take the duty of representing the United States at the "ministerial" level at the annual meeting of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council of the OAS in Vina del Mar, Chile. Dr. Gordon was on his little rest before leaving, and I was literally thrown into the swimming pool to go down there and represent the United States at this ministerial meeting, being pretty new on the job and not having been at all involved in the planning or execution of the programs considered for and at the meeting of the Presidents at Puenta del Esta, Uruguay, in April 1967. This is not the White House's fault. I was a consultant to the Department, and I had definite views about what we should be doing; but they were too busy to ask me, and I'm sure I've done the same thing to consultants on our rolls. Once you get involved in operations here, it's a little hard to break stride and find the time to sit down with an outside man to see if he's

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got any ideas and pick his brain. I think I've done a little better than some, but at any rate I was not very well clued-in to take over Vina del Mar. I got to Vina del Mar and found the Latin Americans in outraged rebellion against our technical experts here in the Bureau, men who either never knew how to deal with Latin Americans or if they did know, they had become so tired and worn out in the process that they had lost the art. But at any rate I had to immediately begin down there to mend the fences, shall we say, without giving away any points; and I was fresh on the job and was doing the "amistad" side of it very well. The Latin American press was astounded and happy when I could hold a press conference in Spanish, you see, and throw in a little Portuguese as well. That goes a long way.

I didn't have to give up any points. It's just the way you approach them, you know, that makes a great deal of difference. At any rate, I came into the American delegation headquarters early one morning because they had phoned from the Embassy in Santiago to say "there is a message here that only you can see, and we are sending it over by courier." So I went into our delegation headquarters in the hotel, the Hotel at Vina del Mar on Chile's Pacific coast, and I was handed an envelope that only I could open. And the message came from the White House, I can't say that it came from the President, it didn't say so. But it said, "Eyes only, literally eyes only, for Oliver." And it went along about as follows: "Here's what we have to say about your general stance as you move into the position that you are now beginning to occupy." And I paraphrased those main elements, put them on a little--tore off a corner of a legal size yellow tablet, scribbled them down, and I've carried them in my wallet here ever since.

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And these are my basic instructions from Lyndon Johnson, and I don't think I could have had a better set of instructions for the job. I'll find it here in just a minute. Here it is. This comes out of the message:

1. "Maintain a stance of idealism."

Now I liked that, because when the press called me right after the appointment was announced and I was still in Philadelphia, the first question was "How will you characterize your Administration of the Bureau, will you say it will be pragmatic?" And my response was, "I don't want to be tied to any noun or adjective or one-word description, but there's one thing I can tell you. I have never liked the misuse of the term "pragmatism" in U. S. government lingo. "Pragmatism" should properly refer to a brand of idealistic philosophy developed by William James, Peirce, and Royce, and others. Pragmatism is not the same thing as realism or expediency. And so I just gave them a little philosophical lecture. At any rate, when the first instruction came, "maintain a stance of idealism," I liked that very much. Unless we are hopeful and forward-looking with our neighbors in relationship to development, we are not going to keep the spirits up to the point that they need to be kept in order for this lengthy, long, drawn-out process to be achieved. To be idealistic doesn't mean that you have to be quixotic, of course, though the element of the quixotic in relationship to Latin Americans can't be completely forgotten either because it's deeply imbedded in the Spanish character. They have inherited many of the national characteristics of the Spanish. At any rate, I liked that one.

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The second one is "Stay out in front on social development as well as on economic development." That was fine.

Then, third: "Don't be outflanked from the left rhetorically." In other words, don't let the--the way I interpreted that, don't let the outdated Marxists get the better of you when you talk about reform and change. In my view, Marxism is hopelessly outdated really as a way of trying to describe what reform and change should be in this latter half of the twentieth century. And I thought these were just great instructions. "Maintain a stance of idealism; stay out in front on social as well as economic development; and don't be outflanked from the left rhetorically."

Well, that stood me in good stead and all the speeches I've made--I wrote most of them myself--I've tried to develop a consistent body of doctrine as to development within the framework of this set of instructions.

