

**Frank Mankiewicz Oral History Interview – RFK #1, 6/26/1969**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Frank Mankiewicz  
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**Biographical Note**

Mankiewicz was director of the Peace Corps in Lima, Peru from 1962 to 1964, Latin America regional director from 1964 to 1966 and then press secretary to Senator Robert F. Kennedy from 1966 to 1968. In the interview Mankiewicz talks about RFK's trip to Latin America in November 1965, describes how he came to work for RFK, and talks about RFK's personality, habits of mind, views on religion and other topics.

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FRANK MANKIEWICZ  
RFK #1

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First of Nine Oral History Interviews

with

FRANK MANKIEWICZ

June 26, 1969  
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

HACKMAN: Okay, why don't we just take off now starting when you first came or what contacts you had before you came to the Senate office, going back to the Latin America trip, conversations you had with him at that time.

MANKIEWICZ: Yes.

HACKMAN: Or if there's anything before that, while you were still in the Peace Corps.

MANKIEWICZ: I don't think there was. I remember in 1965 hearing from I think it was Pedro Sanjuan. Pedro, whom I'd known, called me and said that Senator Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]

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was going to Latin America and that he, Pedro, and others were trying to collect some people who knew Latin America and whose views he might want to listen to, and would I be willing to help brief and so forth. At that time I was still in the government; I was the Latin America Peace Corps director and not very happy about it. I hadn't been very happy since the Dominican crisis in the summer before, and certainly I liked the things Senator Kennedy had been saying and was anxious to do what I could. So I said certainly I'd be available.

Then, as I recall, the next contact I had was when John Nolan [John E. Nolan] called me. He explained to me who he was and he was advancing the Latin America trip and he had

been to Peru, I think, or else he was on his way to Peru, but I think he had been there--and he had a schedule, a proposed schedule for Peru. And it was awful, in my view. It was a pretty routine tourist schedule and it included, I thought, far too much time with Americans and far too little time with Peruvians.

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It included no time at all in any of the poorer areas. And I recall telling Nolan, or perhaps I told Senator Kennedy later, that they had one day set up for him there where he was going to spend the morning with American school children, and the noon, lunchtime, with their fathers at a luncheon at The American Society, and then, in the afternoon and evening with their mothers at a reception. And I urged John Nolan to take the senator to Cuzco, at least, if not to Puno, or perhaps up the coast. But, in any event, it was that kind of discussion where I suggested that he wasn't going to learn very much about Peru from the schedule that had been laid out. And then he asked me whether I thought he ought to go to the university at San Marcos, where I gather he wanted to go but the State Department did not want him to go. I said I didn't think he should go but that I would check it with some people who knew the situation in San Marcos very well. [Interruption]

HACKMAN: Well, you were talking about San Marcos.

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MANKIEWICZ: Yes. Then I checked with a friend of mine who knows San Marcos and he agreed with me that it be a mistake because it would become a political event, there'd be some kind of disturbance. Maybe the anti-communist students would beat up some communists and then the cops would come, or vice versa, or whatever it was. But clearly we didn't think anybody there in either the dominant groups in San Marcos wanted him to come or, indeed, would receive him well. [Interruption] In any event, the next thing that happened was I got a phone call from Robert Kennedy asking me about San Marcos, and asking me also about the rest of the schedule in Peru, and then we talked a little bit about the Latin America trip generally, about what country he was going to go to, what things he ought to do in Chile and Argentina and Brazil. But it was a friendly conversation, and I can't remember whether he invited me to go along on the trip or not; I don't think he did. But in any event, that's where

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the matter sat. I think I may have talked to John Nolan again later; he ran a schedule by me that was a little better. And then--I can't remember who it was, it may have been Jack Vaughn, I'm not sure--but somehow, I became aware--it was not done formally--but I became aware there was going to be this briefing over at the State Department before he left. And I went as a Peace Corps representative. They had the Latin American director of AID [Agency for International Development] there, Jack Vaughn, who was then assistant secretary. Pedro was there, and Adam [Adam Walinsky], Senator Kennedy, and maybe John

Nolan, I'm not sure. And, of course, that was just a shambles, and I'm sure other people will report that meeting too. But, I've never been to a meeting involving government officials like that one. And it was very difficult to understand too because Jack Vaughn is really a rather mild fellow, and the only thing I could think of was that someone had given him orders to be just as hostile and bitter as he could. And he did it badly because Jack doesn't

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do that terribly well--pretty bad particularly, I think, when his heart's not in it. And the whole thing was clumsy and brutal and, the senator was infuriated from the beginning which I guess was the idea. I mean he didn't raise his voice or get mad, but it was clear that he was very angry. He asked Vaughn what he should say in Latin America about the Dominican Republic and Jack said, "Why don't you tell them what your brother said at the time of the Cuban missile crisis?" And Senator Kennedy said, "Which statement of President Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] was that?" And Vaughn didn't remember, and that didn't help. And he kept referring to President Kennedy as "your brother" when it was obvious that Senator Kennedy didn't like that at all. You'd think after the first time he wouldn't do it. And it went from bad to worse. There was some talk about Peru and about our pressure on the oil company--on the government on behalf of the oil company, American oil company, IPC [International Petroleum Company]. And I made a few comments about that in which I said probably the government was right or at

