

INTERVIEWEE: RAYMOND L. TELLES

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

March 1, 1972

F: This is an interview with Mr. Raymond Telles in his office at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Washington, D. C. on the afternoon of March 1, 1972. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz. When did you first meet President Johnson or Senator Johnson or Congressman Johnson, or whatever phase he was at when you met him?

T: Well, it was my pleasure to first meet him back in 1948 when he was campaigning for the office of United States Senator. That's when I first met him.

F: You were county clerk then, weren't you?

T: Yes, well, as a matter of fact, that particular date of 1948 is quite significant to me for the reason that not only was it important because of President Johnson's campaign at the time, but also it was my first venture into politics, the first time that I ran for the office of county clerk of El Paso County, Texas. And I was elected.

F: So you have good reason to remember that.

T: Yes, I have good reason to remember that.

F: Was it a general rally or was he just out there on his own or--?

T: No, I actually went out and campaigned for him. Not only did I campaign for myself but also was involved in President Johnson's campaign for the Senate. In fact, it was quite a very interesting senatorial race. It was a very exciting one. Well, for many reasons, I suppose. Not only because he won, but you might recall that he won by a small handful of votes. And of course the legal battles ensued which were initiated by his opponent trying to keep him from taking the U.S. Senate seat here in Washington. We had some very exciting moments on election day, election night particularly,

because the race was so close that we didn't know from one minute to the other what was going to be the final result.

F: Was El Paso County as nip-and-tuck as the rest of the state?

T: Yes, I think it was. Not as nip-and-tuck as the final result of the election, but close enough that we were quite concerned in that possibly a small difference in our own county could've meant the difference between victory and losing the campaign.

F: Had you contacted Congressman Johnson with an offer to help or had he contacted you as a leader of the community? How did you two get together?

T: I think it was a mutual desire. He contacted me and, of course, I stayed in contact with him and I campaigned for him. Of course, I was in contact with him quite often during the campaign.

F: Did you have what was then called a Mexican-American bloc vote in El Paso the way you did in some of the valley counties?

T: Well, I don't know that it was considered a bloc vote, but I do know this, that because of the excitement generated by my own campaign--the first time that a person of Mexican descent had even dared--and I'm using that literally--had even dared to run for the office of county clerk or any major office in the county. It created and generated a very high interest on the part of the Mexican-Americans. I'll put it that way. So that I think we had a larger number of Mexican-Americans registered to vote in that year than we had had in the history of El Paso.

F: I realize that this is a quarter century back almost, but these were the days of the poll tax. Had you made a real effort, or had someone made a real effort, to get poll taxes paid among the Mexican-Americans?

T: Oh, absolutely. We put on a campaign at that time--. Well, to begin with, the one reason or the main reason that I became involved as a candidate was my father's interest in politics. He was not a candidate ever, but

it was a hobby, I'd say, with him and he would get out and help the candidate whom he thought would be a better official, not only to our community but to the state and our country. So that when I came back from the service after I'd been in the service six years in World War II, he and his friends decided that I should run for the office of county clerk. Now, I sincerely didn't have any interest in politics and all I wanted to do was to return to my job with the Department of Justice. I was in the accounting division of the Department of Justice. And that's all I wanted to do--go back to my job--and in fact I did.

F: You didn't know who they were going to move your life around, did you?

T: No, I didn't, but they certainly did. My father and his friends continued to press me on the matter. They felt that since I had--apparently, in their minds, they thought that I had established a fine record in the service--I had gone in as a private and came back as a Major, that I should be the one to break the ice with the Mexican-American and stick my neck out and if necessary, have someone chop it off for me. But, that I should.

F: This is moving, maybe, way ahead, but it may be pertinent at this point. You were decorated by Brazil and Peru.

T: I was decorated by a number of countries. I was decorated by Mexico twice.

F: Well, was this for military service?

T: Yes, I was in charge of delivery of aircraft to all of the countries of Latin America from Mexico all the way to Brazil during the war. I was responsible for setting up and organizing training programs for the Latin American countries in the aviation field. And I was in charge of the maintenance of their airplanes and actually the housing of their people

and seeing that their needs were taken care of. So, I was decorated, as I say, twice by Mexico; by Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, and I don't know, one or two other countries.

F: Panama, I think. You must have spent a lot of time from El Paso southward to Santiago or--?

T: You mean at that time?

F: Yes.

T: Well, my main office, of course, was in San Antonio, at Kelly Air Force Base, but I did spend quite some time south.

F: Did you ever consider moving down there permanently?

T: Well, in fact, right after the war, in 1945, I was assigned as liaison officer for the United States Air Force with the Mexican Air Force. So I lived in Mexico for two years as liaison officer with the Mexican Air Force and finally I decided to leave the service. In 1947 I came back and left the service.

F: Was Congressman Johnson aware of your victory out in El Paso and sort of the turning point this meant in El Paso County politics?

T: Yes, absolutely that he was. And I'll tell you why. As I started to mention to you a few minutes ago that although--. You asked me if it was a bloc of votes. I suppose that you would have to consider it as a bloc, but it was certainly very interesting and different in that it was the first time in the history of that community that so many of our Mexican-Americans had registered. Certainly, I would be a fool not to acknowledge the fact that undoubtedly they all voted as a bloc for me, but as a consequence they also voted for Congressman Johnson.

F: I judge even in those days he related well with the Mexican-Americans.

T: He did. He's always been admired and respected and certainly liked because I think that President Johnson has always indicated a sincere interest in

the welfare of the Mexican-American, or resident of the State of Texas of Mexican descent. I think that that was also shown when he agreed with President Diaz Ordaz of Mexico to organize this U.S.-Mexico Border Commission for the economic and social development of the area.

F: Right. Did you continue to see him then off and on through the years when he was senator?

T: Yes, I did. In fact, I visited with him on many occasions. Not only in Texas but also in Washington and I maintained my contact with him. In fact, I would guess that I participated in all of his campaigns. To include, of course, his presidential campaign both with President Kennedy and then on his own as a presidential candidate. That was 1960. So I participated in all of his campaigns.

F: Were you a delegate to the '60 convention?

T: No, I did not participate as a delegate. I was simply a campaign worker.

F: Had you tried to drum up some sentiment for Johnson in '60?

T: Yes, I was mayor of El Paso at the time and I campaigned for the team of Kennedy and Johnson not only in Texas but also in California. They were running quite behind in California so they thought that maybe I could be of some help and I did go and campaign for them in California in addition to campaigning in Texas.

F: Where, down there in southern California in the agricultural area?

T: No, in the entire--over the entire state. I started south and climbed all the way up north to San Francisco. And of course in Texas it was primarily in the southwest part of the state.

F: Did this include speaking at rallies or was it mainly a buttonholing of the right people or what?

T: It was both. Buttonholing of the right people and speaking at rallies and speaking wherever it was necessary or wherever I was allowed to.

F: Who set up your schedule?

T: This was set up by the Democratic National Committee.

F: Any idea when the germ first sort of got planted for the settlement of the Chamizal dispute. Did Johnson show any interest in this before he became Vice President?

T: Maybe I can give you a little background in history as far as I'm concerned. My first interest of course was back in 1957 when I became mayor of El Paso. At that time there was interest shown by our department of State officials and in particular our U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Robert Hill. He and I got together on several occasions and tried to initiate some kind of an action to bring this settlement to a reality. We honestly did not accomplish too much at the time although we did plant the seed, I think, in many people's minds as to the necessity to resolve this problem. I knew of the frustrations and the sensitivity of Mexico in connection with this problem. This was a thorn on their side and it was very evident on many occasions. Their deep feelings in this matter were certainly reflected many times in my relationship as mayor of El Paso with the mayor of the Ciudad Juarez and other Mexican officials. Now, just to give you an illustration of what I'm talking about, at one point the U.S. Customs and Immigrations had constructed a new office building at the border--a new U.S. Customs and Immigrations building there--

F: This is at the bridge?