That telegram put my mind at rest. I knew that my chief was looking forward to what we could do in Latin America very much as he, as a young Congressman, had looked forward to collaborating in what Franklin Roosevelt set in motion in this country a long time ago in the shadows of the depression, and before World War II. So I regard it as a high point. Now, there had been times since when I felt that I had to go to the President on specific things, such as in that picture up there on top [gesturing to photographs on wall]. That's very typical, where he is listening and I'm holding forth with a piece of paper in my hand.

The [Johnson] Library will get among my papers the outlines that I prepared for discussion with the President. I don't know whether it is general practice, but on the few occasions I've gone to see him, I've

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always thought it a good idea to prepare an outline beforehand and give him a copy.

M: It certainly will be convenient for historians.

O: So the headings of this discussion are there, and we're talking pretty much about the same problem in that particular picture, except with the future of foreign assistance in our minds there. Ben Welles of the New York Times had run a story that he had never checked with us, although Welles is a very frequent complainer that he can't check things. He made no effort of this. And he ran a story of the effect--while our aid bill was in Congress at a crucial stage--that the Johnson Administration had given up on bilateral assistance, that in the future everything was going to be done through multilateral assistance. Well, I knew that was plain wrong for a number of reasons. I mean, it was undesirable policy. One, there isn't enough money for what we need in multilateral assistance alone. We need the additional money that the Foreign Assistance Act provides.

Secondly, the Foreign Assistance Act itself authorizes the funding of several multilateral assistance efforts, especially those through the OAS, both the Economic and Social Council, and the new Scientific, Educational, and Cultural Council.

And thirdly, there are some types of assistance that no bank can give, such as budgetary assistance to a few countries that need budgetary support when they are in bad times. [There is a] limit as to how far a bank can go in helping or directing the substantive improvement of university education and the like. The benefits are not credibly

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quantifiable. At any rate, all of those points I brought to his attention. This was February 8, 1968, the picture. And he assured me that he stood by his submissions to Congress on the Foreign Assistance Act and told me that he would continue to do all he could, but that we had to bear in mind that in the legislative environment of the moment it was not within the power of the Presidency to assure completely desirable legislative outcomes. But he would do all he could.

At any rate, I'm reminiscing about that. Now, throughout, I found Mr. Johnson, to sum up on this, Mr. Johnson as President has carried forward and has added appreciably to the western hemisphere total development policy begun by President Kennedy. President Johnson has had some degree recognition in Latin America for what he had done, especially since the Punta del Este meeting in April of 1967. Before the Punta del Este meeting I was genuinely concerned--both while in Bogota and while back at the University of Pennsylvania--concerned about a very understandable Latin American syndrome: The Death Syndrome. Another thing that the Latin Americans have inherited from the mother country, Spain, is an intense preoccupation, indeed, romanticization, about death. So it was very natural for the Latin Americans to say "Alack and alas, the Alliance died with Kennedy." The tragedy of Dallas made a tremendous impression on them. It just happened that at the moment of that tragedy we were moving from rhetoric to operations in the actual assistance effort. We were just getting moving that way when Kennedy was killed.

It's always harder to do things than to talk about doing them. The operations had begun, the nitty gritty had begun, and so the Latins for some of the earlier years of Johnson's Presidency were prone to say the

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Alliance died with Kennedy, when in point of actual fact, the imputs were being improved, both quantitatively and qualitatively during the Johnson years.

By insisting on the continuation of the combined bureau concept here in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs on the State side and Latin American Assistance on the AID side--the only bureau of its type in the Department of State--by insisting on that, Johnson has also shown that he realizes that the Alliance for Progress is a very special type of U. S. foreign assistance--not just run of the mill economic assistance, but something much deeper and more meaningful. I think that his forward movement in the Alliance is very much to his credit, and I hope that history will recognize the great contribution that he made to the assistance process. I don't think that the Kennedy achievement is in any way marred by the solid contributions that Johnson has made to the Alliance for Progress. The fact that the Alliance has suffered budgetary cuts is serious. We have still been treated a little better than most parts of the aid program, and one has to be, I suppose, grateful for small things; but we have raised another problem. I mean the American people and the Congress, not the Administration, have raised a problem as to the continuity of our commitment to the Alliance for Progress.

