

**Wymberley DeRenne Coerr Oral History Interview—11/22/1967**  
Administrative Information

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**Date of Interview:** November 22, 1967  
**Location:** Washington D.C.  
**Length:** 18 pages

**Biographical Note**

Coerr, Ambassador to Uruguay (1962-1965) and Ambassador to Ecuador (1965-1967), discusses the Bay of Pigs and its effect on White House-State Department relations, U.S. relations with the Dominican Republic and Uruguay, and the formation of the Alliance for Progress, among other issues.

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**Suggested Citation**

Wymberley deRenne Coerr, recorded interview by Larry J. Hackman, November 22, 1967, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Oral History Interview

Of

Wymberley deRenne Coerr

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Wymberley deRenne Coerr

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Oral History Interview

with

WYMBERLEY deRENNE COERR

November 22, 1967  
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Ambassador Coerr, can you remember what your reactions were to the appointment of Secretary Rusk [Dean Rusk] as Secretary of State in 1960?

COERR: I had served under then Assistant Secretary Rusk when he was in charge of Far Eastern Affairs back in the early 1950s when I was in charge of Indonesian Affairs and therefore I was very pleased to see his appointment.

HACKMAN: What about the appointment of Under Secretary Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]? This was an appointment that seemed to stir up a great deal of controversy at the time... [Interruption] You were talking about Bowles.

COERR: Yes, I had admired Bowles just as a liberal and as a political leader and I wasn't sure how he was going to work out as an executive in the State Department. But I found out that he both managed to maintain what I considered to be his basic liberal values in the Department and at the same time make a lot of sense in some very tough decisions that he had to make.

HACKMAN: One of the things that came up in that spring of '61 is that Adolf Berle [Adolf A. Berle, Jr.] was named to head a task force that was supposedly in

the Department, but apparently there was some trouble in working out the exact arrangement. Do you have any memories of the problems this created?

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COERR: No. I remember that Mr. Berle had his office, I believe, on the same floor as the Secretary. But most of the relations of the Bureau of Latin American Republics with that task force were handled through Tom Mann [Thomas Clifton Mann], who was Assistant Secretary. And I was his deputy. If the task force took any actions requiring A.R.A. [Bureau of Inter-American Affairs] action, I usually carried those actions out on Tom Mann's instructions.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what Assistant Secretary Mann's reaction to this whole setup was at that time?

COERR: No, I don't.

HACKMAN: After Assistant Secretary Mann left, there seemed to be a problem in finding someone to take the job that the Administration was satisfied with, of Assistant Secretary to replace him. Did this create a problem for you as Acting Assistant Secretary?

COERR: No, I don't think it did. The job of an Acting Assistant Secretary naturally doesn't carry with it the weight that if you wished to get decisions made in the government that an Assistant Secretary does. But A.R.A., I believe, during that period functioned fairly efficiently as a part of the department. We waited for quite a few weeks as various names were mooted, but the Secretary and the Under Secretary for Political Affairs [George McGhee] and Mr. Bowles gave me all the support that I needed in order to get the day to day work done.

HACKMAN: Well, why do you think it took so long for them to find someone in this period?

COERR: Well, the papers were reporting that one of the reasons was that the various people whom they approached were afraid they might not be able to run Latin American Affairs because of the strong interest being taken in them by the White House.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what your reaction was to this whole idea of a possible Under Secretary for Inter-American Affairs?

COERR: I wasn't in favor of it. I didn't think it would work to raise Latin America as a geographic area above other parts of the world. I thought that all you had to do was give one man sufficient authority and you wouldn't have to increase his title.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what your reaction was to some of the appointments the Kennedy Administration [John F. Kennedy] made of ambassadors in that period? There

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was a great deal of discussion about the number of non career people they appointed. I'm thinking of people like Moscoso [Teodoro Moscoso], James Loeb [James I. Loeb], and Lincoln Gordon. Did this create a moral problem for you?

COERR: No. The people that he appointed—I've never been one who thinks that all ambassadors should be Foreign Service officers just because they're Foreign Service officers. There were people that Kennedy appointed who were recognized as part of the Kennedy ideology, and as such they helped to portray his image in Latin America. Now, as technicians some of them were better than others, but as personal representatives of the President, which is what they're paid to be and why they're appointed, they carried his image to Latin America and I think did more good than harm.