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least had something on its side. At least I explained what the dispute was about. Then they got to Brazil and, hell, the government had abolished political parties and was closing down the congress and banished some of its political enemies, harassing the church, and he asked the Brazil people what he ought to say about that and some clown said, "Well, why don't you say that while we regret temporarily that a great democratic power had seen fit and so forth." And he just cut him off and he said, "I don't talk like that." And there was silence for a few moments and then Jack Vaughn, I think, said, "Well, why don't you just say nothing?" And then he [Robert Kennedy] said, "Are you kidding?" And then I said, "Well, you know, at least you're identified with one of our political parties and you are a United States senator, and I would think the minimum that they might expect--and I don't see why it would be wrong--would be to say in our country we like strong political parties and strong legislative parlia-

[-7-]

mentary institutions, and we wish you'd have them." And he thought that was a pretty good idea, but I don't think anybody else there thought it was a very good idea. And then the meeting went on and they talked about a few other things. Then finally at the end of it, the senator said, "Well, Mr. Vaughn, as I see it, then what the Alliance for Progress is come down to is that you can abolish political parties and close down the congress and take away the basic freedoms of the people and deny your political opponents any rights at all and

banish them from the country and you'll get a lot of our money. But if you mess around with an American oil company, we'll cut you off without a penny. Is that it?" And Vaughn thought for a minute and said, "That's about the size of it." And that was where the meeting ended. And when it was over, I went over and introduced myself and said who I was. And he said to me, "Are these people real? Do they really believe that stuff, or do they just talk that

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way?" And I said I thought many of them really believed it. Then he asked me to come to a breakfast briefing at his house the next morning, and also asked me--I think he asked me, or I may have offered, I forget how the discussion arose--but I told him, in any event, that I would prepare a one or two page memo explaining to him how the Latin Americans that he was going to be talking to viewed some of these things that he'd be talking about, in other words, how the Alliance for Progress was perceived, U.S. aid, and all the rest of it. So I went the next morning with Pedro to breakfast, and we talked; and I gave him [Robert F. Kennedy] that document which I think he liked. And then, as we were leaving that meeting, he asked me to go with him on the trip. And I said I couldn't do it because I had a Peace Corps trip through Latin America that I had to do, I had a meeting of all the country directors in Panama and, in fact, we were going to be in Panama when he came through, but that maybe I could join him in Brazil.

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So I went to the meeting in Panama. I went down to the airport when he came through about 3 o'clock in the morning and I remember there was a little fuss there. The Panama newspapers had told their reporters that he would have a press conference in the Panama airport at 3 o'clock in the morning. And when the plane arrived, the reporters were all there and I went onboard and told him that they were there, and he was in bed. And I remember there was really never much question in his mind about whether he'd get up and go talk to them. He said to me, "Who gets hurt if I don't go see them? Do the reporters get hurt or the owners of the papers?" And I said, "Well, probably the reporters." And he said, "Well, that's what I thought, so let's go." So he got up and got dressed and we went out and he had a little press conference. And then he went on down to Peru and I stayed in Panama. [Interruption] The trip turned into a series of conversations with Peace Corps people, as I was reading it in

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the papers. In general, what seemed to be happening was that in every country he went to, the Peace Corps people would tell him how bad the Alliance for Progress was. And then by the time I was ready to join him in Brazil, I checked with Sarge Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.]. Shriver felt it was not terribly wise for me to go the rest of the way with Robert Kennedy because it might have clinched that Peace Corps identification, which was not very happy. Apparently Lyndon Johnson had the feeling that Sarge Shriver had told all these Peace Corps people to tell Robert Kennedy how bad the Alliance for Progress was under Lyndon Johnson, whereas, the fact of the matter is Sarge Shriver hadn't done that at all, I had.



HACKMAN: Did Moyers [William D. Moyers] get into the picture at all at this point?

MANKIEWICZ: Not as far as I knew. I'm not sure Bill was even with the Peace Corps then.

HACKMAN: No, I don't think he was.... I'm sure he wasn't. He had gone to the White House by that time, but I thought he might have had something to do with it.

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MANKIEWICZ: Well, he may have talked to Sarge. He was the White House sort of liaison with Shriver at that point. I just don't know. I think it's probably quite possible. It's quite possible because it was Moyers earlier that year who had called from the White House to tell me that I had to do something about the Peace Corps volunteers in the Dominican Republic because they were becoming a source of great embarrassment because they were on the wrong side in the war. So there was that sort of touchy thing with the Peace Corps so I didn't go, and I came back.

When he came back from Latin America, I went over to see him a couple of times to talk about the trip, what things he had observed, and what I could learn about the Peace Corps people he'd seen, and I also told him of some reactions that I had gotten from the volunteers to his visit. And he was happy to get that because he apparently hadn't received those.

