

**Riordan Roett, interview March 5, 2004, Washington D.C.**

JG: How did you get interested in Brazil?

RR: That's easy, I applied for a Fulbright Fellowship in 1961, got the Fulbright in the spring of 62 and arrived in the Northeast in July of 1962. I went to the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco in Recife with Gilberto Freyre.

JG: He was still the director?

RR: Yes. He was a godlike figure. He would arrive the afternoon in the back of his jeep for a few hours and Mauro Motta was a local poet writer and was the actual director by then but Gilberto came in most afternoons, received people, correspondences, that sort of thing.

JG: You wrote a book about AID at the end of the 1960s and USAID in the Northeast.

RR: My dissertation.

JG: Posing an immediate question asking about the effectiveness of USAID in the Northeast. What drove you to ask that question.

RR: I first thought I would do a research project on Federal-State relations in the Northeast having no idea about what the Northeast was like and I went in to talk to Celso Furtado, the director of SUDENE, he said where there is no project there, it doesn't make any sense. I said oh my god, what are we going to do? And so I began thinking about this huge AID mission that was building up and I had a lot of friends in the mission, and they had no idea about what they were doing and I got into this whole question about the polarization of politics in the Northeast and the elections of 1962 and the elections when Miguel Arraes was elected the governor of Pernambuco and then Lincoln Gordon comes up with the islands of sanity in 1963 and then you have the denouement of the Goulart government in 1963 early 64 and I leave in August 63 to back to Columbia to continue my work.

JG: The islands of sanity, wasn't that a discourse to explain what the U.S. government had done in the 62 elections to aid certain government.

RR: I can't remember when it was enunciated, but it became very clear that the 62 elections elected good guys and bad guys and the Embassy's role in Rio was to target the "good guys", the conservatives in the Northeast with as much money as they could for whatever purposes they needed it for, as well as to guarantee Arraes and the other governments as well as SUDENE, because by this time Celso would come back from the failed three year plan in Brasilia, and the U.S. government had decided that SUDENE was taken over by the leftists which to a certain extent it had been in late 62 and early 63 when Celso was in Brasilia and there was almost no communication between SUDENE

and the AID mission, the consulate played almost no role, through 63 and early 64 and then when the coup came, they all disappeared.

JG: You went back.

RR: I went back to finish my course work, comps and all of that and then I wound up in the Northeast.

JG: Did you know Brad Burns.

RR: There were very few Brazilianists. We all took Tannenbaum's course. Chuck Wagley.

JG: Who would have been in your cohort?

RR: The only other person was Bob Meyers who went into the private sector and disappeared from Latin American studies, because I got to do all of this stuff in 60 when I went to CIPA, Frank's class had four or five students, Brad, me this guy Meyer and probably someone else. Nobody, nobody. Then there was the famous Tannenbaum seminar on Thursday afternoon where people would show up and once Castro just walked in.

JG: Castro walked in?

RR: During his famous visit to the United Nations, Frank, God knows how, got him, suddenly Fidel walked in. There were twenty people or so there. It was kind of surreal. Then Frank used to have these marvelous parties at his house and Frank would invite us. Lazaro Cardenas or someone would walk in. He was the only Latin Americanist around on the social scientists, historical side. Wagley and lot of people in anthropology, Marvin Harris, and literature. Wagley was putting together the Institute, very successfully, I was one of the first students to benefit from the Institute for Latin American studies that he got a lot of funding for that sort of promoted us, so I got a Fulbright for 61 and 62, then with the support of the Institute got Foreign Area fellowship in 65-66 and went back to the Northeast to do my dissertation research on the foreign aid program and then the book that Vanderbilt published at the end of the 60s. So then I had almost 2 and a half years in Brazil by that time. Then I went back to Rio in 70. Then I went to Vanderbilt as an assistant professor in 67 as an assistant professor. I was at MIT as a post doc from 66-67 without a doctorate, that's how we did things in those time. Then I wrote the dissertation, it was a terrible dissertation, we didn't have any social science training in the 60s, we just wrote, there were no paradymys and all of those marvelous things. We just wrote and got people to approve it, so I went to Vanderbilt and had a great time and must have gotten money from the Latin American Center at Vanderbilt Institute that Bill Nicols; I guess I had become the associate director by then and then I went off to Paraguay in the late 60s for a couple of times to do a book on Paraguay that came out in the late 80s or 90s and then I got money to go back to Brazil for I guess it was January to August in 70, when all of this happens.