T: Yes, at the bridge. --and then at the completion of it, of course, the inauguration ceremonies were programmed and naturally, as mayor of the city of El Paso, and many other officials, we were to be there, present. And the mayor of Juarez and many other officials of the government of Mexico were invited to participate. When the time came for the ceremony, they didn't show up. Not because they had any personal animosity toward

me as the mayor of the city, but simply because they felt very strongly about the fact that the land in which this Customs office building had been constructed was part of the Chamizal land which they were claiming and this happened--

F: If they showed up, this would sort of give sanction to the U.S. position.

T: This was true even though the mayor of the Ciudad Juarez at that time, who was Rene Mascareñas, was a very close friend of mine. In fact, we went to high school together, and I do honestly believe that the relations of the two communities was enhanced because two friends were mayors of the two communities. In fact, I believe that I cut more ribbons on the other side than I did even in El Paso.

F: Well, now, I have assumed that, at least in recent times, that the two cities, sort of fatherhoods, have sort of worked in harness. The cities are naturally competitive as any cities across the river from each other would be but that to a certain extent they do feel that their problems are mutual and the solutions are therefore mutual. Am I right in that?

T: Yes, you are absolutely right. The only time that we experienced any particular problems was when we had people from the outside, from the federal governments of either side coming in and setting up certain rules that were contrary to the friendly feelings of the people on both sides of the border, but other than that the people of the two communities, the governments of the two communities, always experienced friendly relations.

F: Go ahead with your Chamizal story.

T: Well, anyhow, so we dropped the subject for awhile. Of course, until President Kennedy came into office then he had a very strong and sincere desire to resolve the public problem because he had been made aware of the fact that this problem existed and that Mexico was quite sensitive about it.

F: Where do you think he got his awareness?

T: I really believe that our people at the embassy--at the U.S. Embassy, in other words, our representatives for the Department of State--were the ones that finally talked to him about it. He agreed that that problem should be resolved although many, many people didn't believe that it could ever be resolved. They thought that it was of such international scope that to reach an agreement would be tremendously difficult. And in many ways, I agreed that it was going to be a very difficult situation, not only because it involved the transfer of land back to Mexico, even though the amount was very small--I think it involved about 400 acres. This was land that actually became part of the U.S. territory because of the movement of the river. The river was the international boundry and it changed its course and moved south. Well, that left about 400 acres on the U.S. side. So this was a problem. Many people, as I said, thought it would be almost impossible to reach some kind of an agreement.

F: Among other things, the resettlement.

T: Well, that was another problem that we had as far as our people on our side because there were about 2500 people that had to be moved away from the area in order to be able to reach an equitable agreement with Mexico in the transfer of this land. So, there was certainly some opposition without question. Now, much of the credit, I think, for the-- Well, in addition to the fact that it was President Kennedy's and certainly Vice President Johnson's desire to resolve the problem and the actions that they took positive actions to resolve the problem--and I'm sure that in the final analysis you have to give the credit to President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson--the two people, I think that deserve a lot of the credit were Tom Mann, who was our U.S. Ambassador in Mexico at the time, and then Commissioner Joseph Friedkin. He was the chairman or the Commissioner

of the U.S.-Mexico boundary and water commission. They had many, many meetings, not only with officials of Mexico, but with people on our side of the border in trying to resolve the opposition which would naturally develop in this kind of situation. There was some opposition in the way of, or from, members of our own Congress who were unhappy about the whole situation. But I think they did a terrific job in dealing with the many diplomatic negotiations and intricacies involved in these negotiations to obtaining a final solution. There again, I have to repeat that I don't think anyone could have accomplished the final successful and satisfactory results had it not been for President Kennedy, first of all, and then, of course, Vice President Johnson, who were very much interested and wanted to resolve this problem and this was again not only a desire to resolve the problem but it was an expansion of their friendly relationship toward Mexico and basically toward all of Latin America.

F: Did you have the feeling sometimes that you were running a tourist bureau there? People coming down to go over the ground and look at it?

T: Well, yes. You see, at that time, of course, I was United States Ambassador to Costa Rica but I was--

F: Before you left, had this been set up with sufficient momentum that you left feeling that it was going to carry through?

T: No. At the time I left, there hadn't been too much activity, in fact, I think it was soon after that this intense activity and the President's directive to find a solution to the problem became a reality, was effective. I was named as one of President Kennedy's advisors. I met with him on several occasions to discuss the many problems that arose from the negotiations and not only with the government of Mexico, but also with our citizens and residents of the area of El Paso.

F: Even after you moved on down to Costa Rica, did you continue to advise on this?

T: Oh, yes. In fact, I was asked by President Kennedy to come back to Washington and I accompanied him to his first meeting with President Lopez Mateos. He met with President Lopez Mateos on this question, on this subject, and I accompanied President Kennedy.

F: Was there much interest in Central America on this?

T: Yes, I think there was very definitely because I believe that there was a doubt in the minds of the people, generally in Latin America, that this problem could be resolved. They never could understand why a world power like the United States would even consider returning this part of Mexico to them and so that when it was finally resolved and the mutual agreement arrived at, this was not only received with good eyes, but also, I think that our image in Latin America was enhanced because of the fact that here, a big power, had agreed to do something, while it wasn't very important to the United States, it was certainly very important to Mexico. So I think that it was definitely an important event in the history of our country and in the history of Mexico.

F: Do you know whether President Johnson had any role in your name coming up as Ambassador to Costa Rica?

T: Oh, I'm sure, I'm certain, that certainly he was one of the persons that was most instrumental in my being named as United States Ambassador to Costa Rica.

F: When you came up here for the confirmation hearing, did you see him?

T: Oh, absolutely. As a matter of fact, I'll never forget. I was staying at the Statler-Hilton Hotel and he came and picked me up in his Vice Presidential car.

F: He came by there.

10a

T: Yes, he came by there and he picked me up and this was really something, something that I have never forgotten, because here's the Vice President picking me up in his own car.

F: And took you up to the Senate?

T: Yes, actually to the White House, as a matter of fact, so it is something that I have never forgotten.

F: I presume now--

T: Well, to go on with the story, as I said, I did serve as an advisor to President Kennedy. He did ask me to accompany him when he visited with President Lopez Mateos, and at that time it was a very friendly, very cordial meeting. And I could see the sincere interest on the part of both presidents to do something about the problem. I knew then that the problem was going to be resolved because there was this interest on the part of both--a sincere interest--to resolve the problem. Out of that meeting, they came out with an agreement in principle and with the understanding that they would get their representatives together to start working the many, many details that were involved in solving the problem. Also, of course, it was very unfortunate that President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. However, this did not stop the negotiations or even delay the negotiations because President--then President Lyndon B. Johnson just took over and he had the same interest that President Kennedy had had in solving this problem and his fondness and his interest in Latin America and particularly in Mexico were part of his desire to resolve the problem. So he certainly took over and again, I was--I still served as advisor to President Johnson and when he met with President Lopez Mateos, he asked me to return from Costa Rica and go with him.

F: Did you meet him in El Paso? Did you come up here, come to the ranch, or what?

- T: I came up here with him. Now, then, of course, in the final meeting which was--the first meeting of President Johnson was with President Lopez Mateos then--and, of course, in the final meeting, at ceremonies to transfer the land, I also accompanied President Johnson on this trip.
- F: That was with Diaz Ordaz.
- T: That was with President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz of Mexico, and again this was very, very interesting and I was particularly interested in remarks that were made by President Diaz Ordaz in Spanish. Of course, I later told President Johnson that President Diaz Ordaz in his conversation with President Johnson remarked more-or-less as a side comment, "Well, we have finally resolved a problem that has existed for over a hundred years." And he seemed to be quite pleased about the fact that this problem had been resolved.
- F: Did you get the feeling that President Johnson could follow the talks in Spanish fairly well?
- T: Well, I would say that he could understand some, but not really. I don't honestly believe that he could carry on a conversation. In fact, he never did when I was there. There was some complementary phrases passed between them but to say that he could possibly carry on a full conversation or discussion, I don't think so.
- F: Did Diaz Ordaz and Johnson seem to get on well together?
- T: Very well. In fact, I think that even today, that they're very close friends, and I know that President Johnson, every time he has the opportunity, he does visit in Mexico and I know that he has met with President Diaz Ordaz on several occasions. So that they were not only friends when they were both Presidents, but I think that their friendship still remains quite strong even today.
- F: Were you ever at the ranch when he was President?