And then Adam Walinsky and the senator started working on a draft for the long speech he was going to give in the Senate. And I came

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over to the office several times to talk to Adam about that, go over some sections that I knew something about, make some suggestions, stay with it. And I may have spoken to the senator a couple of times on those occasions, but I doubt it. I doubt it.

And I think it was Adam who first raised the possibility that I might work there. He knew that the press secretary was leaving and asked me if I was interested. And I said I was. But I didn't think too much about it. And then I guess it was in April that the senator called me and I asked if I would like to come over and talk to him about going to work there. And I thought about it but not for very long because at that time I was leaving anyway. As a matter of fact, it was either do that or go out--and I thought I had a chance to be the president of San Francisco State College. I think as it turned out, I probably made the right move.

HACKMAN: Yes, I'd say so.

MANKIEWICZ: So I went over and talked to him in one of those

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monosyllabic conversations for about fifteen, twenty minutes, and then he said, "Well, that's fine. Why don't you go see Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] and work out the details." And I did, and I guess I started in May.

HACKMAN: Well, did you come on while he was in South Africa?

MANKIEWICZ: No, I came on the day he got back.

HACKMAN: Yes, but that was in June.

MANKIEWICZ: Well, then I guess I didn't start in May, but I don't think I saw him before he went to Africa. I really didn't go into the office until the day he got back from Africa. It probably was June. Probably was June because I raised a lot of hell the weekend before I came to work. I was a free man for the first time in about four years and I had been invited to L.A. [Los Angeles] State it was, I guess, to give a graduation address. And I gave a very tough graduation address which, by the time it filtered back to Washington from Los Angeles, it had gotten even tougher. And all I said was that our foreign policy in under-

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developed countries was being run by smug, bland people who were basically counter-revolutionary. And of course, that's accepted gospel now; well, it was accepted gospel then. I mean I didn't say anything I that a lot of other people hadn't been saying and better. But it apparently raised a bit of a flap because I was identified as I should have realized I was identified, as Robert Kennedy's press secretary, only, in fact, I wasn't and hadn't yet begun. So I remember whatever that date was, it was the next day that I came on in.

HACKMAN: Can I go back and ask you a few things about the Latin America trip?

MANKIEWICZ: Sure.

HACKMAN: You describe that first State Department briefing when Vaughn and the AID [Agency for International Development] guy were there, and then you mentioned the Brazil people when you were talking about this. Were there other people around then?

MANKIEWICZ: Oh, yes, there must have been about twenty or thirty people there from the department including

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the State Department and AID desk officers for each of the countries he was going to visit: Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Peru. So there's a good chunk

right there. And then he had Tony Solomon [Anthony M. Solomon] who was there, who was, I think, assistant secretary for economic affairs, and he explained something about oil ratios in Venezuela and the senator got a glazed look in his eye--all about quotas and preferences, and I couldn't understand that either. So I suppose there were maybe twenty people from the Department there.

HACKMAN: What kind of job could you tell....What knowledge did he bring to that meeting of Latin America, or at that point, what kind of job had Walinsky done with him before that...?

MANKIEWICZ: Well, he'd evidently talked to a number of representatives of Latin countries. And, of course, Bill Rogers [William D. Rogers], who used to be the coordinator of the Alliance for Progress, was a friend of his, and I'm sure had talked to him at some length. I don't think

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Rogers was at that meeting, but I think he was the next morning. So, clearly, he had talked to him; Pedro Sanjuan, I'm sure, had talked to him because when he talked to Vaughn about the Dominican Republic, he said to him--because Vaughn said Latin Americans don't want to talk about the Dominican Republic, they're not interested in it--and he said, "Well, you haven't been talking to the same Latins I have." And he even made him a bet that it would be one of the first three questions asked. So I don't know precisely what his briefing had been, but he clearly talked to a lot of people.

HACKMAN: At that meeting, were the State Department people showing resentment or concern in terms of the places he wanted to visit? Was that debated or was it just an idea for them to talk about?

MANKIEWICZ: No. No, apparently the schedule was set. There was no discussion about where he was going to go. The discussion was: All right, let's turn to Chile and Mr. So-and-So will tell you, you know, what the situation is there. And

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then he'd give a quick briefing of what the situation was, what our AID program consisted of, what the military program consisted of, and that was about it, the history of our relations with each of these countries.

HACKMAN: In your conversations with him, then, when he got back, putting his speech together or whatever, had the trip really had an impact one way or another in showing him how bad things were?

MANKIEWICZ: Oh, yes, it really had, particularly in two areas: particularly in the area of

the slow-down in the Alliance and in the extraordinary hostility of the left-wing students in Chile--left-wing is the wrong word, really organized Marxist students in Chile, and in the poverty in all of those places and particularly in northeast Brazil. He returned again and again in his speeches, particularly the extemporaneous speeches that he made all through that time and even through the campaign, to northeast Brazil.

HACKMAN: Do you know if up to that time he'd made

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really any effort to follow this closely? Had he talked to Tom Mann [Thomas C. Mann] when Mann was there before Vaughn, or is this sort of his first go-around with this whole thing?