JG: So you are in Brazil, you are not at the LASA conference of 70.

RR: No.

JG: In February according to Stanely Stein, his authorship got Skidmore Stein, Moorse and Wagley to sign a letter about Caio Prado, Junior's tribunal and it was a letter to the editor of the NYT. Soon after that there circulated a letter and a petition with 97 signatures, reads like the Who's Who of Latin America. . . . Your name is not on the document. You are accused, and according to the interrogations in the report that you made, they spent a lot of time about the petition, that you had received it, alleged tha you were going collect money for an ad...

RR: I don't remember the petition at all. It was traumatic evening.

JG: I can't tell if they were imaging things.

RR: I came home from my Portuguese verb class and found all of these thugs in my apartment. I remember one of the guys asked me if I knew someone named Carlos, I though of Carlos Pelaez.

JG: . . .

RR: They went to pick up Carlos and thank god his wife, Magnolia, I think it was, she, had the good sense to call the Embassy and then **we found a college classmate**, she found, who I didn't know was in Brazil and he was the duty officer and he went from 10 at night to two or three in the morning to each of the intelligence units saying, I know that you have three Americans, I want them, and then at 2:30 or 3:00 in the morning, it was earlier when Bob or whatever his name was that they got the word that we were going to be released, then they got all nice nice and then released us.

JG: You never knew where you were being held?

RR: No we were blindfolded and it was somewhere on the outskirts of Rio.

JG: DOPS and 31 delegacia, north of downtown, near Tijuca. How you remember and effect.

RR: Blindfolded us, took us out in the jeep, these guys were having a great time. Mother's **day was coming up and these guys talked about Mother's Day**. They stopped for coffee or something to drink, and then we ended up at this place; and it was winter, it was cool at night, then took us out of the jeep and we were blindfolded, and they were guiding us, they weren't pushing us, and I thought: "This is it, we're going up against the wall and mow us down. I truly believed that. That quickly passed and they took us upstairs, put us in the rooms, then began to play this game, Werner your friend told us everything that we wanted to know so why don't you collaborate and then they'd say that

Pelaez ratted on you and Werner, and you are scum bags, then someone came into my room and had a rifle or a gun and he put it to my teeth; he didn't touch me and said, "We know that you know, see my nice clean shirt, I don't want to go home with it all bloody, why don't you tell us all that we want to know. I kept thinking, now what is the imperfect verb that I use to explain myself. We went on this game with the lights on for several hours and then Bob or whatever his name was from the foreign service got through and I gather that he didn't get much support from Boonstra who was in Brasilia and didn't want to get involved very much but he pushed anyway and what the dynamics were I don't know, but then suddenly incomes the coronel, he wasn't but in comes the chefe and do you want a coca-cola.

JG: Your speculation is that at some point, the duty officer got through to someone and said, oops you guys made a mistake, you don't pick up Americans...

RR: Right.

JG: Did you have a notion of what they were trying to get at by the questions that they were asking.

RR: None, absolutely none. It was really very strange. I know now what happen. I was writing this first edition of this book on Brazilian politics, Brazil: Politics in the Patromonial society, and the first edition had a section on guerrillas and guerrilla movements just out of the newspapers and stuff, and I had sent that back to Vanderbilt through the mail and they obviously were going through my mail, and I think as well and that was the kidnapping of the German ambassador. . . and they found in my briefcase a map of Santa Teresa opened to the quadrant where the Ambassador was being held, where old and dear friends of mine lived and still live, and so it was all a coincidence, my writing about the guerrillas, the FGV taking it out of my desk or the mail and my having the map, having friends in Santa Teresa, I suppose that if I were a law officer or a security agent I might have thought, hey, this is suspicious in the context of the Cold War and their own war. To this day I don't know if I was the reason that Pelaez and Baer got picked up of if they had just decided to do a sweep of the Ford Foundation people or I have no idea why we were pulled into the same net.