T: Yes, I was there at the ranch. I was invited up to the ranch one time when Lopez Mateos was invited to visit.

F: What was that like?

T: Well, it was very interesting. Well, as usual, the many, many high ranking officials from both countries and members of the diplomatic corps here in Washington had been invited to come down and another reason that I won't forget that particular incident was because I flew into Austin, and they lost my bag, you know? And there I was without a suit.

F: Not just going to see the President of the United States, but two Presidents!

T: Two Presidents! And here I was without a shaving kit, without proper clothes, so I had to go out and buy me a whole set of new clothes, and shaving kit, and everything else to be able to attend the ceremony. But, there again, that was quite an experience for me being there at the ranch.

F: What did they do with most of the diplomatic corps? Did they stay in Austin and commute or did they try to house them out there near the ranch?

T: They were housed in Austin and they commuted. We had quite a barbecue there, Lyndon Johnson style--quite a festive occasion. Everybody enjoyed it.

F: When Kennedy was assassinated, where were you?

T: I was in Costa Rica at the time.

F: How did you receive the news?

T: Well, it was like a lightning bolt out of the clear sky.

F: Were you in the Embassy, or were you--?

T: Yes, in fact I had left the Embassy and gone to the residence for lunch, when I was called that I was needed at the Embassy immediately, that there was an urgent call from Washington--

F: That would have been Central Standard Time?

T: Yes, more or less. --and that I was needed at the Embassy, that there was an urgent call from Washington and that I should return, so that before I even had a chance to have my lunch, I returned immediately and of course, they gave me the news at that time that President Kennedy had been assassinated.

F: Who called you, the Latin American desk at the State Department or--?

T: Well, it was from the State Department and then I got another call from one of the President's aides advising me of what had happened. And like I said, it was very difficult to believe and I felt at the time that somebody was pulling a very bad joke. And of course when the news was known in Costa Rica, it was almost as though he had been the President of Costa Rica. There were hundreds of people out on the streets, openly crying and coming to the Embassy to express their sympathy. I remember I had one little lady, an old lady--and she was a very poor person--that came up to me and wanted to see me and I said, "Sure, certainly, let her come in." She had a ten colon note which would be equivalent to about a dollar-twenty-five cents, something like that. And she said, "I know now that President Kennedy has died; Mrs. Kennedy is going to have need for financial help, won't you send these ten colones to her." It was very difficult for me to hold my tears because it was so moving. And then another Costa Rican came up and he says, "Look," he says, "Do me a favor," he says, "Get me a visa to go to the United States and I promise you that I'll kill the person that assassinated President Kennedy. I promise you that I will do it." It was really something. For two or three weeks, there was nothing I could do except receive persons that wanted to come in and express their sympathy. They had many, many church services for him, all throughout the country and that kept me pretty busy moving around.

F: You spent more time at church than you did there!

T: Yes, I did. Absolutely. But, they just loved the President, they remembered his visit in 1963. His visit was quite fresh in their memory. It had only been a few months before that he had been there and that was, I think, not only a successful visit from the point of view of friendship as between us and the Central American countries because he met with all of the presidents of Central America and Panama, but also there was a certain love for the President as a person. He generated friendliness. The image which he generated as a person and also as a representative of the United States was something to behold, something to see. If anybody would have wanted to kill the President or assassinated him at that time, it could have been the easiest thing in the world because people were just crushing right up against him, they just wanted to touch him and the President didn't help any. He had the Secret Service people going crazy because he would tear away from them and walk right into a huge crowd and start shaking their hands. People just loved him. I'll never forget that. I recall, of course, one of the recommendations I made was that he should visit the campus of the University of Costa Rica because never in the history had a President of the United States visited in any of the campuses of the universities of Latin America. And, of course, I was in close contact with the student body of, and the officials of the university and I knew that this was possible and that it would certainly generate, not only friendly relations but I thought that it would generate a fine impression among the people of all of Latin America. This was a big battle that I had to undertake with my own Department of State. Because his advisors, his security people, were opposed to it. They didn't want any part of it. And finally I went over the heads of the State Department and talked with the President and again suggested very strongly that he

should and he did. And I think that it was one of the finest things that he did during his visit down there because he was well received, there were thousands and thousands of young people there on the campus, and he was great, in fact, this is the first time and only time that the President of the United States had ever visited the campus. It hasn't been done again. But anyhow, it was quite an experience.

F: I presume you've covered that visit with the Kennedy people in more detail.

T: Yes.

F: Did you have much difficulty persuading the Costa Rican people that Johnson had not engineered a palace revolution--

T: That he didn't--that Johnson--

F: --to get Kennedy out. In other words, that this wasn't a power play?

T: No, I don't think that there was any--

F: You know, in some parts of the world, there was that strong belief.

T: Yes, but I don't think that was true in Latin America. At least not with the people that I contacted and the people from different countries in Latin America. I never did sense that this was the feeling.

F: Did they have the feeling that U.S. policy would go on well and that in a sense we had made a good transfer of power there?

T: It was going to be very difficult at that moment for them to understand that this would happen. They were a little bit dubious. Their friendship and love for President Kennedy was so great that--

F: And personal, really.

T: It was a personal feeling that I don't believe that at that particular moment that they felt that this could happen again. Well, as a matter of fact, it did. I think that President Johnson very ably and quickly made

a number of moves that endeared him to the people of, not only of Costa Rica, but the people of Latin America. And to give you a couple of illustrations, for example, today there is a housing village. At that time when I was there in 1965 or '66, a new housing village was constructed and was named Lyndon B. Johnson. Also, if you'll recall, and I think it was in 1965, we were having quite a bit of trouble around the world. Our embassies were being stoned; they were throwing paint buckets against the walls of our embassies and all that. We were having quite a difficult time throughout the world. But Costa Rica, to counter-act this, to show their friendship toward the United States, they went out and organized a demonstration of about 30,000 people in favor of the United States, in favor of President Johnson, they carried huge pictures of the President in their march and they congregated in the center of the plaza there and had all kinds of friendly speeches there toward the President and the United States. So, this is why I say that President Johnson was able, not only to retain that friendship, but I think to generate a feeling of sincerity towards the countries of Latin America and particularly in Mexico, of course. As I said, before, he's been a very good friend to Mexico for many reasons. Not only because he felt that Mexico was necessary to the United States from an economic and social point of view but also I think he felt that Mexico was important to the security of the United States being our friend and neighbor to the south.

F: Did you ever feel in any danger in San Jose?

T: No, I never did. As a matter of fact, I traveled throughout the country. I went up into the mountains, to the little villages, several times--

F: You were known as the grass roots ambassador.

T: Yes, I did. I honestly did. In fact, on several occasions I was advised by the Costa Rican government that I shouldn't make a certain visit to a certain community because they knew of possible plans by the Communists to even do me bodily harm--

F: Just to embarrass the government back in San Jose.