This results from these cuts and Congressional abandonment of the multi-year authorization for foreign assistance--if you authorize it for two years at a time you have a greater assurance that you will be in business and you will be able to plan ahead for the future. Well, they killed that off year before last, as you know, fiscally speaking, the year before last, fiscal '68 they killed that. The main thing that

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has happened, though, I think, on the Alliance front, that really presents us a problem in the future, is one that Mr. Johnson and I have not discussed. That's the effect of our balance of payments difficulties on the Alliance for Progress. The President wants to review--his standing orders are that he must review--any proposal to negotiate an assistance program of over a substantial amount in absolute terms, in relative terms not a very great amount, but I don't know whether I should mention the amount.

M: Ten million?

O: It's ten million. I wasn't sure whether I should mention these figures.

M: All this can be cut by you and cleared by you, any way you want to do it. It can be classified by the Department's Security Officer as some of the people have indicated they might want to do.

O: Well, at any rate, the review process, bureaucratically, does require almost automatically the clearance of other Departments than those directly charged with the responsibility for assistance programs, including especially the Department of the Treasury, which had waged such a vigorous and successful battle to save the dollar. And I admire everything the Treasury has done in that regard. However, Latin America does not leak dollars to De Gaulle and others who cash them in for gold; it simply doesn't. Our analyses show that it does not leak dollars. Nonetheless, Latin America has been asked, because the clearance process had required it, to undertake commitments as to the way in which AID dollars and their own expert earnings are used in relationship to exports from the United States, which requirements actually show down the rates at which the Latin American countries can, as a practical matter, use the dollars.

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To illustrate what I mean, the desirable goal for a balance of payments loan is that freely-made economic decisions by importers lead to their taking their local currency to the central bank in a particular country and buying dollars to pay for their imports. They are supposed to make a fairly free judgment as to what it is they want to bring in, provided what they want to bring in is not luxury goods but something related to development in the country. Very well, but we do, in many instances now say the Latins--despite our preference for trade liberalization as it's called, that is, the liberalization from import controls--"Now our aid dollars you should use up to certain percentages for items on this positive list that we have, that we have shown you," and the positive list is made up of manufactured items as to which we have not had in the past as big a share of the Latin American market as we think we would like to have for balance of payments reasons. So we've put on the positive list of things that, you know, where maybe we're only selling 20 percent and we would like to sell 34 percent. It's the additionality problem. Well, the additionality problem in point of actual fact, has seriously slowed down the rate of actual absorption of many aid dollars in Latin America. And that, I think, though it's not well known, is a much more serious problem confronting the immediate future of development than have been the recent cuts in foreign assistance. The recent cuts have damaged morale in Latin America, they have raised questions as to the bona fides of the United State's commitment to assistance in Latin America. But they haven't actually slowed us down as much as additionality has. Of course, these lower levels of assistance can't go on much longer. If we are going

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to do this at all, we've got to do it on an adequate basis, and, naturally, my own hope is that in its final days this Administration will continue to give evidence of very, a very strong, sense of commitment to the importance of development in the Western Hemisphere.

M: You're sort of anticipating what I was trying to lead to regarding the Alliance. You have written speeches, and you said you write most of them yourself, which include a great number of the impressive accomplishments of the Alliance, particularly since Punta del Este. On the other hand, there are critics who are learned people in some cases, like, I saw an article, I believe, by Leo Cherne [in Saturday Review] recently. A senator called the Alliance "stagnant" and listed it as one of Mr. Nixon's big problems. What is the status of the Alliance? Have the dreams of Punta del Esta '67 been--how far have they come in the subsequent year and a half, in your current judgment?

O: First of all, in response to that, I should like to express my own puzzled amazement at the proclivity of commentators to read the burial service over the Alliance for Progress. I've alluded to this as to the Latin Americans, the linking it to the assassination of President Kennedy; but it still goes on, and I don't know what sort of psychological quirk it is in people that leads them to want to say "Poor ole Jud is dead," that is, the Alliance for Progress is gone. It isn't gone at all. It's moving along, I should say, with all deliberate speed, and perhaps even more speedily actually than the deliberateness with which integration is actually occurring in the United States.

M: Some would say that was pretty slow.

O: I know. That's why I added the statement I just did. I think some

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in Latin America are happy to preside over the death of the Alliance or to make more than should be made out of the trade-not-aid shibboleth I would call it simply because they don't like the reformist influence of the Alliance. We have to be very careful about that. Trade, you know, can work on a trickle-down basis. Aid can't really, because we have to ask too many changes in the old ways of doing things in order to get into phase on an aid program.