HACKMAN: Do you have any particular memories of problems that these people created as administrators because they were new to the situation?

COERR: No, nothing very important that I can remember.

HACKMAN: I thought we could talk about Cuba a little bit in light of this meeting in the White House. I believe it was April 6th. At what point did you become involved in the Cuba situation in the spring?

COERR: About the first day of April. They had sent me on a mission to Bolivia in February and I believe it extended into March. I had known vaguely that something was going on. I had shared Tom Mann's belief that you shouldn't mount anything like this unless you're prepared to go all the way. I subscribed to that strongly. But I hadn't been brought in on any of the, that I can remember, on any of the important meetings or any of the details of the thing until just a couple of days, two or three days or so, before Tom Mann left as Ambassador to Mexico.

HACKMAN: Was his leaving timed because of the Bay of Pigs coming up and the problems it would create?

COERR: I don't know. I don't know. On the surface it could be assumed that there was a connection, but unless you knew, it's very difficult to say.

HACKMAN: How many other people in the State Department, let's say other than

Secretary Rusk and Mann and yourself, were involved in this situation?

COERR: I would say almost—I can't think of anybody else in A.R.A., which I think was one of its basic weaknesses.

HACKMAN: I was wondering what you thought about that.

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COERR: I believe strongly that when you're planning such important action you better rely on the desk; you better rely on people who have a working knowledge and not on executives who inevitable have so much pressing on them that they don't have time to get to the root of the matter.

HACKMAN: Do you think if this had been done that plans would not have evolved as they did?

COERR: I don't know because it would all depend on what the working level, so to speak, had thought of it, how effective would have been their presentation if they had opposed it because there were very strong arguments and very strong factors in favor of going ahead, and for the same reason that Kennedy himself made the decision. My guess is that a good strong working level analysis would inevitably have shown that politically it was pretty well doomed. But I'm not at all sure, and hindsight's always a lot easier than foresight.

HACKMAN: Did this ever come up at any of the meetings at the White House that you know of? Did yourself or Assistant Secretary Mann make this point at the time?

COERR: About the working level?

HACKMAN: Right.

COERR: No, not that I know of. I think it was assumed that another agency had done all the working level preparations necessary.

HACKMAN: What can you recall specifically about that meeting at the White House?

COERR: Well, I'd rather not go into that.

HACKMAN: Okay. What was your own role after the White House meeting, let's say over about the next week, as the Bay of Pigs invasion preparations continues? Were you continually involved in this, or is there anything that you...?



COERR: There was nothing that I could do; I was merely kept informed. I tried to run day to day operations with the Bureau.

HACKMAN: You had a number of meetings with the President at about the time of the Bay of Pigs and immediately after April 17th, 18th, and 19th. Can you remember those meetings and what his reactions seemed to be? Was it apparent that he was deeply affected by the lack of success of the operation?

COERR: Let's see, I met him...

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HACKMAN: These are the Ambassador of Costa Rica, the Foreign Minister of Ecuador, José Figueres [José Figueres Ferrer], and Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin].

COERR: No, I think it was obvious that the President was deeply affected, but of course when you're having a protocolary meeting with an Ambassador—President Kennedy knew how to carry it off and this didn't show through very much.

HACKMAN: It didn't come up in the discussion?

COERR: Not that I can remember. I would just say the nature of the meetings would not have encouraged the Ambassador to bring it up, and neither the President nor I would have brought it up.

HACKMAN: I had wondered about this meeting with Jose Figueres and Richard Goodwin because I had heard that Figueres was quite upset about not having been informed on the invasion of Cuba. Is this what this meeting was about primarily?

COERR: I don't remember the subject of that meeting. It just escapes me completely. I don't remember that it was a very significant or an epochal meeting. And I don't remember Figueres getting excited about this or bringing it up. He might have done it. So much was happening in those days that you tend to forget things this far back. I don't remember it.

HACKMAN: Do you feel, or did you think at the time that the relationship between the State Department and the White House had changed any as a result of the Bay of Pigs?