T: That's right, but I felt that as long as they would allow me to go on, and they would not forbid me to go, that I should, because I never felt that they would harm me because I felt that the majority of the people in the country were with me that they knew me because of my interest in their people, in their welfare and because of my visits to the many parts of the country. And I doubted seriously that anyone would actually take any serious action against me either physically or otherwise. On several occasions, as I said, the government advised me that they felt it would be better if I didn't. When I did not accept their recommendation, I went to these different communities. They did provide, of course, a number of security people, not necessarily around me, but in the vicinity. I was rather contrary, I suppose, in a way, and whenever I was threatened in that manner, well, it just made me furious and would urge me to take many chances that probably an ambassador shouldn't take. But I would arrive at a community there and I would generally walk out in the middle of the street and several hundred people would gather around me and I would walk along the streets for many blocks, you know, and I could see that there were a number of these Communists on the side, but they wouldn't dare do anything about it because there I was surrounded by hundreds of people from the community.

F: I'm sure your facility with Spanish didn't hurt any.

T: Oh, it helped. I couldn't have done it without it. For example, another time I was in the United States on official business and while I was gone,

there was a Communist demonstration in front of our embassy, our offices there. Of course, the Marines locked the doors, and this huge bunch of people came up and they rattled the doors and shouted all kinds of insults and primarily on account of the Viet Nam situation, and they got away with it. Well, they didn't know that I wasn't there, that I was in the United States. But then when I returned, a week later they tried it again. This time, of course I was there and they let me know that they were coming. So, the Marines again locked the doors and when I heard about it, I was in the middle of a staff meeting, I came up to the front door and they were already there, this crowd of Commies and I asked the Marine guard to open the door for me. Of course, he practically refused. He was afraid for my safety. My officers who were there with me, also begged me not to get out there because, of course, they felt that it could be dangerous. But, I insisted that they should open one door and when they did, I walked right into the middle of them, the middle of this crowd, and something that they were not expecting and this certainly caught them by surprise. It gave me the opportunity to make a little speech to them in Spanish, you know. And, of course, later on we found out -- and we took pictures -- that there were three leaders, three Communist leaders, who had been trained in Russia and Cuba. They were the ones that were exciting this bunch of people there. It was a very exciting moment, I don't mind telling you. It wasn't that I was brave, but I just felt that it had to be done if I was going to maintain the respect not only of the Communists, but of the people of Costa Rica, that I had to do it, although I think they would have understood if I had not because this had never been done by a United States Ambassador anywhere.

Anyway, in my speech I said, I said to them that I wanted them to realize that that they were on U.S. property--actually, the street wasn't, but they

were there at the door of the embassy, but, that I wanted to demonstrate to them that we were a democratic country, that I would allow them to shout and sing and do whatever they wanted with the understanding that once they got through then I would be permitted to say something. Of course, most of these were young people and they said, "Sure, certainly." And of course the leaders didn't want any part of that because this was not in their program. Their program was to go there and raise cane and put up a showing and then go on about their business. They didn't expect me to come out there. So I stood there and of course my officers were inside. They've opened the door, about maybe a couple of feet, they were concerned and they thought they'd drag me in if things got a little too hot. They started throwing tomatoes, but possibly at the Commie leaders. One of the tomatoes hit one of my officers inside the building! So anyhow, when they got through with all their insults and all that, then I said, "Now it's my turn." You know, I stood there and listened to them and of course the Commie leaders would not allow it. They said, "No, we can't allow you to do that, you can't." But the followers of the Commies said, "Yes, we told the ambassador that he could and we think he should." So, they did settle down a bit and gave me the opportunity to make quite a speech and appeal to their good sense and to their patriotic feelings and so forth. And one of the Commie leaders was right there beside me and he sort of shoved me a little bit and when that happened, I grabbed him by the shoulder and pushed him down and I told him in no uncertain terms, "The next time you do this to me, the next time you push me, you're going to come out missing your teeth." I guess I looked serious enough and determined enough that he never got close to me again. But anyhow, by this time,

there were several hundred Costa Ricans, other Costa Ricans, that had gathered around and they were getting concerned for my safety, and I knew then that if I didn't do something that we were going to have these people hurt and so I then invited all the Commie leaders, there were five of them, to come into the Embassy into my office and sit down and "Let's talk about your problems. I want to know what your problem is." Well, of course, the Commie leaders didn't want this to happen, but the other people said, "Yes, yes, yes." So they did. They came in and sat down with me for about an hour, an hour-and-a-half, and discussed their problems. In the meantime, the group of Communists that were out there dispersed, because their leaders were taken away from them, and they didn't know what to do so they started leaving in every direction.

Then the people, the Costa Ricans, started after them. They chased them all over the place. In fact, the following day, one of these taxi drivers came in and wanted the United States to pay for the repair of his taxi because one of the Commies or two of the Commies had gotten into his taxi, locked the doors, and were leaving, but a bunch of people came up and did quite a bit of damage to the car. So they felt that the United States should pay for the car. I said, "Look, you better talk to the Commies, they're the ones that caused this problem." So anyway--

F: When you were inside talking to these leaders, did they do a kind of give-and-take talk or did they--?

T: They did except for the fact that I found out at that time that the Communists, at least the type of Communists that we had, based in Central America, were the type that followed a definite program or instructions and if they had to deviate from it, then they were lost.

So I knew that then, so that in my conversation, I was able to get them confused. In fact, I had pictures of President Kennedy and they ended up by going around looking at the pictures of President Kennedy and President Johnson. But, later on we found out that at their regular Communist meeting, that the three leaders were severely reprimanded for having allowed the situation to develop the way it did. Because their plan was never to have me come out there. Their plan was never to have them to go into the building, you know. When I left--when I left the country, when it was announced that I was leaving--even in the Communist paper, they said, "Well, we don't agree with the same principles that Ambassador Raymond Telles does, we don't agree with what his country's doing, but we respect him because he has been of help to the people of our country," which I thought was great for them to say that.

F: Incidentally, is Telles a Spanish surname?

T: Yes.

F: I haven't run into it anywhere but with you.

T: Is that right? I would say it's very common. You'll find it in many places.

F: Did it make any particular difference in how you ran an embassy, whether Johnson or Kennedy was President, or did to a certain extent your representation of the United States go on the same?

T: No, it was about the same, because I think their policies towards Latin America were the same. The Alliance for Progress for example went on the same as it did when President Kennedy originated it.

F: Common Market picked up some steam.

T: Common Market picked up. I was instrumental in getting Costa Rica interested and involved in the Central American Common Market. You see, up until that time, Costa Rica has been the only country that would not join the Central American Common Market. Then, when President Orlich came in, I was able to induce him or to talk his government into joining the Central American Common Market.

F: Was there any resentment, any considerable resentment, through the part of Latin America you were acquainted with over the announcements of both Kennedy and Johnson that we had to do something to slow down the birth rate?

T: Well--

F: Did they recognize this as a pragmatic problem even though its got a religious--

T: See, our policy at the time was a low-key type. In other words, we didn't actually come out over night and demand that this program should be undertaken. It was done in a very low-key and very slowly. And, of course, in Costa Rica, for example, I made certain that I visited with the high officials of the Catholic Church before any program was initiated and again, the program was initiated very slowly. It wasn't put on as a full program so.

F: It was never so much pushed as people were allowed to come to you.

T: No, that's right. In other words, we were advocating it but not to the extent that it was offensive to the people. And of course, as I said, I had very good relations with the church people there in Costa Rica. So it didn't create a problem as far as I was concerned. In fact, I thought that it was well taken.

F: In the summer of 1964 President Orlich came up to Washington, D. C. and saw the President, saw Dean Rusk, saw U Thant and so forth, did you come along?

T: Yes, I accompanied President Orlich.

F: Tell me about the trip and sort of how it went.

T: Well, first of all, I had been after President Johnson to invite President Orlich not only because I thought it would be a good thing since Costa Rica was certainly one of our best friends in Latin America, but also because of the fact that they had given President Kennedy such a wonderful reception that I thought it was only right that we should reciprocate and invite President Orlich to Washington and after a few attempts and efforts, President Johnson agreed to invite President Orlich.