MANKIEWICZ: I have the feeling that he'd probably been very interested in Latin America in the early days of the Kennedy administration, but that he'd sort of put it to one side in '64 and '65. But he clearly had an interest in it and always did. And I remember frequently we'd sort of talk in the morning about what might be going on every day, and if there'd been some Latin America news in the paper, or if he'd heard of something, he'd always ask about it--should he do something, were these our friends, were these people that were somehow depending on him? I remember, you know, he took an awful lot of little things connected with Latin America that mattered to an awful lot of people. I remember in Nicaragua--I guess it was after the, was it after or before an election down there (it wasn't much of an election in any event)--and the government had broken

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up a demonstration of the opposition and had then fired on the crowd. And the crowd had retreated and taken asylum, in effect, in one of the hotels. And the government took their tanks and army and surrounded the hotel and gave them an ultimatum and said, "Either you come out and surrender in six hours or we'll destroy the building with all of you inside, including the leader of the Liberal party, Fernando Agüero." And at that point a friend of Agüero's called me and said, "You've got to do something." And this is a man who looks to Robert Kennedy, and they're going to be slaughtered. And I called the Department, State Department, to see what their view of the thing was. And their view was that the Liberal party people who were holed up in the hotel were holding the few American tourists who were in that hotel as hostages, and their feeling was that once they got the Americans out they didn't care what happened to the hotel or what happened to the Liberals inside. And it was clear that they weren't going to do anything

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for them. So I worked out, with the senator and Sol Linowitz--I hope somebody's going to talk to him because I think he'll remember this.

HACKMAN: He was at OAS [Organization of American States] at this point?

MANKIEWICZ: He was the ambassador to the OAS. We worked out a deal with him whereby Robert Kennedy would issue a statement which I would read to Linowitz--he was then out of town; he was in New York, I think--and without going through the Department, Linowitz would then put out a statement.... I mean, the statement of Robert Kennedy's was going to be: This was an outrage and that the OAS ought immediately to send observers down there to make sure that nothing happened to these people because it was clear that if they stayed in the hotel, they would be blown up, and if they came out, they'd be killed. And what happened was that we did that; we got the statement, we called Linowitz, Linowitz then put out the statement, and we'd arranged with the wire services to get the statement from Lino-

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witz. And the whole thing was down in Nicaragua because my friend, who had started this whole thing off, had press access in Nicaragua, either through the wire services or through his own connections with some of the newspapers, and the result was to within an hour the story was in Nicaragua that the OAS, if not was coming, at least that Sol Linowitz [Sol M. Linowitz] wanted to convene a meeting so that they would come because of this request by Robert Kennedy. And it was a big story down there that Kennedy was interested and looking at it and had gotten the OAS interested. And the result was that they abandoned the siege and let those people out. The next day the senator got a lot of telegrams from Nicaragua, mostly from pro-government people protesting against his intervention on behalf of these no-account troublemakers. But we did get one telegram from Fernando Agüero thanking Robert Kennedy for saving his life. And I think that's true.

So he did have a very.... I mean whenever either I would point something out to him in

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Latin America that he hadn't seen in the news, or he'd point something out to me and we'd talk about it, and he was always ready to do something that really never, I must say, can hardly ever have done him any good politically in the United States. In fact, if it did anything, it hurt. I mean nobody cares about anything like that, and you're bound to offend some wealthy U.S. commercial interest or somebody who is interested in stability down there or whatever it is. These things were strictly personal in a sense. He wanted to do what he could.

HACKMAN: You were saying that at the time you came on....well, you talked to Walinsky and he knew that Barthelmes [Albert Wesley Barthelmes, Jr.] was leaving.

MANKIEWICZ: Barthelmes, yes.

HACKMAN: What were his reasons for leaving? Did you ever get a clear understanding of that or how this all...

MANKIEWICZ: No. Nobody around the office had anything but great respect for Wes, and Wes remained a very

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good friend. And the only thing I can imagine, the feeling I get, is that it was simply a question of chemistry--that he just didn't work the way and in the style that the senator wanted. I just don't know what that was. I gather that he was at all times very competent and good, and, you know, he's a marvelous guy and to this day we exchange things back and forth, and all during the time I was there he was very helpful. He'd come in from time to time and frequently the senator would say to me, "Why don't you see what Wes [Albert Wesley Barthelmes, Jr.] thinks about that?" It may be that Wes himself preferred a more regular, quiet, not quiet but certainly a more regular and structured situation. I'll say this, I think it was an impossible job for anybody who had habits developed as a press secretary because it wasn't that kind of job. And I think the only reason I was able to make it go was because I didn't have those habits. I mean, I didn't know about deadlines or when you had to have something ready for the after-

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noon papers or any of that.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about that brief conversation you had with Robert Kennedy when you talked about the job or his.... You say he was very...

MANKIEWICZ: Well, I remember him telling me that it was not just press job, that the job concerned with substance, and it was just, in effect, another staff job in the office. Everybody had a title and the title controlled much of what was done, and that I'd be spending.... [Interruption] He said that he needed somebody of my sort of age and experience. He said he wanted me to do the kind of thing that Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman] had done.

HACKMAN: Meaning what in terms of what Barthelmes...