COERR: No. I didn't see a change in any relationship, either at the time of or because of the Bay of Pigs. The White House, as I said and as everyone knows, was

taking a very strong and executive role in Latin American Affairs at that time and did so before and after the Bay of Pigs. Although we understood, especially from the press, that the President might have lost faith in some of his advisors, I think that probably that loss of faith affected other agencies more than the State Department, which hadn't been so awfully heavily involved to begin with. Things continued much as they had before.

HACKMAN: I see. Would you go into some of the problems that arose because of the intensive activity of the White House staff people in the affairs of the Department during that period? There was a lot of talk about Richard Goodwin and Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] and some problems of lines of authority.

COERR: No, I think that probably the—I think the press tended to blow this up. I

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think the press saw something which looked like news and proceeded to make news out of it more than was justified. Occasionally you would get situations created by the confusion or else the sophistication of Latin Americans who figured they could play one agency off against the other and they would feel that they could talk confidentially, say to the White House without talking the same way to the State Department because that was where they figured the source of power lay. But we kept up pretty good communications and we gradually worked out a line of action for the White House and for the State Department. I talked with them frequently, or two or three times, had frank talks with Dick Goodwin about this. I had the impression that things were getting along fairly well.

Of course the State Department individuals, including myself, were not quite as free to take to the press, directly or indirectly, to advertise their point of view. I don't think that the White House people who did have natural press connections used them in any sense competitively with the State Department. I think that they just had good working relations and they talked their affairs over with their favorite reporters.

HACKMAN: In your discussions that you had with Goodwin, how knowledgeable did he appear on Latin Affairs at that point? He was fairly young at the time.

COERR: Well, that's hard to say, to estimate a man's knowledge. I think everyone would agree that Goodwin is a very intelligent guy. He has met a few Latin American leaders. He was aware that there was a revolution, in spirit at least, in Latin America. But you can't get completely knowledgeable when you've just been through an all embracing political campaign and have picked up a few good ideas.

HACKMAN: Did the other people in the Department, particularly Secretary Rusk I guess,

appreciate the problems that you people were having with the White House people?

COEER: I imagine they knew what was going on, and the problems weren't that all fired serious. I never went and complained to the Secretary, for instance. There was no need to take it that high. Occasionally I talked to Luke Battle [Lucius D. Battle], who was—what was his position then—head of the secretariat or the Secretary's immediate staff or something like that.

HACKMAN: At one point I believed that the President said, or at least it came out in the press that he had instructed his staff on how to handle this and that any problems that had existed were going to cease. Did this make any difference...?

COERR: I don't remember when he said that.

HACKMAN: I believe that was about May, in May '61.

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COERR: Well, I don't remember that had very much effect one way or the other.

HACKMAN: What about the appointment of Robert Woodward [Robert Forbes Woodward] then, as Assistant Secretary? Did this....

COERR: Well, Woodward came in and immediately made a very strong effort to see eye to eye with the White House.

HACKMAN: It's frequently been mentioned that the President was fond of making phone calls himself down into departments to try to get specific information. Did this happen in the area of Inter-American Affairs, that you can recall?

COERR: He called me once on a Sunday morning about some point which is not too important. And I think if I remember right it was Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] that acted as his telephone operator. They were down at the White House at their office just as we were down working on Sunday morning in the State Department.

HACKMAN: I was just continuing these meetings. On May 1st—this may not stand out in your mind—you were at a meeting with the Ambassador of Panama and President Kennedy. Ambassador Arango [Augusto Guillermo Arango], I believe it was. Do you remember anything specifically about that meeting?

COERR: No, I think it was presenting credentials, but I'm not even sure. He might have been there sometime already. Most of those meetings were for

credentials or protocolary purposes.

HACKMAN: Can you describe in general how the President reacted in these meetings?

COERR: He was very friendly and the ambassadors usually—he usually took a little bit more time with them than the ambassadors expected. He usually made a terrific impression on them. They usually went out pretty well sold on the President.

HACKMAN: Did anything substantive usually come up, or were they just casual conversations?

COERR: There would be general comments. Usually the President would get substantive before they would and he would discuss general ideas about Latin America.

HACKMAN: On May 16th, there was a meeting that I suppose dealt with Brazil at which Harold Linder [Harold F. Linder], John Leddy [John M. Leddy], the Minister of Finance [Clemente Mariani] and the Charge d' Affaires [Carlos Alfredo Bernardes] from Brazil were present. Does anything ring a bell on that?