F: How do you set that up? Does the President give you some alternative dates of when it would be convenient and then you sort of feel out the local person, or do the two embassies handle it between them or how?

T: Well, actually it is handled--well, of course, the White House and the State Department and our embassy and we would do the leg work on it as far as setting the dates. In other words, we would be given two or three dates by the President as to when it would be possible for the President of the country to visit in Washington and then after much contact, discussion, the date is finally set. And then, of course, it's generally set several months in advance because it does take a considerable amount of planning to set this kind of a visit.

F: Does your embassy send up information on President Orlich, for instance, saying what his likes are?

T: Not only what his likes are, but right down to what he likes in the way of food, and what his interests are, either personal or official. For example, in his case he was very much interested in cattle. So, as part

of his visit it was arranged that he would visit the King's Ranch in Texas, and he enjoyed that very much. Then he visited Philadelphia where he had some distant relatives that he wanted to see, you know. Then, from here we flew him to Puerto Rico where he wanted to meet with the public officials there. Then finally from there we flew him back to Costa Rica. And this was a first time, again, that the Presidential airplane had gone all the way to Costa Rica to pick up the President and his party. I requested it because, well, I thought it would be a good thing to do, a nice gesture on the part of our government towards their government and their airplanes were not satisfactory. So, I was able to talk the White House into letting the airplane fly all the way to Costa Rica and pick up the people.

F: Do they send down either Air Force One or back-up or do they--?

T: Yes, they sent Air Force One at the time and then when we returned to Costa Rica, again I was able to talk them into sending an airplane to take them all the way back.

F: A lot of people came out just to see the plane, didn't they?

T: Oh, that's right. Absolutely. This one time, of course, going back was the back-up plane, but that same plane took us all the way to Puerto Rico and from Puerto Rico took us in to Costa Rica. So, it was quite an interesting trip, you know.

F: You must have been present sometime when the two President talked.

T: Oh, yes. I was present on several occasions.

F: Did they talk pretty candidly with each other or--?

T: Yes, yes I think they did and particularly--of course, Costa Rica, you know, has always been very friendly to the United States and their main problems were economic problems so that there was nothing that could be considered as being problem that would generate any friction between the

governments of the presidents. Of course, our President was well informed as to the economic problem situation of the country and we, in fact, attempted to determine what President Orlich would talk about to our president, and so forth. So that's why I say it takes several months to prepare for such a visit. But I think that their conversations were quite frank, but very friendly. As you know, Costa Rica has always been on the side of the United States. For example, when the Cuban situation came up, of course, we were asked to advise the President, to keep him advised as to when these things were going to happen and what the United States planned to do. Immediately President Orlich offered the use of their sea ports and their air bases and asked me to advise the President that any way that they could be of assistance, that they were there. You probably might of heard of the story that went on after Pearl Harbor, when we were attacked at Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. The Costa Ricans felt so strongly about it that they declared war on Japan and Germany even before we did. And simply as a resentment on their part against the action that had been taken by Japan. And as a result, of course, one of their banana ships was sunk by the Germans. I don't know, three or four Costa Ricans lost their lives, so it is quite an annual ceremony when they visit the tombs of these people that died in World War II. What was so interesting about it and fascinating was the fact that Costa Rica doesn't have a military, you know! They don't have an army, they don't have an air force, or a navy but still they were willing to be on our side; they were willing to be counted! They stood up and were counted as our friends even on that occasion.

F: Did Santo Domingo pose any particular problem for you?

- T: Well, Santo Domingo naturally was a problem; but, yet I think that we had sympathy, not just sympathy but I think that we had the support of those people. It was not possible for them to come out and openly say, "We're supporting the United States." But in principle and in many other ways, well, they were with us. In fact Costa Rica was the first country that offered to send a contingency of troops--it wasn't troops actually, they were policemen because Costa Rica only has a police force. So they sent a company of policemen as an indication of their support to the United States--to make it public.
- F: Is the feeling of Costa Rica--the official Costa Rica--that the Organization of American States is their organization, or do they have the feeling that the United States sort of dominates it?
- T: No, I think that they feel that it is their organization. I never did experience too much opposition to that. Our criticism as a matter of fact--I think that they felt that it was their organization; it was a place where they could certainly expound on their theories or principles and whatever objection they might have had to us or anybody else, for that matter. So, I do really believe that they thought it was their OAS and not so much the United States.
- F: In 1965, right at the end of it, the Inter-American Development Bank gave a 4.2 million dollar loan to Costa Rica to help out with the problems. Do you play any role in that since the United States, of course, is, in a sense, the major stockholder in the IADB or is that handled independently of the embassy?
- T: No, the embassy contributes to a determination because I think that the economic situation of the particular country plays a very important part in determining the approval or rejection of such loans. So that the

ambassador and his staff certainly play an important part in contributing the many factors that are involved in determining either the acceptance or the rejection of such a proposal.

F: Does the fact that the head of the IADB is someone like Felipe Herrera is that important as a reassurance that this is not a sort of another United States super-agency?

T: Well, I would imagine that at times, especially when we indicate our displeasure or disapproval of certain loans that they do feel that it is a United States bank rather than a Latin America, but not to the extent that they would register a major protest or would be willing to dissolve the bank or anything like that. I'm sure that at times they feel somewhat frustrated, but I would say that's only in a small number of occasions, not generally.

F: When President Trejos succeeded President Orlich, did it make any particular difference in the relationship between the United States and Costa Rica.

T: Yes, it did. It did in some ways. You see, you have to know a little bit about Dr. Trejos to understand his position or reaction. You see, he was never a politician. As a matter of fact--

F: A most unlikely man to be a president, really!

T: As a matter of fact, all his life he had been a professor in the University of Costa Rica.

F: And not active?

T: Not active whatsoever in politics. I don't know that he even knew how to spell the word, you know. I don't mean that as a--he was very respectable, but I'm trying to impress upon you the fact that he was not ever involved in politics before that. It was this coalition of groups that finally decided on President Trejos because all of the

different proposed candidates that had been presented by the different groups of this coalition were not acceptable either because they were all politicians or because they felt that they would not attract the average voter on the street or for many other reasons. So then they had to select somebody like Dr. Trejos, Professor Trejos, who had never been involved in politics and while he was not a hero or not necessarily known yet nobody could ever point the finger at him. They can say he's a very nice fellow--

F: If you didn't like him, at least you could be neutral.

T: That's right. And this is the way that President Trejos came into political life. I don't think that he was ever entirely and totally happy as a politician. And as a consequence, because of this lack of political experience, he had many, many problems with his congress and with the average politician, even in his own party, because of the fact that he was trying to administer the business of the country in the same way he would administer the business of the University. And this would never work, so that he had problems not only with members of his congress, but also in some of the international problems. So consequently, I think that the relations between the United States and Costa Rica at that point were just a little bit different, you know. They were not as close for the moment until we had to prove to the man that we were for him, that we wanted to help him as a president and to help his people and his country. So it took a few months to get him to understand that we were sincere in our desires to help him. Then after that it worked out real fine. We tried to get him to visit Washington as a President-elect. We did everything we could and we felt that he was coming, but at the last minute some of our plans in the program changed and his desire to be prepared when the time came to take over the reigns of the country--he had many

things to do before that, and therefore the visit was never arranged.

But I had recommended very strongly that he be invited, not necessarily as a president because we had just had Orlich but certainly as President-elect. But as I said, for a number of reasons it wasn't possible. But he continued to cooperate with us and he sent many of his representatives here to Washington in the different areas of economics, military, and so forth. So that, as I said, after a few months, we had no further problems.

F: When he came up finally, as I recall, in the fall of '68, you, of course, were no longer Ambassador. Did you go to the White House dinner for him?

T: Yes, yes I was invited fortunately. I say fortunate because I liked President Trejos and of course I'm very fond of their country. Those people, not only the government but the people of Costa Rica, were always very kind and generous to me and to my family. And so that's the reason I felt very fortunate and pleased that I was invited.

