INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 31, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: PRESIDENT JOSÉ JOAQUIN TREJOS

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

PLACE: President Trejos' office in the Casa Presidencial in San José, Costa Rica.

Tape 1 of 1

F: This is an interview with *el Señor Presidente*, José Joaquin Trejos, in his office in the *Casa Presidencial* in San José, Costa Rica on May 31, 1969. Sr. Presidente, what are you going to include to say where you came from and how you happened to be presidente?

T: I was born in San José, Costa Rica in 1916. I have lived all my life here, except for a little more that a year that I lived in Chicago, at the University of Chicago.

F: What were you studying there?

T: Especially mathematics and statistical theory, which were the subjects I came to teach here in Costa Rica at the university.

F: This is not the usual road to the presidency.

T: No.

F: By mathematics.

T: That was in 1946-1947. I was already working at the university by that time. I became dean of the school of economics of our university in 1952, and the dean of the new school of arts and sciences, call it *Escuela de Ciencias y Letras*, from 1957 to 1960. In 1965, I was called to be a candidate. I was proposed as a pre-candidate and then elected as the candidate for the Unification Party, which was a coalition of two main parties in Costa Rica. We went to elections in February 1966. My

coming directly from the university to government has been pretty much a surprise for many people. I didn't make a career of politics, but I haven't found so many difficulties in translating experiences from the university to government. In general terms it is the human soul that we are tricked with.

F: And both disciplines have a certain scientific approach also that you temper with the human approach.

T: Yes, that is also true.

F: All right. Now, when you came into office here, President Johnson had been in office since the end of 1963. This means then that you more or less inherited the situation vis-a-vis the United States. What was being done with the Alliance [for Progress]? What problems did you inherit and what successes did you face?

T: Let me now continue speaking in Spanish because I cannot speak very fluently in English, as you have noticed. [Translation follows:] In Costa Rica, we have received important aid from the Alliance for Progress. Some programs had more success. In others, we noticed that there was perhaps too much bureaucracy involved and that the programs were too expensive. The programs that have been especially successful are the counseling for our Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the projects in our Ministry of Public Health.

The country also has special gratitude for President Johnson because, precisely in 1963, the country began to suffer a kind of national catastrophe. A volcano that is forty kilometers from the capital city, San José, began to erupt and that affected all the agricultural activities in our central plateau, which is the most productive,

the richest, and the most populated in the entire country. And during 1964, the problems our economy had were already serious; many problems were of a human nature, with people that had to be moved from the most afflicted regions or from the dangerous regions.

President Johnson donated a million dollars that were used to house the people that were moved into new places for a program of apartment constructions for them; and the country also received a great deal of help at that time in the form of food and other articles for the families who had suffered losses.

F: Sometimes in the States, at a time of disaster, you have a feeling that the implementation of the systems from the federal government is tied up in bureaucracy, that it tends to be delayed too long in being delivered. Was that your experience with the United States assistance at the time of your volcanic eruption and its aftermath?

T: In general, that has been one of the problems of the programs of the Alliance for Progress, about which I would like to refer to perhaps later, in more general terms, to express a global appraisal. The aid for the catastrophe, for the damage caused by the volcano, did not have these characteristics. It was given quickly. Maybe, in that case, that if not all of the benefits that should have been obtained were obtained from that aid the blame likely was ours, in Costa Rica, for not having distributed the aid given to us more efficiently. But in that concrete case, and in response to your specific question, I should say that the aid given at that time was given quickly.

F: If you were on a witness stand and had to answer yes or no on the success of the Alliance and the necessity for its continuation, would you vote yes or no?

T: It is a difficult question, but I would say that it should be continued. The answer is yes, but greatly modifying its objectives. On one occasion, and precisely during the meeting of the Central American presidents with President Johnson at San Salvador, almost a year ago, at the beginning of July 1968, at a press conference held only by the Central American presidents, a Mexican reporter asked me a question in reference to the Alliance for Progress which consisted in reminding me that I had criticized some aspects of the Alliance for Progress during the electoral campaign and she then asked me if I had since varied my opinion. The intention was to confront me with the friendship that I already had with President Johnson and with the fact that we were gathered, the Central American presidents, with President Johnson at San Salvador.

My answer was brief. I did not even try to explain what I meant, but I noticed that it appeared frequently in Mexico's newspapers. I said that since the statistics did not show that a significant *progress* had been produced; that since we were concerned with an alliance for *progress* and since progress had not occurred, there was nothing left of the Alliance for Progress except its name.