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COERR: If I remember right, they were discussing the problem of a rather large pending loan for Brazil. The details I don't remember.

HACKMAN: And then there are a couple of meetings on or briefings of President Kennedy on the Paris-Vienna trip. Do you recall specifically...?

COERR: I don't remember being on that one at all. I don't know why.

HACKMAN: It's possible that's a mistake on the list.

COERR: It could be. Sometimes we for instance, briefed with him in connection with trips to N.A.T.O. [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] or for other European visits. We might have been involved in that, but I doubt it.

HACKMAN: Was he fairly easy to brief or to work with in this area?

COERR: Yes. I mean if you knew your stuff he would sit and listen and ask very shrewd questions.

HACKMAN: It's been said that he was not fond of long memos and he wanted small, concise reports. Did this ever come up or was this apparent....

COERR: We generally operated on that theory, which isn't a bad one because usually if you've got a question it gets down to yes or no, and that's a pretty short paragraph.

HACKMAN: We talked earlier about the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs and possibly the shift in the influence of the C.I.A. There was a meeting on August 2nd that Richard Bissell [Richard Mervin Bissell, Jr.], Robert Woodward, Richard Goodwin, and Robert T. Morrison and yourself attended. Do you remember....

COERR: It sounds like an interesting meeting, but I don't know what it was about.

HACKMAN: I had thought that the whole intelligence question....

COERR: No, it might have been—when was Trujillo [Rafael Trujillo] shot?

HACKMAN: In May. It had been May 2nd, wasn't it or May 30th?

COERR: That sounds more like a Dominican Republic meeting to me than anything else.

HACKMAN: Okay, why don't we talk about the Dominican Republic then. Do you recall

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what the problems were in working out a policy on the Dominican Republic after the Trujillo assassination?

COERR: Well, the biggest element of the problem was that we had almost no known Dominicans to work with, plus the continuing influence of the Trujillo clan, which was represented fairly effectively in Washington also.

HACKMAN: Were the diplomatic and economic sanctions which had previously existed before the assassination but continued to operate—were they having much of an effect, do you recall?

COERR: Yes, I think they were having an effect but I think it was mostly psychological. I mean the psychological effect was the most important aspect of the sanctions.

HACKMAN: Specifically on the sugar quota, do you remember any complaints ever coming up from the sugar producers other than the Trujillo interests? Were they upset about this?

COERR: I don't remember that. Our basic problem, of course, was to attempt to identify ourselves, to find and identify ourselves with whatever nascent

potential democratic leadership there was while the Trujillos did their best to prevent is from doing that, either by calling them “Communist” or by any one number of things. And there was still a strong tendency in Washington to think that the Trujillos were the only defense against Communism or that they’d made the treaty or made the, you know, the trains run on time. The old argument, so that it was rather a difficult, well, the usual type of difficulty in working out a sensible policy.

HACKMAN: Was this feeling primarily from people in Congress or other people around town?

COERR: I think there were one or two people in Congress and one or two—I think they had some common friends with members of the Kennedy family too.

HACKMAN: Do you want to be any more specific on that? [Interruption] Can you remember some of the problems we had in trying to work with some of the other groups, the groups that were emerging in the Dominican Republic at that time? The Civic Union, do you remember the Civic Union program, the national Civic Union program, the 14th of June movement, these people?

COERR: Yes. It was really a little easier than we expected once we had made the decision in our own government. I remember we had some of those Dominicans out to my house—I live in Virginia. And just in passing, I don’t know how the conversation came to this turn—but I made the crack that one Trujillo in a century is enough. That seemed to impress them terrifically because they weren’t even sure

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still that we didn’t want another Trujillo. The fact that a State Department official could joke about it like that made more of an impression than I had expected. I wasn’t thinking I was pulling any particular coup. But it was merely a matter of establishing bona fides among people who were critically anxious to find a basis for confidence in the State Department and the White House. I figured the main thing we had to avoid was taking actions of the type that were being urged by the Trujillo clan.

HACKMAN: What, in this meeting at your home, do you recall what particular groups were represented there from the Dominican Republic?

COERR: I could probably find out for you; I don’t remember now. Ben Stephansky [Ben S. Stephansky] was there with me and a few others.