F: Did that seem to go off just as well as it had when President Orlich came up?

T: Yes, it was a very good visit. In fact, President Johnson and--

F: That would be in June of '68--

T: Yes, were very pleased--and Lady Bird Johnson--very pleased with the visit and they were of course--Lady Bird Johnson remarked that she was very pleased and happy to see that there was a close friendship between my wife and me and the Trejos.

F: You did become personal friends.

T: Yes. So again, it was a very interesting occasion for me.

F: Had you come to know President Trejos while he was still a professor?

T: Yes, I knew him because as I mentioned to you before I made it a point to maintain contact with the University because I felt that it was very important.

There were Communist groups in the University and I felt that it was necessary that I should maintain close contact with the students and the faculty. In fact, I was instrumental in helping establish the first medical school in Costa Rica. I had the privilege of attending the first graduation of five doctors--two of them were women--from the University there.

F: You say you were instrumental. What did you do?

T: Well, in my contacts with the University, and my talks with the faculty and the president of the University I not only noticed, but they made it known, that they were very much interested in establishing a school of medicine because their young people had to leave the country, to go to other countries, to attend medical schools. I had the AID people conduct a survey to determine whether or not the basic facilities and necessities in establishing a medical school were there, and the report that was given to me was that there were, that it was only a matter of some additional help on the part of our government--that they could establish a fine medical school. Then, of course, in coming up to Washington in consultation, I urged our government to provide the necessary--not only the necessary financial help, but also provided professors and doctors from Louisiana State University to visit in Costa Rica for whatever time was necessary in order to establish the school.

F: Did you get to know some of the Communists well enough that you--I mean, allowing for the fact that you had diametrically opposite political views--that you became sort of halfway friends with some of them?

T: No, we were not friends, but we were not violent enemies either because I think that they honestly had respect for me because they felt that what I was doing while it was contrary to their principles and contrary

to their desires as far as being able to influence the people--what I was doing was certainly not to their benefit. Like my visits to all the small villages and all that where they were trying to do some work. My presence there certainly detracted from their efforts and would not permit them to operate as freely as they would have like to because I was not only in the villages but I was in the banana fields, you know, plantations.

F: Walk down the rows of stalks--

T: I visited--I even went into the holds of the ships where the Costa Ricans were loading the bananas and all that and this is what they didn't like.

F: Down there at Limon.

T: Right. They agreed in their own minds that what I was doing was right--

F: But they wished you wouldn't do it!

T: Right. They felt that I was taking away from their interests, and so while we were not friends, I don't think that they would ever consider doing bodily or physical damage or harm to me. Of course, you never know.

F: Did you, from an administrative standpoint, did you have the problem that there was a kind of a proliferation of U.S. agencies there that were semi-autonomous, independent of embassy control, or could you pretty well keep things?

T: Well, you see, this was very interesting to me because this was the first time that I had been an ambassador. All I had was administrative experience in dealing with municipal governments so when I went to Costa Rica, actually, I had ideas of my own which did not necessarily agree with the policies and ideas of the State Department and primarily with some of our foreign service officers. And consequently when I went there, there was an immediate confrontation, as it were, with some of my high staff there, some of my immediate high staff, and, however, realizing that this could

be a serious problem for me and the fact that this was the first time in the history of our country that a U.S. ambassador of Mexican descent had ever been appointed--this was a first, again. I knew that I had to take some action at the risk of maybe being reprimanded by the State Department or by the President in order to put into effect my own policies. For example, my going out to the little villages and visiting with the banana workers and all that, I was told in no uncertain terms by my high staff, "We don't do that in the State Department. This is not being done; you're not supposed to do these things." Well, it got to the point where it was going to be my policy, and I was going to determine my actions in my efforts to maintain the respect of the people and the country towards the United States and towards me. I was there to make friends with those people, I was there to try to help them and to influence them not only in their friendship but in the final analysis in any political moves that we would make. For example, on many, many occasions, when the chips were down, and we had to get a certain number of votes, either at the U.N. or at the OAS, this is when our influence that we had generated and accumulated over the months would pay off, you see, not only with the government, but with the people. And so, consequently, I felt that my best approach was to become friends with the people. In other words, you could go to any hotel and there you would see the shoe shine boy and you could ask him who the ambassador of the United States was and they could tell you who he was by name, and this is exactly what I wanted. And as a consequence, I think that I was able to influence not only the people but the government of Costa Rica in many of our policies, in the establishment of the Central American Market, in many of the votes at the U.N., and at the OAS, and particularly when we asked them to send a token group of soldiers or policemen to the Dominican Republic, which had never been done before,

and this was a taboo as far as Latin America was concerned, but yet we were able to do it.

F: More so in a non-militaristic country.

T: Right. So I think that this was primarily because of the friendship relationship that was not only evident over the years, but certainly the enhancement of that friendship in the past or in the matter of the few months that I was there. So, it got to the point that it was necessary for me to send back home some of those top people that were not willing to go along with my policies. They had set policies in their minds that had been in effect for too long, I thought. Therefore, since we couldn't have a meeting of the minds, I felt that it was either them or me. So it was me; I stayed there. So, in answer to your question, yes, I originally--to start with, I had a little problem not only in setting policy but in my ability to direct all of the activities. But it wasn't too long. They found out that I meant business and there was no two ways about it. After that, I didn't have any problems at all. As a matter of fact, many of the ambassadors complained about the CIA. I never had any problem with the CIA, but we had an understanding. In fact, I had three CIA people there while I was ambassador, and I never had any problem with any of them. As a matter of fact, I did everything I could within my power to help them get along in the country because of the respect people had for me, because of the respect the government had for me. So, I would sit with them and talk to them and say, "Now listen fellows. I'm the boss here, and I want to know everything that goes on. The day that I find out that you're doing something that you haven't consulted with me, or that I have not approved of, that day we part company." And I guess they knew that I meant business, because there was no problem. So I never had any problem.

F: Did everybody in the embassy--were they all aware that these were CIA people?

T: Oh yes. There was no question about it. Everybody knew it. In fact, the government knew it. They knew who they were.

F: Were they mainly fact-gatherers?

T: Well, whatever the CIA does. The government knew and that's why many times I was able to help them with their relationship with the government.

F: Well now, for instance, back there in Orlich's time, you had a plot in the spring of '65 against the government that didn't get anywhere. Would the CIA get into something like that or was that strictly--

T: A plot in 1965?

F: Yes. In March.

T: It would be very difficult for me to try to analyze the situation because I honestly don't know. In fact, I have tried to--well, not necessarily tried but as a matter of conversation with many of my friends in Costa Rica that when they come to the United States they still visit with us. Many of them are convinced, of course, that we were involved. They don't have any proof of it that we were, but of course the President, President Figueres, apparently was convinced that our embassy was involved in an attempt to overthrow him, or at least that they were talking about it. I would tend to believe that it wasn't true, because if it was true, we certainly handled it in a very poor manner! So, in my honest opinion, I don't think that it was true. Sometimes members of your embassy do a lot of talking that they shouldn't; sometimes some of them have maybe a couple of drinks too many and they start talking. And many times their conversations or remarks are taken out of context and made to appear something different than what they really are. I had to send one of my staff members back home because of that, because every time that he

had maybe a drink too much, he would start making certain comments and remarks that I didn't think were to the best interest of either country for that matter. And I sent him back. So, in answer to your question, again, my personal opinion is that I don't think there was anything like that. I think there was just loose talk that wasn't true.

F: The State Department takes an ambassador's recommendation on personnel like that--this particular individual. They wouldn't insist that you keep somebody who was--

T: Very seldom would they do that. Especially if--of course if they feel that the ambassador knows what he's doing, that his recommendations are to the best interest of our government, they don't insist. You can generally send back home the people that you don't feel are doing a job.