MANKIEWICZ: Well, I don't know. He never talked about Wes. He never talked about Wes. But I gather what he wanted--and I came away from the meeting with him with the understanding--was that he wanted somebody to be aware at all times of

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how he looked--that is of how the things he said might be perceived in the press and in the media and advise him on that--in other words, say to him, "You're going to say this--here's what's going to happen. If you say this, this is more likely to happen." In other words he didn't want somebody, obviously, to manufacture a press image for him, but he did want somebody who would have the time and make it his major concentration to look at the speeches he was going to give, know in advance the issues that he was likely to get involved in, and somehow help arrange it so that what he wanted to say was, in fact, what he said the next morning when you picked up the paper or when you looked on the television screen. I think I had the feeling, because he came back to it from time to time, that he felt that he hadn't had appropriate staffing earlier in '65 when he got into that business with the share of responsibility for the Viet Cong. You remember he had that press conference and then he and Bill Moyers had to go back and

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forth clarifying. And everybody jumped on him, and it appeared as though he had backed down. And his feeling was that he had not backed down and somehow he thought that if he'd had somebody around that might not have happened. In fact, I told him I thought that was the case. And I gave him some advice which I assume he accepted. I thought he was, you know, too many things and that... Well, I can't remember it all too well. But there was some talk about how he appeared. But the main thing that he was stressing to me was that it was not a press secretary's job; I could do that in a couple hours a day. He'd want advice on a million things, and he thought that my experience was such that I might be able to give it to him.

HACKMAN: Did you discuss particularly Latin America as one area where you might take charge?

MANKIEWICZ: No. No.

HACKMAN: Or just across the board or whatever?

MANKIEWICZ: Well, we assumed that I knew about that. But

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that was a very minor area. And, oh, we were talking about political things; I had some political background. See, I never knew what he really knew about me. Right up to the end I never knew or cared, how much he knew about what I had done. I mean, he knew I was from California and he knew that I had been in the Peace Corps, and I guess as time went on he probably learned a little more about me. Although I did find out later from talking to Joe Dolan that Joe, at least, had checked with some of the people I had worked with in California, some of the law firms and so forth. But I don't think there was ever any sort of

personnel.... I think with Robert Kennedy it was a question of chemistry: did he like the fellow; did he seem to be the kind of guy he could work with and rely on. So that we never talked about background.... I mean I never submitted a resume or a form 57 or anything like that. I mean I had the feeling, at one point after I'd been working there for a couple of months, he was surprised to find that I was a

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lawyer, and that I had actually practiced law. And, then at another point I mentioned--we were talking once, you know from time to time and I'd mention somebody I knew or something I'd done and he'd say, "Oh, did you? That's interesting." So he was very much a man of the moment and at that moment, whatever it was he wanted done, I guess he felt I could do it.

HACKMAN: Did you ever have any problems...

MANKIEWICZ: I'm sure he talked to Shriver and Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] a great deal, too.

HACKMAN: Did you ever have any problems then in knowing how far to go into substantive areas?

MANKIEWICZ: No.

HACKMAN: Or how much independence you had in moving into other things?

MANKIEWICZ: No, it was pretty clear very soon that you were on your own and that you weren't supposed to get him in trouble. Within those limits.... I mean, I'd go see him frequently. I usually would go in to see him first thing when he came in in the morning because there were a number of things

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that either had to be done that day or not done at all: so-and-so wants to see you about an interview, NBC [National Broadcasting Company] wants to do something tonight on this or that, this story that seems to be breaking is going to involve you sooner or later, shouldn't we get some statement ready now? And he would say yes or no, and if he said yes, I'd go ahead and get something ready and he'd read it; sometimes he wouldn't read it. Sometimes he'd say, "Well, what does it say?" And I'd say, "Well, you know, this and that." He'd say, "Fine. Then let's use that." But I never said anything in his name without being absolutely clear not only that he wanted that said, but that he wanted it said now. And he did also make it very clear that he didn't want his staff people getting into situations on their own. In other words, he didn't want, if something came up, he didn't want any kind of statement that had my opinion. I mean I could say, "Senator Kennedy has no comment," or "Sena-



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tor Kennedy said last week that such and such.” But beyond that you were sort of urged to get into things and bring them to his attention. And also I liked to bring in things that I thought he ought to read just generally in a lot of areas that maybe he didn’t have the time to get at himself. He couldn’t really read freehand except things he wanted to read himself, and those were usually classical. I mean, when he had free time he’d read Greek poetry or he’d read Edith Hamilton or he’d read some philosopher. He’d read a lot of Camus [Albert Camus] and he read Sartre [Jean-Paul Sartre] and he read...

HACKMAN: He really read this stuff?

MANKIEWICZ: Oh, yes, he carried the book around with him and he’d read it on the subway going over to the Senate or on an airplane. Sometimes he’d come dashing into the office, into my office, 45 minutes before he was going to go somewhere for a weekend or something and say, “What are three good books that I should take with me to

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read?” And then I’d make some suggestion and he’d say, “No, I think I want something a little lighter than that.” He didn’t keep up with current stuff beyond what he heard about it at the dinner table and so forth, but he, you know, reached out to everybody. And I’m sure if he was asking me for a couple of books, I’m sure he was asking thirty or forty other people too. And that way you get a pretty good cross section.