HACKMAN: Did the State Department have a problem in getting a decision from the White House on what policy we should pursue during this period?

COERR: No, no problem in getting a decision, just fighting out various issues as they came up. And everything was fairly tense. There were quite a few, two or

three midnight meetings in the Department at which Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] was present, Vice President Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] was present, and we were just making tactical decisions as fast as necessary.

HACKMAN: Was there much disagreement within the State Department on how much influence we could wield in this situation to bring about changes in the Dominican Republic?

COERR: Well, of course, the basic change had been effected with the removal of Trujillo. No, there were tactical discussions, but I think within the State Department as a whole there wasn't much disagreement. Ambassador Murphy [Robert D. Murphy], who was influential in and interested in the Dominican Republic, made one or two trips to see if he couldn't establish contacts and set up a negotiating atmosphere. And he would tend to have one eye, one view, maybe Ambassador Bowles would tend to have another. But there really wasn't an earthshaking difference. It was usually more a question of just how do you get this done, with a basic agreement on objectives.

HACKMAN: John Hill [John Calvin Hill], I believe, was Charge d' Affaires in Santa Domingo at that time. Did he have problems in getting together with these groups to negotiate?

COERR: If I remember right, he was able to talk to them pretty well. It was very difficult for him to maintain, in that atmosphere, an appearance of neutrality, especially when you're dealing with people who have been reared on conspiracy. If he was seen with one group, the others would figure he was hostile to them. And he suffered from that, but anybody would have.

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The basic problem, as it comes back to me, was that on one hand you have the force – that was Rafael and his Air Force and with tanks – and on the other hand you had.... Well, let's put it this way: on one hand you had the immediate, the present force, and on the other hand you had what you estimated might be the future force, and the question was how did you manage to restrain one while you encouraged the other when they were at loggerheads with each other. There was a constant background threat of Cuba, which was of course very fresh in our minds.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what our intelligence was on the Dominican military at that time?

COERR: Yes. If I remember right, the intelligence on the military was pretty good. That was one thing we did know something about because we'd had close Military – close relations with various missions for some time. That didn't

include necessarily good political intelligence on how much of a statesman a given military officer might be because that type of thing is hard to estimate when you've never seen them in that capacity.

HACKMAN: Do you recall any estimation of what the dissatisfaction among military people with Rafael Trujillo's leadership was or if they were satisfied?

COERR: No, I don't recall anything of any significance there. There was bound to be some jockeying, a lot of rivalry and, of course, he had always been the favorite man with the favorite unit. But I think the military at that time tended to stick together in the face of people whom they considered to be much more dangerous such as Bosch [Juan Emilio Gavino Bosch] and the July 14th Party and the 30th of May Party, if I remember rightly.

HACKMAN: Do you have any specific memories of these two meetings that you attended at the White House? August 28th was one, I believe, and October 5th was another.

COERR: No, except that I thought they got into a lot of detail which people of that caliber and amount of responsibility really didn't need to get into. They were trying to be their own desk officers, which is a normal tendency I suppose, especially given their probable belief that almost nobody knew anything anyway so they might as well take a crack at it and exercise their undoubted good judgment on whatever facts were available.

HACKMAN: I think in that October 5th meeting, this was just after John Bartlow Martin had returned, was there general agreement on his evaluation, or was this....

COERR: Well, let me see. I think that it was generally believed that his report furnished a useful balancing factor against the Trujillo influence and

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propaganda.

HACKMAN: I believe right after this is when George McGhee took his trip to Santo Domingo. Do you recall what your feelings were about this?

COERR: No.

HACKMAN: Let's see. I have a few other meetings. October 11th with the Ambassador [Dr. Jose Antonio Mayobre] and Foreign Minister [Dr. Marcos Falcón Briceño] of Venezuela at the White House. Do you remember anything about this?



COERR: No, I just remember going with them.

HACKMAN: One thing that's been said by some people is that in President Kennedy's meetings with Latin American people he tended to give away or to make commitments on the spot, particularly on aid, that created problems for people in State and A.I.D. [Agency for International Development].

COERR: I don't remember any such incidents.