F: Did you feel that the Alliance lived up to expectation or that it was beginning to run out of gas while you were there?

T: Well, I think that it definitely did a job. I would hate to think what the situation would be today, not only from an economic point of view but from a stability point of view, in Latin America if it hadn't been for the Alliance. I can't say that the Alliance did everything that we had hoped for, but I think that if it had been given the opportunity, that it could have done exactly what we had hoped it would do for the country from an economic point of view. So that, I was definitely sold on the program.

F: I stopped off in El Salvador in 1969 and I was amazed on that occasion at how many more Central American-made goods were on sale.

T: That's right and, of course, the Central American Common Market had something to do with that, so that I do honestly believe that the Alliance for Progress and the Central American Common Market were substantial contributors to the welfare of those countries. Of course, in that type of a program, you can't expect these countries to agree on everything. It's impossible. In fact, we don't agree within ourselves on many occasions as to certain programs. But, I think that basically and generally the program was well accepted by those countries, and I think that they were working.

F: What about the Peace Corps?

T: The Peace Corps, I think, is one of the best programs we ever had. In fact, I was very insistent that a Peace Corps group be sent to Costa Rica. We had one of the largest Peace Corps in Latin America and they did a terrific job. The people loved them. They did a lot of good for the people of Costa Rica. And so I think that's a good program.

F: Did you leave Costa because the President wanted you to go with his Mexican Commission on the Economic and Social Development of the Border Area or did you--

T: No, you see, President Johnson--

F: --or did you leave and then this came up?

T: No. I left for that reason. President Johnson in his meeting with President Diaz Ordaz in Mexico City had discussed the organizing of a joint commission and at that time they agreed that they would definitely go into it and appoint a chairman--you know, one from each country--to organize this joint commission. And of course, there were many, many--when I say many, possibly fifteen--names that came up and that were recommended by the Department of State to the President to chair the U.S. section of the commission. And of course my name was one of those

because of my Mexican descent, because I was mayor of a border city, because of my relations with Mexico--Diaz Ordaz, we were friends you know-- and he felt because of my ability to not only speak the language but understand the people, and I guess he felt that I had done a good job in Costa Rica, that here was something new in which there were no guidelines, certainly no policies that were set.

F: You were given pretty much of a blank check to develop this.

T: That's right. So this is the reason that when the list was presented to President Johnson, he said, "I want Telles to come up and organize this commission." So he asked me to come up and visit with him and then he talked to me about it. And I was quite reluctant at the time to taking on the work of the commission. And, in fact, he offered me other positions but, realizing not only the importance of the commission--

F: Were they other diplomatic positions or--

T: Yes, other diplomatic positions. But realizing the fact that it was the President's desire that I should come back and help him organize and meet the commitment that he had made with President Ordaz, to help him organize this commission, well I decided to go ahead and accept the challenge, because it was a challenge. As I said, there were no previous guidelines set, there were no policies or anything of the sort so I had pretty much of a free hand in setting up--

F: Where'd you get your budget?

T: The budget came primarily from budgets of different departments of government. Primarily. And then eventually, we were included as part of a budget of some other agency to operate.

F: Were you involved in the development of Amistad?

T: Not really. I was aware of it. I was interested in it. I visited during my term as chairman of the border commission. I visited in the

Amistad and attended some of the functions there, but I didn't really have an active part in it, no.

F: Are the Mexicans sort of pleased with that sort of development, that and Falcons for instance, as we are?

T: Yes, I think they are. I think that they're not only pleased, but I think that they have now come to the conclusion that such joint projects do work. I'm certain that at the initiation of these programs, these projects, that they were a little bit concerned. Again, "the giant from the north will take us over," but it's very fine to see it work. For example, at the dam there, you have controls there. You have Mexicans and U.S. North Americans there sitting side by side controlling the dam, working together. It's very inspiring I think. It's one of the finest things that has been done in bettering the relations between the two countries.

F: Well now, in your border commission how often did you get together with the opposite number in Mexico?

T: We got together quite often. First of all, we had the joint meeting of the commission every six months, but in the meantime, I was flying back and forth to Mexico to meet with my counterpart and by the same token, he was doing the same thing. And then we had technical people representing the commission on both sides that were meeting all the time and developing new programs and new projects so that we were very much in contact.

F: In many ways this is sort of an inter-agency commission. You're dealing for instance with one thing that maybe would come under transportation, you're dealing with something else that would come under transportation, you're dealing--

T: This was one of our problems because of the many, many problems and scope of the problems. We were dealing with many, many things, you

know. And, of course, this was one of the reasons that the State Department was a little concerned because we were in the position, at the Presidential level, to deal with many problems; we were in the position to resolve many problems because we were dealing at the Presidential level. I had no one to report to except the President, and by the same token, my counterpart had no one to report to except the President of Mexico. So, we were able to resolve many of our problems at that level to the point where, for example, we came up with an international agreement of assistance in the event of tragedy on either side of the border, like the hurricane. When Beulah Hurricane hit south Texas and north Mexico there, well, we were very much in the picture and we were able to resolve many of the economic and financial problems and I think in effect save many lives. So, we finally came up with an international agreement of assistance and this is something that the State Department had been wanting to come up with for at least ten years and hadn't been able to do it. I certainly don't mean it as criticism; it's just one of those things that when you're dealing from a diplomatic and protocol basis, it just takes that long. But we were able to do it because we were, again, dealing at the Presidential level.

F: Could you do this on an agreement between your end of the office and the Mexican end of the office or did you have to put these things, like the State Department would, through the Senate for okay? How much latitude did you have?

T: I'm sure that depending on the scope of the program of the project, many of them only with the approval of President Johnson I was able to go ahead and put them into effect. Now, there would have been some I'm sure that would require not only approval of the State Department but also the approval of Congress. But we did have quite a bit of free leeway in many of our projects.

F: Did the President show an active interest in the commission or did he sort of set you up in it and forget it?

T: No, no. He had--in fact, it was because of his continued interest that, I think, that the commission was successful. You see, I asked him to name as members of the commission representatives from each department of government. In other words, assistant secretaries from each department were members of the commission. A couple of times came up when I asked the President to call these people in there and let them know that it wasn't Raymond Telles' project or program, that it was his program, that it was a commitment that he had made to Mexico, to President Diaz Ordaz and therefore he expected them to cooperate with; and therefore, I was able to get the assistance and cooperation from all agencies in government. Some of them maybe a little reluctant, but because of the interest of the President they were willing to come along.

F: Now, what else do you think we need to say?

T: Let me just say that I have had the honor and the privilege of serving under five United States Presidents.

F: When Raymond Telles went to El Paso Schools, he never knew that he was going to run around with Presidents of Mexico, and the United States, Costa Rica, etc.

T: No, I never did. In fact, that was too much of a dream to even think about it, you know. But, I did serve under President Harry Truman; under Dwight Eisenhower--I was an aide to both of these two presidents; and of course I served under President John F. Kennedy; I served under President Lyndon B. Johnson; and of course, I'm serving now under President Richard Nixon.

F: I would presume you came to President Nixon's attention just simply because you had been active in government service.

T: Well, I was very much surprised to be honest with you. I served during the transition period. In fact, I didn't leave the office until August of 1969 so that I was in President Nixon's Administration during the transition period.

F: About eight months or so.

T: Yes. And then I retired as an ambassador and I sincerely didn't know, didn't even dreamed, or thought that President Nixon would ever ask me to assume one of these positions.

F: Did your leadership of the United States part of the Mexican commission carry ambassadorial rights?

T: Yes, yes. I was appointed as chairman of the U.S. section of the border commission with the rank of ambassador. That's right. Well anyhow, as I started to say that I had served under five presidents and I would like to state that, in my opinion, history will record--(interruption)
--Some kind of an international position tomorrow, I would take that.