HACKMAN: Would he ever come back to you with something like that and just sit down and discuss a book in terms of the book or in terms of a thinker or is this foreign to him?

MANKIEWICZ: Sometimes, if we had time. Sometimes on an airplane maybe.

HACKMAN: How good a reader was he on something like Camus or Sartre? Did he feel at home with it?

MANKIEWICZ: Pretty good. Oh yes. And he read a lot of history. He read a lot of history. He read a lot of American history, Revolutionary War history. And he liked to reread books. And every

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once in awhile we’d get some kind of question that would lead into something like that--like some magazine would be doing a survey and they’d want to know what three books most influenced somebody as a child, you know. So we’d get to talking about that, and then I’d say, “Did you read such-and-such?” and he’d say, “Well, I never liked that,” or “No, I never

read that kind of book.”

HACKMAN: Do you remember any specifics here?

MANKIEWICZ: Can't really. It was the kind of things kids read. I don't know--Sherlock Holmes, the Rover Boys. You know, I'd try out something that I had read. It seems to me that the stuff he read as a child was more likely to be related to something, either the war or something current. And then, of course, since I hadn't been with him at all through the Justice Department or through any of those things, we would frequently have some very interesting discussions which I'd come in and we'd start talking about something else and then I'd say, "Of course,

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that all goes back to the time you got those reporters out of bed and grilled them about the steel companies.” And he'd laugh and he'd say, "What do you think happened?" And then I'd tell him what I thought happened if I were just a member of the public reading the papers, and I'd also tell him what I really thought at the time had happened and guessing what had really happened. And then it would always please me when he'd say, "Well, you were right. Here's what it really was." Or else he'd say, "This was, in fact, what happened." You know, so I got a lot of education about a lot of those things. And I would talk to him about some of the earlier stuff--about the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] business and about Hoffa [James R. Hoffa], you know, and how that was all perceived. And we'd frequently get into discussions of why people felt this or felt that, you know--how does this story about Hoffa come about, you know. Or we'd talk about somebody who was going to interview him. And I'd say, "Well,

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the thing about that guy is that he really believes that it's quite possible that you're tapping his phone, or we're tapping his phone, or that you really did all those awful things to Jimmy Hoffa and there's nothing you can say that will convince him to the contrary. And then he'd say, "Why?" and then we'd get to discussing what kinds of personalities liberals get as they grow up or what kinds of articles of faith people have in politics that they can't abandon. I mean, you know, you start abandoning some of those, then you got to turn yourself around completely, and that's very, very difficult.

HACKMAN: Would he talk in terms of trying to get away from things that he'd grown up thinking? Was he thinking about this a lot?

MANKIEWICZ: Occasionally. Occasionally, yes, he'd say, "I always used to think he was so-and-so." I remember we talked once about Herbert Hoover because he persisted in putting Herbert Hoover down as one of the great people whenever anybody'd give him a list to bring up, you know.

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And I'd always ask him about that. I'd say, "God, Herbert Hoover. Are you sure?" And he'd say, "Yes, and I'll tell you why." Then we'd then have arguments about Herbert Hoover, and then that might turn into the question of how much you rate someone's personal qualities ahead of their public qualities. And I suppose that eventually could turn into some kind of philosophical question. But, you know, he had the most marvelous selective memory. And he had, of course, because of the way he'd grown up--we all do--but he probably more than anyone else because he was constantly pulled by events into major areas of concentration. I mean I don't suppose he knew in 1959 or 1960 even that a year later he would be expected to know more and make the major decisions about, let's say, civil rights, or antitrust legislation, or whom to prosecute for income tax. But suddenly, he was Attorney General and that was his thing just as John Kennedy's political career brought him into things. And so, I mean, who would think in 1953 that Robert Kennedy would know

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about, you know, delegates and all that business, or even '57. And so there were great--like everybody else, but even more so, I think--there were great chunks of lack of knowledge. And I remember a very small area.... Once we were in San Francisco on a, I guess, poverty committee hearing and we went out one night to have dinner with Jesse Unruh and some of his legislators, and we came back late, walked back to the hotel, got back to the hotel about 11:30, quarter to 12, and there was a message from a man in San Francisco, Mel Swig [Melvin M. Swig], who was a son of Ben Swig [Benjamin H. Swig], who is an important man in San Francisco, friend of President Kennedy's--I mean a supporter--and the message was that since Robert Kennedy was on the board of the--what is it? There's a theatre company, a national theatre...

HACKMAN: ANTA [American National Theatre and Academy], you mean ANTA?

MANKIEWICZ: It may be. I'm not sure it's ANTA. It's a touring repertory company.

HACKMAN: No, that's not what I'm thinking of.