I've noted this tendency to say the Alliance is dead, sometimes with concern, sometimes with glee, sometimes on the basis of what I call the North American tendency to be masochistic about Latin America. It's a very interesting, puzzling thing. Why do we, whenever anything bad happens in Latin America, beat our breasts and tend to say, "Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa." Well, I have a theory about that, but I won't break stride to go into it now. At least that's part of the tendency.

The slowness of the Alliance also has Latin elements in it, not only North American ones. I've alluded to some of the North American ones. It hasn't gone as well as it should have, as well as was expected, but it's going well enough on all fronts to justify the continuation of the experiment. That's my feeling about it. I don't think the Alliance has been in doldrums in the time that I have been here. We have put more emphasis on social and civic development inputs. We have good ideas for the future that can help there. The actually gross rates of growth in Latin America have been quite good. A major problem has been, of course, population growth; and another one has been decline in trade. And you asked about Punta del Este. I think the aspect of the Punta del Este efforts that has prospered least in the time since Punta del Este has been our

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effort, more or less with the assistance of Latin America, to try to break the developed-world discrimination against Latin American exports. The UNCTAD meeting in New Delhi didn't come out nearly as positively as we would have liked to see it come out. Some of the Latins tried, but not all of them tried awfully hard, in my view, to push and insist vis a vis the Common Market countries and Great Britain on the elimination of this current discrimination against Latin American tropical agriculture mainly in the markets of these countries; nor have we been able to move the Europeans yet, and this is one reason why the new Administration may well consider the possibility of creating yet another discriminatory system, that is, a Western Hemisphere trade block under which we would grant discriminatory trade preferences, discriminatory as against Africa and Southeast Asia, for Latin America. Just how we square that with GATT, I'm not sure at the present time--[GATT is the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.] I don't really think we should do it if we can possibly get a system of generalized trade preferences for the developing countries as a whole. But we've moved less well on that front than on others.

On the front of integration, economic integration, there have been some slowdowns and, in my view, they are not in any sense the fault of the Johnson Administration. These I lay squarely at the door of the Latin Americans. We've made it clear all the way along that we would be happy to support, through adjustment assistance, the Latin Americans moving toward a common market, that is to say one in which there would be a tariff system applicable to the countries between themselves which tariff levels would be lower than their common external tariff to the rest of the world. We support economic integration in Latin America, not only because it would be the capstone of economic development by giving the Latin

Americans a larger market and making possible the economics of scale and production which they presently can't enjoy. But I think the economic integration of Latin America is even more important pycho-politically. Ordinarily our relations with Latin America are very good. But when a crunch comes, say such as the one that we have with Peru at the present time, some old, basic pycho-diplomatic factors, I think I would call them (this is my phrase) come to the fore. Shame, envy, frustration at the sheer preponderance of the United States. I can't say that in all respects at all levels our relations with Latin Americans are completely rational and free of irrational and emotive influences. And I think that those emotive influences are largely the results of a sense of weakness on the part of Latin America as a whole or any particular country in Latin America vis-a-vis us. Not that they fear that we are going to take them over or invade them. It's just that we are here in the Western Hemisphere. And we're so rich and we're so numerous! And we're so active! And we're so successful! Contrasted with their own situations, it eats their hearts out to see us here. And this all shows up when a crunch comes. All right. If they can unify economically--it's too soon to talk about political unification--if they can unify economically, if Latin America could speak with one voice to the rest of the world in trade matters, how wonderful it would be! Wonderful for the public health, the mental public health, of international relations, especially international relations between the United States and these countries. So for all of these reasons we support economic integration. Now, the Latin American Free Trade Association has in the last year and a half run into serious difficulties.

M: That includes only the South American countries.