HACKMAN: Do you think in general that President Kennedy and his White House staff particularly, tended to see problems in Latin America strictly as having social and economic causes rather than there being a serious threat of Communist subversion? I've heard some people say that they always tended to play down the threat of a serious Communist subversion or threat in places like Venezuela possibly.

COERR: No, I don't remember feeling that myself. I got the impression that their attitude was fairly realistic. I think that the whole emphasis on the Alliance of Progress tended at that time, which was just a warning, tended to elicit a lot more thought and action and publicity on social and economic factors. But I think there was a basic realization all along that the Communists, although they can exploit these underlying factors, can only do so through political organization and that to beat them you've got to have a political organization. The main effort, and the underlying effort, I think, was political all along with economic and social as a means to that end. I think Kennedy as a politician would be very unlikely to make the mistake that you mentioned. I think that he may have thought, as quite a few Americans and a lot of Latin Americans have thought for a long time with reason, that we're a little silly in our anti-Communism. We tend to call anything liberal anti-Communist just as do some groups in Latin America, to the great advantage of the Communists themselves and the great detriment of the indigenous reformers who aren't Communist. But I think the basic—I saw the whole thing and their interest in it as to a certain extent humanitarian, which is part of the American traditions, but also an overriding thing, a long range and politically motivated.

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HACKMAN: Do you recall what your impressions of the whole Alliance for Progress idea was as the idea developed through '61, set up at the Punta del Este meeting in August, I believe of '61.

COERR: I thought it was a long time coming. When I had come to the Department as Director of West Coast Affairs before I was made Deputy Assistant Secretary, I had tried to negotiate a loan which I had christened "U.S. Loans for Land Reform" and which I wanted to present to President Lleras [Alberto Lleras

Camargo] of Colombia when he made a visit here. I got nowhere with it. A year later we had the Alliance for Progress.

HACKMAN: What was the problem that you ran into in the earlier period, what specifically?

COERR: Either hostility to the general idea of land reform, which was associated with Communist China, or at best a reluctant tolerance to let me go and see what I could do as the junior officer, but no support.

HACKMAN: This was a problem within State?

COERR: Within State itself. A little while later we were shouting all sorts of reform all over the place, just one year later, which is the evidence of a change in the administration. Now, I think unfortunately, that we all knew at the time it was being oversold and that's since been problem to be true. And there was a terrific political effect all over Latin America. But many people in Latin America are not accustomed even to understanding their present economic and social system, so how could you expect them to understand something which is designed to change it? What they didn't do is interpret it as they interpret many things, particularly in the less developed countries, as they put Kennedy into the role of a *patron* or a *caudillo*, and they expected everything to flow from him. They themselves, when they asked for something from the government or the *patron*, the *caudillo*, are not usually expected to do anything to get it. This is of course one of the basic South American problems.

HACKMAN: In the resistance that you had found in your efforts, I guess in 1959 or 1960, did this continue to be a problem in getting the Alliance off the ground in '61, did you feel?

COERR: No. I mean, if anything we were shoved so hard we could barely keep our feet under our bodies.

HACKMAN: Where was the friction primarily coming from?

COERR: From the White House, from the press, and from everything else. I mean, you don't resent White House intervention, or you don't call it "White House intervention" in a disrespectful sense when it's accomplishing things which

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should have been accomplished in Latin America twenty years before.

HACKMAN: Were you involved deeply in the arrangement of the agenda for the Punta del Este meeting in August of '61?

COERR: If I remember right, I think that was done mostly in the White House with some assistance, of course, from State.

HACKMAN: I heard that the Treasury Department was....

COERR: I'm sure they also had a good hand in it, yes.

HACKMAN: As it worked out, do you have any comments on what the weaknesses of the Alliance were as they were originally set up? Do you remember the original setup? Did you have any particular ideas at the time which you can recall?

COERR: No, apart from arousing greater expectations than could possibly be solved, be met.

HACKMAN: Moving to something else that's frequently been discussed and that's Secretary Rusk's whole approach in taking over the Department. Were there any great changes that you could see in the way things operated as a result of Secretary Rusk taking over the operations of the Department?

COERR: No. I wouldn't necessarily have seen these changes because I didn't start attending the Secretary's staff meetings until October of '60. How the staff meetings.... I think I attended one meeting when Secretary Herter [Christian A. Herter] was still there and that was as a substitute and I wasn't aware of what was going on so that I wasn't on a good basis to make a comparison. Down at the working level you saw not much difference.