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MANKIEWICZ: It's not ANTA, but it's got three initials, NRC maybe, I don't know what it is. But it was something that he had gone on the board of a year before, and I remember that he had. There was another thing that I did was to make a first judgment, at least, as to whether he ought to be on all these honor committees. I'd say, "This is a good one, this is a bad one," and we'd look and see who else was on. You know, you go to something in New York and if it says Rockefeller, Lindsay [John V. Lindsay], Javits [Jacob K. Javits] and so-and-so are on it, then you have to go on it. But this was something that he was on because it was a good thing to be on. And Mel Swig was on the board, and Mel Swig said, "The company is here in San Francisco and they've

just finished a play at the Geary and would you come over? They want to meet you.” So we went over. He was tired but he went. And what this company did was to give a play and then every night they’d invite one high school class, senior class, from a poorer area of the city to come watch the play. And then when the play was

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over, they’d invite the class up on the stage to sit around with the cast for an hour and discuss the play. And, of course, what they were doing that night was Albee’s [Edward Albee] *Tiny Alice* which is pretty hard for a class of high school seniors from the mission district in San Francisco. I think it’s pretty hard for the Yale Drama School. And when we got there, they were all sitting around the stage talking about the play, and he joined in as well as he could. I don’t think he knew the play, and there’s no reason why he should. They got to talking about the role of religion and so forth, and it was kind of interesting. And then we were on our way back to the hotel and he said to me, “Is that a good company? Is that a good group?” And I said, “Well, it’s not bad. From what I understand and the things I’ve read about it, it’s pretty good. Particularly since there are so few good or even adequate repertory companies in the U.S. And he said to me, “What’s a repertory company?” so I explained to him the

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difference between how that works and the company that, you know, does a lot of plays, do a different play every night rather than just touring with one play. And then we talked about something else and went on and discussed the play and the kids and the witnesses we were going to have the next day and who knows what. And then that day ended. And that was, oh, I guess, in the middle of ’67. And then I remember out in California in the campaign along about April or May, he was giving a speech to a group of businessmen. I was there, took him into it, and sat there and listened to him talking to these California businessmen about his ideas for bringing private enterprise into the fight against poverty, the ghetto. And he began to talk to them about Bedford-Stuyvesant. Ros Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric] was with him and Ros was on the board. And he [Robert F. Kennedy] said they had this block program, and he said we’re going to have a school with

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closed circuit television. He said we’re going to have the store-front school approach and other cultural things for the community. He said we’ll probably set up a repertory company, and he looked right at me and just laughed, you know. And I thought: God, here that thing has just stuck in his mind for a year just.... You know, I’m sure many things he heard, obviously, he forgot. I mean, it’s a question of where you sort things that you hear in the memory bank, and I just know that when he first heard about the repertory company he said to himself, “That’s something that I’m going to remember because that something can be used one day.” And, by God, there it popped out right there. And then he realized that it was a little odd and turned to me and laughed and then went on with his discussion.

There’s another point there on memory, and Jack Newfield quotes me in his book....

For the life of me I can't remember saying it, but I certainly could have said it because I believe it--which is that he treated statistics in a

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different way. He had great trouble remembering remedial statistics, that is, the precise rates in his tax proposals that would accomplish things, and depreciation schedules and all kinds of things that statisticians tend to remember. But he never had any trouble remembering what I guess you might call horror statistics, that is to say, how many or what percentage of children in Latin America die in the first year, what is the average income of the cane workers in northeast Brazil, or many kids in New York high schools don't get the equivalent of an eighth-grade education by the time they graduate. In other words, those statistics he never forgot because to him they related to the human condition. The other statistics, after all, are things that any competent accountant can figure out in a half an hour anyway.

HACKMAN: Let me go back to the discussion of the Albee play. How would he react to something like the theatre of the absurd, coming out of Catholic background, to something which is sacrilegious to many traditional Catholics?

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MANKIEWICZ: Yes, well, I had the feeling that he really was fascinated with not only the development in the Church but with his own development in the Church. Whenever we talked about that, you know, and we would frequently, particularly with respect to Latin America, and also in the U.S., to talking about Cardinal McIntyre [James Francis Aloysius McIntyre], for instance, or even some of the fellows in New York, or the metamorphosis of Fulton J. Sheen. And it was quite clear by 1966-67 what side he was on. I mean, he was a modernist in the Church; there's no question of it. His sympathy went out to the avant-garde in the Church, and he had great disrespect and impatience with the traditionalists. On the other hand, a lot of them had been his friends and particularly had been his father's and his brother's friends. And I remember.... Well, in connection with the Albee play, for instance, whenever he talked about traditional Catholicism or Judaism, we discussed a number of times the real bigotry and anti-Catholicism

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of many liberals, particularly Jews. And we'd talk about why that was. Well, in California, for instance, I always have a theory that the liberal.... [Interruption] It's no great original theory with me. Peter Viereck once said that "anti-Catholicism is the anti-Semitism of the intellectuals," he [Robert F. Kennedy] liked that. And I always had the feeling that the reasons we had such trouble with the liberal Jews, Democrats, in California, was because they're all immigrants usually from New York or Boston, or else their parents were. And they were all beaten up by little, tough Irish kids like Bob Kennedy on their way to school, or

their parents were. And it's very hard to overcome a... And I always thought that the difference between him and Gene McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] was that he was the kind of Irish man that you'd be afraid of whereas nobody could ever be afraid of Gene McCarthy. He was kind of the school teacher who told you, you know, you'd written a good theme. But here was Robert Kennedy who really in his younger days was the