What I meant was that the results have shown, especially at that time, that the lack of the expected increases in the "per capita" national gross product. And I say "especially at that time" because last year there was a much more important increase in the gross national product of each one of our Latin American countries, and in the whole of

Latin America. Last year several countries already reached the goals that they had not reached before and which, by the way, during many years, Costa Rica has been reaching. The goal set at Punta del Este was of a growth of 2 1/2 per cent per capita of the national product of each country.

F: You had the unique experience of seeing President Johnson at Punta del Este and at San Salvador and so you saw him operating in two different groups, one quite large, one somewhat smaller. Was there any difference in his approach to the problems and his technique that you noticed or did he meet more or less with the same success?

T: No, I would not say that I noticed a difference. My first impression in meeting President Johnson at Punta del Este, was meeting a man, a person, extremely open, frank. That first meeting in Uruguay was with all the Central American presidents. We, the five presidents, met with him, and the manner in which he talked with us was completely informal.

The first meeting was surprising. Then, I understood that in that not formal manner President Johnson expressed himself, well, with candor, expounding his points of view without restrictions, in a frank manner; and he was gaining the esteem, the friendship, of each one of us who met him. That was my first meeting with President Johnson at Punta del Este.

His situation there, as you know, was difficult during the conference. The Latin American countries were, and continue to be, preoccupied because their principal problems are not solved quickly; because they desire a much more accelerated progress which they are not achieving

and, in a certain way, they demanded greater attention from the United States for Latin American problems.

At San Salvador, the group was only of Central Americans and in answer to your question, I did not see in President Johnson's approach any fundamental difference. He was again the same honest and likable person who won the affection of the people he dealt with.

There was, of course, a difference in the way of handling the questions. At San Salvador, the principal question at the conference was the Central American Common Market, the problems it had, and the successes it had achieved, and then the question of how it should develop in the future. I think that President Johnson's support for Central America's integration process has been very valuable. He was always definite. He referred, not only in San Salvador but on many previous occasions, to the successes of the Central American Common Market; and one could see his wish that this Market continue to progress, achieving triumphs so it could serve as an example, for other Latin American communities or even for other groups of nations in other parts of the world, of how self effort achieved by a group of nations is the basis of the success of our Central American Common Market; of how far reaching the principles of free trade, and the possibilities that an integration process brings when markets are opened more extensively and consequently permit the development of larger industries; of how all this set of factors could be very effective in achieving the progress of a group of nations that desire development.

So I believe that the Central American integration process, and in particular, the Central American Common Market, owe much encouragement,

much support, which in a sense is materialistic, because during President Johnson's administration, the *Banco Centroamericano de Integración Económica* received important shares from the United States government, shares that the Central American Bank transferred as credits for development in the Central American countries. But mainly a moral support: a great incentive has been the enthusiasm that President Johnson exhibited for everything concerning the Central American Common Market.

I recall that during my visit to Washington at President Johnson's invitation, one month before our meeting at San Salvador, in June 1968, he took advantage of the arrival of the Costa Rican president to sign a law by which the United States government assigned a large sum, close to four hundred million dollars to the *Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo*, for development loans for Latin America. In his speech at that time, he referred to the fact that I was present at the signing of that law, to the signing of which he had invited a group of distinguished persons in the financial field and in the government of the United States. He took advantage of that solemn occasion to emphasize gains reached by the Central American Common Market.

I cite this example, therefore, like one of many in which he, at different meetings, and in this case, at a very distinguished meeting--since we were gathered at the White House when that law was signed--he spoke of the Central American Common Market and the process of Central American integration as a model, as an example. And that is part of the incentive, the moral support the Central American countries have received during Johnson's administration.

F: Have you a danger of too much overproduction in Central America of manufactures for population?

T: No. The problems of the Common Market are rather of another nature and I'm going to refer to them now. I perhaps would like, if you will permit me, to end referring to the Alliance for Progress and referring to that answer that I have not explained well, of why I told the Mexican reporter that since the Alliance for Progress had not progress, nothing was left of it except its name.

I believe that when President Kennedy, at the first meeting in Punta del Este, took up the idea of an Alliance for Progress, at the same time he made an offer or a mention was made that the United States would give twenty billion dollars to aid Latin America to reach its goals for progress set in the first Punta del Este agreement. And the goals set were too ambitious, too elevated, somewhat idealistic, somewhat far from the reality of Latin America, in one sense. And in another sense, it seems that the act of indicating such an enormous sum, in relation to the Latin American economic potential, that the aid the United States was going to give for a number of years, probably caused a soporific impression in the Latin American countries.