JG: ... I expected to find the same anger to the Ford foundation, nothing in the documentation but don't raise regarding supporting subversive professors.

RR: They came for me that night. Poor Werner, I was just living in Werner's apartment and then I guess they found out about Carlos, Carlos became Carlos Pelaez, that became part of the strange events:

JG: Do you think they might have thought he was a Cuban agent.

RR: No, I think it was only because he was a part of our group.

JG: What impact did it have?

RR: I got a note from a friend of mine in the military and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who said gee, I have heard all about you in the information flows in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then in the hearings...I was leaving soon, I was out of there in July or early August. . . I went back to teach in the fall. I don't remember much interaction with my colleagues about it. I think that everyone was so scared about. You know 70 was a terrible time. You really didn't want to spend a lot of time endangering other people or talking to other people about things that would endanger other people.

JG: How did you feel about the political situation.

RR: It was a strange year, it was the year of the soccer championship so there were three days of Carnival, it was one of the years of the high point of Delfin's miracle, so they were broadening the beach and the middle class was emerging and it was a very consumer oriented time. I had know Rio since 64 and Rio was really transforming, fantastically, but there was this undercurrent of nervousness among the people that you knew about being politically correct. Do you know Brian Owensby's book about the middle class in Brazil, I think it is a marvelous book. The middle class had finally come into its own after decades of defeat and betrayal and first by Prestes, then by the UDN, then by Vargas and then the UDN, finally by 64 is the apogee of their hopes, and the military brought them what they wanted, status and income and you felt that with your middle class friends, by then a lot of your academic friends had disappeared, literally or had left the country so the community was very small by 70, Cardoso was in Santiago, he and Ruth had left and others were in France and elsewhere, there wasn't much of an academic community, there were economists at IUPEU, Pedro Malan and the whole crowd who began the income distribution stuff when they came back from Berkeley, and places like that, but economists in Brazil are somewhat different and they are not politically involved, historians at that period were not very political, and there were no political scientists in Brazil. People I knew were ordinary Brazilians. Werner knew the economists so I would always see his crowd of economists... Carlos Pelaez... he wound up at Chase Manhattan bank, married to a Brazilian, charming, never saw much of him after... I was only there a few weeks after an incident. I went back to Brazil but not for long periods of time.

JG: Paranoia and not want to talk about people to get them in trouble, did want to make people think that you were a CIA agent and also didn't want to get people into trouble.

RR: Bill Klein came through with his wife at that time in Copacabana and we'd have dinner and talk blandly about inflation. I didn't have a sense of foreboding when I was writing the first edition of my book; all of us had a sense that we were Americans, they can't touch us, we're Americans, my generation felt that very strongly; we could ask what we wanted and go where we wanted and do what we wanted, we were Americans.

JG: Resentments of Brazilian scholars...access to documents.

RR: I didn't have access.

JG: Deference.

RR: I suppose, clearly before 64 I was the only Fulbright and I got to see everyone, I was a novelty, also 6 foot 2, I was the only American around. I got to see Castelo. I taught D. Argentina English for a while. I was in his house on the beach fairly frequently. Celso Furtado, I met Juliao, we had seminars in the Instituto where Julião and Castelo came to debate land reform. Castelo was very interesting guy. Miguel Arraes, the conservative people and got to know everyone. And then after 64 it closed.

