

Francisco J. Orlich Bolmarcich Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 11/19/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Francisco J. Orlich Bolmarcich (1907-1969) was the President of Costa Rica from 1962 to 1966. This interview covers John F. Kennedy's popularity among Costa Ricans during his visit to Costa Rica and the Kennedy administration's policies concerning Latin America, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Francisco J. Orlich Bolmarcich

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIVISION OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

(TRANSLATION)

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Spanish

[Interview with Francisco J. Orlich Bolmarich, President of Costa Rica,
for the John F. Kennedy Library]

Interviewer: The tumultuous welcome given President Kennedy by the people of Costa Rica in March 1963 seemed to reveal an esteem for Mr. Kennedy as an individual that went beyond the ordinary reception a man may be given in a nation like Costa Rica that has traditionally maintained friendly relations with the United States. To what do you attribute this warm personal feeling manifested toward him by the Costa Rican people?

Mr. Orlich: Several qualities of the President may have helped create this affection for him felt by the Costa Rican people. His youth undoubtedly contributed. Costa Ricans have always admired young politicians, their drive, their manner of speaking in the name of a new generation, and the respect the Costa Rican has always felt for thinkers, the intellectuals. There is a false image of Americans, which has spread throughout Latin America, that they are a materialistic people who think only of business and profits. The Latin American countries have never greatly admired businessmen. Their idols and leaders have always come from other fields of activity. To the Latin Americans, Kennedy was an American who differed from the image. The fact that he appeared as a man of thought and letters, together with the traditional cordiality of the Costa Rican people toward the United States and the obvious fact that President Kennedy revealed himself from the beginning as a genuine friend of Latin Americans, as a statesman concerned about their problems and prepared to help solve them by means, and on terms, the Latin Americans could understand--- all these factors must have helped establish that bond of affection that we all see

between the people of my country and President Kennedy. Moreover, it should be remembered that President Kennedy was the first United States president who listened to the ideas and proposals that Latin American statesmen had been expressing for a long time. What has happened is that no one has understood them better.

Interviewer: Mr. President, there had been a certain hesitation about sending a president of the United States to visit a Latin American university campus. Nevertheless, there was a sharp contrast between the welcome given President Kennedy at the University of Costa Rica and that given other American dignitaries in other Latin American countries in recent years. Why do you think this was? Was it due to something unique in the Costa Rican students or in President Kennedy personally, or both?

Mr. Orlich: It pleases me to see that there is a trait, something, in the Costa Rican students distinguishing them from students in other places. There is hardly a student in this country who does not participate in its political life, but they know how to separate political from university activities. Furthermore, the enthusiasm generated by the figure of President Kennedy among the Costa Rican people was manifested also among the university students.

Interviewer: And now that the March 1963 meeting of presidents in San José has passed into history, what do you think were the most important results of that event?

Mr. Orlich: From my point of view as President of a Latin American country, the most important result was the new approach given by President Kennedy to the relations between the States of this Hemisphere. During the Kennedy administration, we were able to feel for the first time that Hemispheric policy was multilateral, even though, on previous occasions, other United States presidents maintained excellent and understanding policies toward Latin America. President Kennedy was the first to take Latin American thought into account in forming his policy. Thus, his policy was not the unilateral policy of the most powerful neighbor, but

the product of a rational discussion that continued for years at a very high intellectual level. President Kennedy's Latin American policy was not based exclusively on safeguarding American interests in the Hemisphere, nor was it cloaked in Hemispheric pronouncements, but rather on mutual interests. He placed great emphasis on the interests of the Latin American countries, and this indeed is something new. For President Kennedy, the important thing was the intensive, peaceful development of those countries. He was not afraid to use the term revolution and to suggest the need for making profound changes in national infrastructures. He said aloud what the people were thinking. Thus, he left an indelible mark on the relations between the United States and the other nations of America, and he won the respect and affection of all peoples.