Then there were two factors that seemed negative to me for the success of the Alliance. On the one hand, the goals were too ambitious; almost illusions were determined; goals or objectives reached the level of illusions. And, on the other hand, millions of dollars were spoken of which the United States was going to contribute to this program. The act of indicating this sum, therefore, induced people to wait for the aid to come from outside, for the push for development to come from the

exterior; while on the other hand it was said--what is constructive, what is positive--that the Alliance should be a labor of common effort. But there was a contradiction in speaking of a common effort and in mentioning twenty billion dollars.

I think that with respect to the Alliance for Progress, the Latin American dissatisfactions have started from there. In general, nevertheless, the program has been good. Some of the specific programs have had great successes and have helped very much our development as well as the betterment of the humane conditions of our peoples.

But our goals of progress were not achieved and a little of the disillusion of our peoples originates form the two circumstances that I noted. Maybe because of that is why Latin America willingly accepted President Nixon's idea of emphasizing commerce more and of paying better prices for Latin American products. She has accepted that idea with great enthusiasm. But nevertheless, when the time comes to face facts, to interpret that President Nixon's idea that Latin America likes; when the time comes to enact it, he may be unable to find the way to do it. Because the United States is bound by a series of other international agreements and by internal problems that are reflected in its Congress.

F: Do you get the impression that the United States under President Johnson has neglected Latin America or do you think that the Johnson Administration has been any better or any worse than its predecessors in this?

T: I do not consider in any way that Latin America has forgotten. Rather, I would say, in response to the second part of the question, that it has followed the same tendencies of prior administrations. On his part, I'm sure that he had greater interest in Latin American affairs than he

could fulfill. That was obvious at Punta del Este. It was obvious at San Salvador.

In general, the executive power, the executive branch of government in the United States, has always taken great care to attend to Latin American matters in a special way. But that has not been transposed into actions when it has passed through the House of Representatives and the United States Senate where there are much greater and conflicting interests that move to determine the actual and future action of the United States.

The executive branch of the government has a more direct contact with these countries: it has been justly preoccupied with Latin American programs. But that has not transposed itself in effective actions. I believe that this dissatisfaction with the United States that can be seen today in all of Latin America, and one that is truly lamentable and preoccupying, stems from this.

F: You've had some student violence as has the most of the remainder of the world now. In the United States, there is a tendency to blame this on the preoccupation with Vietnam. Do you think that the violence in Costa Rica has anything to do with Vietnam or do you think it's just part of a general student movement at this time?

T: I rather think that it is a worldwide sentiment that we frequently see expressed by the students, but it is also expressed by adult groups. In July of last year, in July of 1968, in France's case, when the students' movement began, it had an extra-logical scope. The posing of the goals were not clear. Later we have also seen the same beginnings of violence in other parts of the world. The ones we remember best are Mexico's, a

little before the Olympic Games which were going to take place there. They have had them in Brazil and also, of course, very much in the United States. I think that except for the United States, the others do not have any direct relation with Vietnam. Instead, it seems to be the result of a worldwide anxiety whose foundation is probably a subject of philosophical speculation. But perhaps its foundation does have something to do with the speed with which the world is changing because of technological advances. Thus, for example, the enormous advances of this so called "space era" produce anxiety in many people, and especially in the young people in relation to, "What is my future going to be? What will my life be like in ten years? How is life going to be lived in the world in a few years?" All this produces an anxiety that is frequently transposed into violence.

F: Yes. Back to the meeting of the presidents in San Salvador, did the other presidents, as well as yourself, seem to find President Johnson *simpatico*, approachable? Could they talk together fairly freely?

T: Yes. That is how it was. The conversations were like those of old friends and the same feelings were evident on the part of all the presidents: feelings of real friendship towards President Johnson.

F: Well now, am I correct in believing that even though he only went to airports, except in San Salvador, that he is the first president to have made all the Central American countries?

T: That is the way it is and. . . .

F: You met President Kennedy here in 1962? 1963?

T: President Kennedy was here in 1963. I think it was in March of 1963, for a meeting with Central American presidents, but as you say, the

difference between this meeting with President Johnson and the meeting with President Kennedy is that President Kennedy was only in San José, where he was met by the other presidents. President Johnson instead made an effort to visit each one of the countries, although only for a few hours.