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archetypical tough Irish cop. He wasn't, but he permitted that image to get abroad, and it's very tough to knock down. So we used to talk about that, about the different cultural perceptions not only of him but of other people. And it related sometimes too to discussions of more serious matters like, for instance, the reactions of the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* is an anti-Catholic newspaper, really. You'd have a tough time selling them on that belief. They don't think so, but it's true. [Interruption] We're going to have to break this off shortly. Now where were we--*New York Times*. Well, so there was that sort of thing. But I was always aware that he was fascinated with new developments in the Church and that, in a sense, when he'd talk about them or deliver himself with these opinions about so and so was a good guy, and Sister Corita was good, and Cardinal McIntyre was bad--obviously, it's so vastly oversimplified there--that he was also, in a sense, listening to himself, sort

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of watching his own development.

HACKMAN: Did he talk about the rest of...

MANKIEWICZ: It's true of Ethel too.

HACKMAN: Yes, I wondered. Did he talk about, well, not only Mrs. Kennedy, but the rest of his family on this? And how they felt about it?

MANKIEWICZ: I don't know. I don't know. He had very curious relationships with the people in his family, but it was funny--I mean, very close with all of them but... I remember once--because I had worked with Sarge Shriver, of course, and I knew Eunice very well--and I remember once we went over to the House recording studio in 1966 because something like 110 House members wanted him to cut tapes with them for their own election campaigns. And they were lined up, you know, the DSG [Democratic Study Group] had lined them up, and he sat there in the studio and one guy after another would come in, and he'd have a little piece of copy and we'd do it. And we went over there about 11:30 or something, and he had a meeting at 1:00 of the trustees of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.

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Foundation, of which Eunice, I guess, was, the chairman, at the time, back here somewhere.

We started running late over there and we still had about fifteen congressmen to go by 1:00. And I told him about the meeting and I said to him, "I don't know about you, Senator, but if I had to choose between mortally offending fifteen key House Democrats from key districts all around the country, and keeping Eunice waiting," I said, "I wouldn't hesitate. I'd tell the congressmen, 'Forget it' because it's much more serious to have Eunice mad at you." And he looked at me and laughed and he said, "I agree with you. Let's tell these guys we'll do it later." And we went over to the luncheon.

HACKMAN: One other thing if you've got time. You mentioned he looked back on the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] thing and, the Hoffa thing. How would he discuss the McCarthy thing and his role at that time, or how did he see what he was doing at that time?

MANKIEWICZ: Well, he would concede now and then that he probably shouldn't have gotten into it at all, but that he

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never did any of the communist stuff for McCarthy, that he.... And as a matter of fact, once I was talking to him--we were talking about somebody who had been labeled something or other, I forget how the thing came up--but, at any rate, a name came to me out of the past and I said, that's like Annie Lee Moss, who was a celebrated McCarthy victim--she was a cafeteria worker over at one of the government offices and McCarthy said she was a communist and it turned out it was a different Annie Lee Moss. And he snapped up at once in the front seat--he was in the front seat of the care--and he turned to me. He said, "You know that story?" and I said, "Well, only what I read in the paper." And it turned out that he was responsible for that. It was one of the things that had turned him against Roy Cohn that he found about Annie Lee Moss, that they had the wrong one, and Cohn apparently knew about it too, but it didn't matter because it would have been too much trouble to get the right one, and they could make the point anyway with the

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one they had. And he said that he had gone to Stuart Symington with the story and it was Symington, of course, who had broken it finally. And then, you know, we'd talk from time to time about that and about the fact that what he had done with respect to McCarthy was that he had done some work for him for about six months on [Interruption]....worked on palm oil shipments and God knows what--Red Chinese trade, I guess. And after about six months, he quit because he didn't like the way McCarthy was running the committee in other respects and he didn't like Roy Cohn. When he came back to the committee I would think his service was unexceptionable. He came back as the minority counsel. But he nevertheless knew that it was a defensive area for him and he also knew that he was never going to be able to shake it. Whereas the Hoffa thing, I think, bothered him much more. He could never understand why people were sore at him for having finally put behind bars this guy whom he regarded, and I think correctly, as a menace to

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the labor movement and probably to society. And he used to wonder when the turn would come. I mean, the history of the last three years, four years, is a history of the courts turning people loose because they were bugged. And I think something like eleven courts have considered Hoffa's claim now, and not one of them has ever given him an inch on it. And, you know, we'd look at some court decision and I'd say, "Well, see what the circuit court did somewhere," you know. And he'd say, "Well, doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. I'm the fellow that bugged Jimmy Hoffa and did all those terrible things. Don't know how many more decisions it's going to take." He was pretty much resigned to those things although he did, I think, he felt they were unfair. It bothered him.

HACKMAN:            Want to do another side or what?

MANKIEWICZ:        I think we better knock it off. I've got a couple of things to do.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]



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