O: It includes the South American countries and Mexico; not the Central Americans who have their own little tidy Central American Common Market. But a very hopeful development has been in the Andean group within the broader membership of LAFTA, the Latin American Free Trade Association. There, of course, the Andean group is made up on Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, and Chile as major members; and Equador and Bolivia as junior members. That group is delayed by problems of comparative advantage and disadvantage as between a high cost country such as Venezuela and other countries which with equal efficiency but at lower cost can produce the same items. That slowed us up, but this is what adjustment assistance is all about. If you can help the countries bridge the transition period things can work out. We have to wait and see how the elections come out in Venezuela and let that situation work itself down. But in the meantime--and this is a very definite Johnson contribution that ought to be in this recollection--this year--I guess it was in March or April, I'm not sure exactly--I had a five-minute spot before the National Security Council to report on the Alliance for Progress and especially on integration. I sketched the problems as to integration of trade that I've just mentioned to you and then came on to a subheading "Physical Integration," by which we mean improved links from highways to telecommunications between the countries themselves. As is well known, Latin America doesn't have the communication links that the western European members of the European economic community have by a long shot. When I said "physical integration," the President said, "Now, Covey, that's something that they can do

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right now. I recognize the difficulties that they will have in bringing their trade patterns into harmony with each other. But they can go ahead with our assistance and with bank assistance, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Banks, assistance, and link themselves up better through roads, waterways, and so on." That statement of the President's was a signal to us in the Executive Branch, or we took it as such, and I think he intended us to do so, of trying to be especially helpful and forthcoming on the fronts of physical integration. And to that end we have supported the appointment of a physical integration planning body, a group of experts, not to displace any other group, but what I call "engineers with slide rules and vision" to inform us all, all of us who are involved in development assistance to Latin America, of what can be done in connection with project selection and the like, to try to stress link-ups. That group, we thought, should be composed of an expert from the Inter-American Development Bank, one from the OAS, where we wanted to see some leadership initiatives taken by the new Secretary-General through the Secretariat instead of having the Secretary-General continue to be the mere clerk of the Council. However, so far physical integration amazingly enough has moved quite slowly because several of the larger countries, Brazil and Argentina specifically, have had doubts about (a) the desirability of using any multilateral channels, especially the OAS, but some of them have doubts about the Bank as well, and (b) they have fears that any institutionalization of the planning of physical integration might intrude upon their own national plans for internal physical integration. I can understand that fear, but it's in my view

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a groundless one. I mention this because my thesis at this point is that not all the deficiencies in the forward motion of the Alliance for Progress can be laid at the door of the United States. Nor should we be willing to accept overly much blame for what delays have occurred. We can--ideally we would like to--be in a position of being able to respond with alacrity to forward-looking ideas and projects coming from the Latin Americans as to development.

Unfortunately, the rate at which the Latin Americans themselves come up with development ideas is slow. So that all too frequently we find ourselves as in the case of physical integration taking initiatives not because we want to be intrusive or run the show, but because we nobody else has said anything. The original ideas of the Alliance did come to us from Latin America. That is well known historically, but the rate at which goal imputs has been maintained is disappointing.

M: This is probably a little clumsy place to stop. We are going to run out of this tape. I wonder if I might prevail upon you for a subsequent session perhaps nearly the same length sometime the balance of this month?

O: Fine and good.

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to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Covey T. Oliver, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, ~~and all literary property rights~~, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

5. Copy of the transcript at library's expense to be supplied donor.

Signed Covey T. Oliver

Date 11/21/74

Accepted [illegible] - for
Archivist of the United States

Date September 30, 1974

LBJ Presidential Library
http://www.lbjlibrary.org

More on LBJ Library oral histories:
http://discoverlbj.org/exhibits/show/loh/oh

D. If you do not wish to have the restriction imposed above apply to employees of the National Archives and Records Service, the following sentence will be added to paragraph 2:

This restriction shall not apply to employees and officers of the General Services Administration (including the National Archives and Records Service and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library) engaged in performing normal archival work processes.

E. If a restriction that extends beyond your lifetime is to be imposed in paragraph 2, the following paragraph (appropriately numbered) will be completed and added to the end of the "Gift of Personal Statement":

I hereby designate _____ to have, after my death, the same authority with respect to authorizing access to the aforesaid material as I have reserved to myself in paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 above.

F. If you wish to retain the literary property rights to the material for a period of time, the phrase in paragraph 1 "and all literary property rights" will be deleted and either of the following paragraphs (appropriately numbered) added to the end of the statement:

The donor retains to himself ~~for a period of _____ years~~ and his literary estate all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of the instrument. After the expiration of this _____ year period, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.

or

The donor retains to himself during his lifetime all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument. After the death of the donor, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.