F: Did this device of accompanying each president home create any particular problems? Would you say it was generally successful? What is your impression of it?

T: In general, it was a success. He was received affectionately here in Costa Rica, with great love; and I should say, it surprised me. He did not have time to come to San José, so he was only at the airport but for a little over an hour: you know that the airport is over twenty kilometers from San José. There thousands of Costa Ricans met to welcome him; a welcome full of affection. Very satisfactory.

F: Let's talk a little bit about your trip to Washington in 1968. What was the routine there? What sort of calendar did you follow after you got there?

T: Well, we had a very active first day, the day of our arrival. It began with my personal interview with President Johnson upon our arrival at the White House, an interview of about one hour. We commented on various topics relative to the Central American Common Market and Costa Rica's situation.

I remember that then, as today, I was worried about the situation of Atlantic region, our Puerto Limón region, and all the Atlantic region. That region is perhaps *the* most underdeveloped that the country has today. The region which lacks the fundamental infrastructure works

as well. I explained that preoccupation to President Johnson, the worry that social problems could occur there. All that induced me to consider important a loan application that we had presented a long time ago to the World Bank for the means with which to construct a good highway to Puerto Limón. I make here a parenthesis to explain this aspect because it's important in relation to the growth of violence that we have had in Puerto Limón these last two months. (President Johnson became interested in this matter. In my presence, he spoke with Mr. [Robert] McNamara, the President of the World Bank.) But the truth of the matter is that the World Bank has not approved our credit then or up to now. We are perfectly conscious of the fact that the United States is not the World Bank, that many other countries intervene in their decisions; and, above all, we are convinced that it is in the administration that the danger of no approval of that credit lies.

The World Bank began setting a large series of prerequisites to consider the loan application. The project is one of the best projects that Costa Rica has been able to present to any credit institution and, according to the Bank's officials, it is one of the most perfect ones presented. It includes particular studies, economic studies, studies in the engineering field in a very complex and encompassing manner. Then, there again is the problem of the United States' president's good will is not effective in actions that favor the development of our countries. In the particular case of the credit for the highway to Limón, as I say, a year has gone by and we still have the same difficulties for financing. If they present obstacles to the increase of our development, well, the problems of financial equilibrium will become acute instead of

bettering themselves.

Going back to the program of the first day of our arrival at Washington, after that first meeting, the law that gave the almost four hundred million dollars to the Interamerican Development Bank with the ceremony I have mentioned was signed. Then there was a lunch with the presidents of international financial institutions and with the secretaries general of some interamerican institutions like the CIAP (*Comité Interamericano de Alianza para el Progreso*), like the Organization of American States.

In the afternoon, the program comprised an interview with the Secretary of State, Mr. Dean Rusk. I again presented the problem of the highway to Limón because we had reasons to believe that the Department of State, in an agreement with the AID [Agency for International Development] and the other international credit organizations, was also delaying the credit transactions in favor of Costa Rica. In the evening, there was a dinner at the White House with a very select group of guests. It was very pleasant. It was a very active day. I have referred to the principal activities. There were others the same day. That evening was the evening that Senator [Robert] Kennedy was wounded in Los Angeles, and the following day the activities were interrupted for that reason.

F: Yes, I remember.

T: And although we finished other activities, it was already in the midst of that atmosphere of tension produced among all people in all the United States, and also directly affected us: the emotion, the worry, the grief, the sorrow were great for what had happened in Los Angeles.

The following day we knew about Senator Kennedy's death and all ended in drama. A part of the visit program was canceled--which was a trip to visit the fair in San Antonio, Texas--because of bereavement. But the first day had been very useful so that I always consider the visit to have been very profitable.

[Three pages deleted here at the request of President Trejos (pending his review)]

F: One more question, a technique. When you talked person to person with President Johnson, since you speak such good English, did you two talk in English or did you use an interpreter for precision?

T: In some occasions it was directly in English. But, for example, during official interviews, I preferred to speak in Spanish. There was a magnificent interpreter and I preferred to speak in Spanish because it was easier for me to express myself. But in many other occasions, in the informal ones, we spoke in English.

F: *Mil gracias.*

T: *Tuve mucho gusto.*

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By José Joaquín Trejos

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, JOSE JOAQUIN TREJOS, 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.

Signed [signature]

Date 16 de Julio 1970.

Accepted [signature]
Archivist of the United States

Date October 4, 1974