HACKMAN: We talked earlier about Under Secretary Bowles. Did he take much of an interest in the day to day workings of the Department? Did you have frequent contact with him do you recall?

COERR: I had quite a lot of contact with him on some things such as President Kennedy's trip and the Dominican Republic.

HACKMAN: At the time you left, I guess the plans for President Kennedy's trip were in the works at that time. Did you recall what your feelings were as to the advisability of taking this trip?

COERR: I thought he should do it, but I thought he should either go to Punta del Este only or to all countries, and there were quite a few of them. We had to fight that one. I think if I remember right, he ended up just by going to

Punta del Este and coming back. But there were quite a few people who thought oh you know, he might visit one or two countries or something like that. It wasn't a very important point. I remember that one came up.

HACKMAN: At the time Secretary Bowles went out as Under Secretary on November 26th, this was at the same time that you left, were you ever given any reason for this change bring Richard Goodwin as Deputy Assistant to replace you? Do you recall how you found out about this? What was your reaction?

COERR: The Secretary told me there was going to be a change. [Laughter] He was very nice and very sympathetic about it, and he didn't need to tell me why.

HACKMAN: After you left as Deputy Assistant Secretary, what primarily were you involved in that period?

COERR: I worked briefly with A.I.D.

HACKMAN: That was in February and March.

COERR: That's right.

HACKMAN: What specifically were you doing over there, do you recall?

COERR: It wasn't very important or very useful. I never really got my feet wet. I was trying to study the overall operations of the A.I.D. program, but I started late and quit early on a new assignment.

HACKMAN: Do you have any recollections of what your attitude was towards this whole idea of reorganization of the A.I.D. program?

COERR: No. I had a very strong impression that there were an awful lot of useless meetings, but everybody has that, so there was nothing new there. If you're referring to the incorporation of A.I.D. officers in A.R.A., which is part of the reorganization which I think was being discussed at that time and matured later, it struck me as a fairly good idea because I think you had to have that. Well, they called it "back to back" in those days. And I think it's worked out fairly well.

HACKMAN: To go back to something a little earlier connected with A.I.D., do you recall what your reaction was to the proposal of the Administration in '61 to ask for the long term borrowing authority for the A.I.D. program?

COERR: I thought it was a very good thing to do.

HACKMAN: I want to turn this around.

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE]

HACKMAN: Well, we can go on and talk about the period when you were in Uruguay then. Do you recall what the state of relations between the United States and that government was at the time you went there and what the main problems were?

COERR: There were no great bilateral problems. I think our main concern was Uruguay's financial position.

HACKMAN: As it worked out there were frequent complaints on the part of people there, certain parts of the government got into problems in getting some of the Alliance for Progress programs going. Do you recall what those were and where you felt the problem was?

COERR: No. Can you mention one of those specifically?

HACKMAN: I can't really mention the specific A.I.D. programs, but I believe there was a split in the government down there. One number of government leaders were saying that it was the fault of the Parliament beating reforms that would have brought the programs through, and others said that it was the fault of the operation in Washington.

COERR: If I remember right, the Parliament had to take some actions to formally approve the basis for the programs—which program I can't be specific—which it didn't take. There was much greater concern in Uruguay—I don't remember that was an issue when I was there, but I do remember that they violently objected to our PL 480 policy on wheat. They considered that we were, by shipping wheat under PL 480 to Israel and other places, that we were competing with them with a government subsidized program. PL 480 was a very bad program. PL 480 was a very bad word in Uruguay. In my speeches, I tried to set the record straight. I pointed out that there was no increase. I pointed out for various reasons this was not competitive with Uruguay. Yugoslavia is another example. I pointed out that in regards to shipments of wheat that we always negotiated with the recipient the amount and both our government and their government were really interested in bringing in just the amount they needed to supplement their own production but not enough to depress their own agricultural production in that area. All they had to do was come in and talk over the negotiations.