F: You almost worked yourself out of a job when that border commission--

T: That's right, but anyhow--

F: Let's go back to what we were saying about--

T: But anyhow, I started to say that in my opinion, history will record President Lyndon B. Johnson as one of our great Presidents and certainly one of the greatest men in government. I honestly don't know of another President in our history who was better prepared, better qualified, and with a tremendous amount of government experience to assume the duties and responsibilities of the office of the President of the United States.

And I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to become acquainted with President Lyndon B. Johnson, but to serve under him and certainly to be counted, I'm sure, among the many, many thousands of friends that he has.

F: I know that's mutual.

T: And I would also, I think that I would not give you my complete views here this afternoon if I didn't mention another great person. As if it were in LBJ's Administration. Let me just say in reminiscing over my friendship and association with President Lyndon B. Johnson, not only in my experiences as United States Ambassador, but also as Chairman of the U.S. Mexico Border Commission, that I must not forget or overlook another very important person. And that is Lady Bird Johnson. In my book, she is certainly a very great woman. I think her greatness was combined with her many other outstanding qualities for she certainly has a fine quality of humility, understanding, compassion, and a great reservoir of intelligence. You know the old saying that behind every great man there's a great woman. I sincerely believe that that saying applies very definitely to Lady Bird Johnson. In my opinion, she was not only an inspiration and a fine influence upon the President, but also in her own right I feel that she was a great woman and, of course, still is.

F: Sitting here today, and in fact coming in from National Airport at noon today, I thought to myself with the 60 or 70 degrees that we're having today, pretty soon her handiwork's just going to be bursting all over the country, particularly all over this Washington area.

T: She was the type of woman that not only was humble in her relationship with people, but I'll never forget that it didn't make a bit of difference where I was or where she was, I was always received by her with the same

kindness. She seemed to be happy to see me and this really meant quite a bit because as I said, I consider Mrs. Johnson a great woman and for her to act in this manner--simple, humble--I think this is great in a person.

F: Before I go, let me ask you one other question. Did you have a feeling that President Johnson had a really good grasp on the Latin American needs and problems and aspirations, the sort of psyche of the Latin Americans?

T: I think he did. Not only do I think that he had this feeling for Latin America, for the countries and the people, but I think that he showed it in many ways. To give you an illustration, you might recall that we had the eruption of the volcano Irazu in Costa Rica.

F: That mud slide.

T: --during the time that I was there. This eruption continued for two years whereby every morning, the city of San Jose was completely covered by one or two inches of ashes and President Johnson was tremendously helpful in that situation. To give you an idea: As a result, of course, of the ashes that were going into the river and streams created a flooding condition and in fact one of the small towns there close to San Jose was completely wiped out. You couldn't find a door, a board, or any part of a house--

F: I visited there.

T: --in the area. This same flooding condition threatened one of the largest cities of Costa Rica, a city by the name of Cartago about twenty or twenty-five miles from San Jose and when that happened, when the potential danger was there, of course, the people came to me and the government came to me and I contacted President Johnson and told him

what the problem was, what the danger was so that President Johnson without hesitation, immediately ordered not only a contingency of our C.B.'s, company of C.B.'s to fly to Costa Rica, but also ordered a number of our large transport Air Force airplanes to transport huge heavy machinery. You know, like dump trucks and all kinds of--

F: Earth moving equipment.

T: --earth moving equipment to the country and they flew them into the country in a matter of a few days which indicated to me that he was responsive to the pleas and the urgings, not only of the people but to the recommendations of his representative of the country.

F: When you needed to, you could get through to him without any problem?

T: Oh yes, absolutely. I could. I don't know whether this was true with all ambassadors, but I know that it was true of me, and as I said, the people I know, in Costa Rica loved President Johnson. As I said, the two indications of it was this demonstration of about 30 thousand people in favor of President Johnson and the fact that they named a whole town or village for President Johnson.

F: When he later, in the summer of '68, went on that trip to El Salvador, you didn't go on that, did you?

T: No, I didn't go on that one.

F: Did you have any hand in trying to set up a Punta del Este?

T: No, I was not involved in any of that.

F: One final question. You've been very patient. How do you account for Costa Rican stability. It's a beacon, you know.

T: I think that one of the main reasons for the stability of the country--

F: It's such an everlastingly rational country in an irrational world!

T: I think that it's the--well, several reasons--first of all, the distribution of wealth. You will find, I think, that one of the basic reasons is the

fact that there is truly a wealth distribution. By that I mean, you'll find that there are thousands of small farms that are owned by the farmer and not necessarily by just a small group of wealthy people in the country like you have in some of the other Latin American countries. So that the distribution of land that many other countries are talking about, that's a reality in Costa Rica; you have hundreds and possibly thousands of small farmers that own their own land. I think that that's one of the reasons. The other reason is the fact that that country, you might have heard, is probably the most literate country in the whole of Latin America. That doesn't mean that they have the most college graduates, but it means that the average person at least knows how to read and write. And therefore, this contributes to their being well-informed; they know what's going on. They're able to adopt new methods because of their education, because of their literacy.

Also, I think that the democracy that reigns in that country--I think it's not only important to the country, but it's just as effective as it is in our own country. In fact, I think that their elections are even much more protected against fraud than they are here in our own country. Because over there, they not only have your picture, but they also have your fingerprints and so when you mark your ballot, you put your fingerprint on it so they can find out whether you're the right person that voted on that ballot. You do have a truly working democracy in Costa Rica.

As I said, I keep in touch through these many friends that write to me and visit with me when they're here. A while back--oh, several months ago--when it was announced that President Figueres had reached an agreement with the Russian government to exchange diplomatic missions, ambassadors, in other words, the people of Costa Rica were very unhappy. They didn't want any part of it, I think because they feel that Russia is a Communistic country. I think because they felt that Russia is not necessarily a very close friend of the United States so that they were very much opposed to it. And when it was announced that a Russian ambassador would come to Costa Rica, they held a demonstration of many thousands of people. The women were dressed in black, you know and demonstrated in front of the Presidential Palace. It was not a violent type of demonstration but a very effective demonstration to the point where President Figueres had to stop and take another look. Now, as I understand it, though, the Russian ambassador finally did come, but it did show the reluctance of the people.

F: He didn't come in with much arrogance. He's going to tread softly for a while at least.

T: And so I think that these are many of the reasons that the country is as stable as it is.

F: It's a trivial question. Somehow I've wondered though, ever since I first went there in 1959. How do they feel about the American embassy residence there which is totally un-Latin? It's traditionally an old South colonial home.

T: Well, first of all, let me just say that it's the only residency in all of our Latin American embassies that's not owned by our government. It's the only one that's leased.

F: It is leased?

T: And we used to--

F: Was it built locally?

T: Yes. It's patterned after the Gone with the Wind residence. What was the name of that?

F: Tara.

T: Tara. And no, I think that the people are very proud--proud not only because of the design, but of course it belongs to Costa Rica. It's a beautiful residence. I understand however that we are now constructing a residence of our own.

F: Well, you know, you're kind of startled when you drive out there and see the thing because--

T: It's a beautiful sight. And we enjoyed it very, very much the six years that we spent there.

I would also just like to say to you that, of course, I personally was extremely disappointed and sad when--, I guess just like many millions of Americans when President Johnson announced that he did not choose to run again or that he would not accept the nomination if offered. I'm sorry that he didn't, you know, because we were all prepared and ready to go to work for him again. But, I can understand.

F: Well, thank you Mr. Ambassador.


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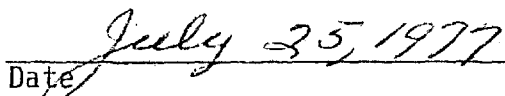
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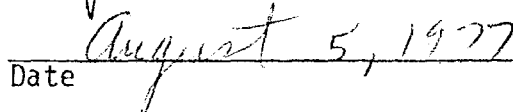
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