JG: Why if the government was pro-American

RR: It closed for academics. AID mission of course was something else. The people in SUDENE were rightwingers and they sensed that I was connected, with the “leftwing” before the Revolution. Lot of my friends disappeared, friends, academics, where the repression was very heavy in 64 in the Northeast. I also got to know D. Helder when I came back. He had just moved up there before the coup. I worked closely with Paulo Friere before 64 I worked with the MEB people. When I came back it was really focused on collecting data. It wasn’t easy because the AID mission didn’t like me for various reasons. I realize now that I should have changed my topic, graduate students are pretty one-minded, I have a topic and I am not going to change it...I had some subversive friends who were sidelined and marginalized. And then in 70 I decided to work with the Vargas foundation and it worked out very well for the five editions of my Patriomonal books. At the time I thought protected because I was American. I know now that they were probably going through my desk.

JG: desk...

RR: I wouldn’t be surprised that I said something, bitching against the regime, the word might have gotten to DOPS that Roett...

JG: At that time how would you describe yourself politically...

RR: Really very much in the center.

JG: Not a liberal

RR: I suppose a liberal, not a leftist.

JG: But you had a transit with leftists

RR: Yeah, opposites attract. I should not have been a Brazilianists. ....

I probably was more a liberal of the late 60s and early 70s, anti Nixon, remembered that I was in the missile crisis that we would all be murdered because we were on lists of conservatives.

JG: Petition about Caio Prado . . .

RR: I know we signed something at the end of the evening. I guess that they dictated to us or that we released them of all responsibility indicating that we hadn't been hurt, which was true as we hadn't been hurt.

JG: Although they stole things. . . .Other memories...

RR: Thirty some odd years a lot of water has passed under the bridge. I have had a lot of traumatic events in my life. I do remember everyone once in a while. I don't see Werner as much and we would see him in and talk a lot. We don't see Carlos. Stan Nichols has moved away. The principles are gone. . . .I guess also. Coup in Chile in 73. I became Chairman of ECALA. Emergency Committee to aid Latin American Scholars. I saw a lot more horrible things in Chile than happened to us in Brazil that night.

JG: So you were a leftist. Come on. You were helping the people who were in Chile.

RR: I was flying down to Chile with some frequency. We had Ford Foundation money. Richard Fagan who was president of LASA. Must have thought I was a leftist, but no I was just well organized and got me Chairman of ECLAS which got me elected president of LASA several years later.

JG:... Sonia new president.

RR: When I got back to the states, I was midway through my career at Vanderbilt. I didn't know that at the time. I went to LASA. I was very active in early LASA. I like organizations like that and there weren't many people. I went to the first one in NY. I missed the second one because I was in Brazil. Then I did ECLAS and then flying back and forth with Santiago in 73 and 74. I don't think that I was on the Executive Council. I got elected Vice President in 75 or 76. That's when I ended up in Cuba. I established the first exchange program with Hopkins and Havana and wound up there in 76 and 77 until 80. You could look at different parts of my career and think that I was a leftist. Well dressed, but . . .

JG: Nothing wrong with being well dressed and a left.

RR: It was an interesting person. Who would I classify as a leftist. Not Charles Wagley. Not Marvin Harris.

JG: Stanely Stein?

RR: Good old Stanley Stein. Served years on the Board that gave out fellowships. Stanley was a European leftist.

JG: A Social Democrat.

RR: An elegant social democrat. We had dinner once a year and would discuss things like that?

JG: Did you hang out with Ken Maxwell?

RR: I didn't know Ken. He was more doing Portugal and he wasn't part of our crowd. Our crowd was Al Stepan, Susan Pursell, Arturo Valenzuela, Maxine Margolis. The Columbian group. I knew Bob Levine who has now died. We were the only place to do Brazil, so Bob came to Columbia to do Brazil with Wagley to do the Brazil course. Stanley Stein came to do the Brazil course. John Wirth came for a year. He was at Stanford. There were a couple of years in the early sixties were very rich.

JG: Did you have contact with Richard Morse, he was at Yale in 70.

RR: I guess I met him at some point in Rio, Warren Dean was there as well.

JG: Warren Dean, he was a hard working scholar and stood by his principles.

RR: The other is Ralph Della Cava. Authentic leftist.

JG: He and Brady Tyson are doing behind the scenes are doing many many things...Brady Tyson, Church Commission...Brady is feeding names...

Thank you very much.