Another issue was I think entirely different. This brings to light one of our real difficulties in dealing with Latin America compared to the other parts of the world. We encouraged the Latin Americans under the Alliance for Progress to use private industry and private investment to diversify and help themselves. The Uruguayans developed a rice industry which started with the sale of some small quantities of rice to Canada. Their rice was well priced, which was able to out compete the rice from the United States in the

Canadian market, even though our rice was, compared to theirs, closer in proximity and everything else, where upon we invoked payment in kind, procedures of the law which

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permitted the United States government to reimburse the American producer of rice sufficiently to compensate for the difference between Canada's price and the international price. And as soon as we did that we cut the Uruguayans out of the Canadian market.

HACKMAN: Did you have any problem that you can recall in getting A.I.D. projects that came out of Uruguay, getting them approved? Was there a problem in the Alliance for Progress operation in Washington?

COERR: No, no more than usual give and take tug of war between the field and Washington. I thought we ought to make one loan to them, and I had to go in very strong on it, but the A.I.D. came through another loan I was very interested in which would have been a loan which brought regeneration down there. They got many benefits just from negotiating in confidence deals with many of the farmers who are also members of the government federation. The mere fact that we were negotiating made the Uruguayans stall certain decisions with regard to the conferences. But I'm afraid to mention it fell through because the federation proved itself not to be an adequate facility.

We also got the Peace Corps under way in Uruguay. The Uruguayans tend to consider themselves different from some of the other Latin American countries. They tend to think the Peace Corps is for the Africans. But we've had a very successful farm exchange program, the International Farm Youth Exchange, three or four kids a year who would go on radio and speak with newsmen when they arrived, and a few months later, I think after having lived in three or four Uruguayan farm homes, I think they did fairly well in Spanish. And you saw them all over Uruguay. These kids usually were terrific popular successes and made friends. So we sold to the Uruguayans the Peace Corps on the basis of these I've been describing, a program of this nature but expanded.

HACKMAN: In May of '61, and that's while you were still here in the Department, the President had sent around a directive to the Ambassadors, in effect giving the Ambassadors the responsibility for operations, all United States operations in different countries. Do you recall if that had an effect at the time, had any effect later when you went to Uruguay on the way you operated there?

COERR: Well, I assume that since he sent it out there must have been some post where that was necessary. But I always assumed that an Ambassador ran his own shop, which included complete responsibility for all government agencies. But probably that directive was aimed at places where there might have been heavy U.S. military contingent, or the main

sources of power might not have been the Embassy. But either A.I.D. or [unclear] that didn't prevent such situation didn't prevail in Uruguay there. I managed to cut out American A.I.D. program, down there too. It was a small program.

HACKMAN: Do you remember at the time anyone else at specific embassies that he probably had in mind?

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COERR: No. No, I would just guess that they would be, were in other areas.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what your discussions with the Uruguayan government, the people in Uruguay, on the whole questions of what their stance was on Cuba?

COERR: We talked about Cuba a bit, but not too much because we knew each others position very clearly and there wasn't too much to relate. What I did do was get to know the Colorados, especially Luis Batlle Berres, who was head of the Colorado Party. I called on him. It would generally be assumed for some reason or another, rather falsely, that the Embassy just didn't see eye to eye with the Colorados. And I called on him and he received me at his office and flanked by seven or eight of his henchmen. The whole group got into a discussion of what is a Communist and what isn't a Communist and what do we believe about dictatorships. That established the basis of understanding and he was pleased and I was pleased. So that when the Colorados started—considerably more to say in cases where the word was passed down by his Lieutenants.

HACKMAN: Can you remember specifically the reaction to the Cuban missile crisis? I believe Uruguay was the only country to abstain from the O.A.S. [Organization of American States] resolution....

COERR: Yes, it always happens to me. [Laughter] There was, if I remember right, the Council met on Tuesdays, and they took long weekends. And if you wanted to get a really important governmental decision done on a Sunday and a Monday, which that involved if I remember right, you just couldn't do it because they couldn't act without each other and they were scattered all over at Punta del Este or up in their *hacienda* (or what they call *estancia* down there). And I think it was as simple as that. There might have been a reluctance to make the decision but that man was just uninstructed because nobody could instruct him. There were nine members of that Council. You try to run a nine man executive sometime.

HACKMAN: Well, that's all the questions I have unless you can think of something else, in particular I'm referring to meetings in the White House, memories of the President....

COERR: I can't think of anything.

HACKMAN: Okay. Thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]



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