

**Earl Graves Oral History Interview- RFK #3, 8/28/1969**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Earl Graves

**Interviewer:** Roberta W. Greene

**Date of Interview:** August 28, 1969

**Place of Interview:** New York, New York

**Length:** 54 pp.

**Biographical Note**

Graves, Earl; administrative Assistant to Senator Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], New York (1965 - 1968). Graves discusses his role as a black member in RFK's presidential campaign (1968), the racism that existed within RFK's campaign, campaigning in Indiana, and the impact Martin Luther King Jr.'s death had on RFK and his campaign, among other issues.

**Access Restrictions**

None.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed September 5, 2017, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Transcript of Oral History Interview**

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

**Suggested Citation**

Earl Graves, recorded interview by Roberta W. Greene, August 28, 1969, (page number), Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION  
JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

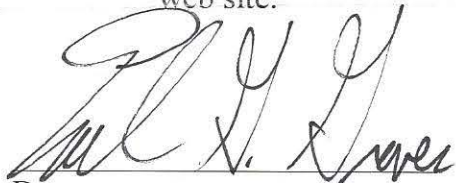
**Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews  
of EARL G. GRAVES**


Interviewed by: Roberta Greene


In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions hereinafter set forth, I, **EARL GRAVES, JR.**, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the recording and transcript of the personal interview(s) (hereinafter referred to as Materials) conducted with **ROBERTA GREENE** (Interviewer) on July 17, 1969; July 18, 1969; August 28, 1969; August 30, 1969; October 23, 1969; May 7, 1970; June 18, 1970 for deposit in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.


This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript and recording shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and reviewed by archives staff for information that would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy and/or information the protection of which is essential to the Nation's security.
- (2) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright we may have in the Materials.
- (3) Copies of the recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (4) Copies of the Materials may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.
- (5) The Materials may be placed on the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library's web site.

  
Donor

  
Dated

  
Susan K. Donius  
Director for Presidential Libraries

  
Dated

Earl Graves- RFK #3

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
98, 109, 115	Planning of April 4, 1968 visit to Indianapolis
98	Impact of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s [MLK] death on visit to Indianapolis
102	Jim Tolan and Franklin W. Holgate meeting
107, 120	Racism within Robert F. Kennedy's [RFK] presidential campaign (1968)
110	Louis Martin, lack of authority in Hubert H. Humphrey campaign
112	Recognition of influence and need of black communities in campaign primaries
115, 130, 140, 144	Visits to Gary, Indiana
117	Aiding Mrs. Coretta Scott King
117,141	Competition with Eugene J. McCarthy in black communities
119, 121	Talk of ending the campaign
122	MLK's funeral and RFK's meeting with many members of the civil rights movement
127, 148	RFK's personality after MLK's death
129	MLK's support of RFK
132	California preparations
133	Money handling, decisions, and concerns
140	Indianapolis campaign

Third Oral History Interview

with

EARL GRAVES

August 28, 1969  
New York, New York

By Roberta Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program  
of the John F. Kennedy Library

GREENE: Would you begin by explaining what you remember about the plans for the April 4th visit? As it turned out, that was the night Martin Luther King was killed, but what do you remember about planning for that first visit to Indianapolis?

GRAVES: Well, I'm not sure when you ask me what I remember about the April 4th visit in terms of planning and coming to Indianapolis, I assume that what you're talking about is what preparations went into the visit of Senator Kennedy to Indianapolis.

GREENE: Yes.

GRAVES: I was not directly involved since I was out on the road at that time in, I guess it was the

the western part of the state -- Fort Wayne, South Bend -- and on the road coming in with the Senator. I was not directly involved in the planning that went on for that visit.

I knew that part of what we were going to do was to go into the ghetto of Indianapolis. The plan was that I would go with him, as far as that stop was concerned, into the ghetto of Indianapolis that evening. We left Fort Wayne and flew on and when we left -- when we landed in... I'm just trying to remember the sequence of events in terms of how we found out that King had been shot that night.

I found out about it riding in a police car on the way back to the airport with a group of rather racist policemen who were laughing about it, not remembering I was in the car, and then, remembering I was in the car, trying to cover it up, a bit anyway, in terms of some of the sly comments they were making about the fact that King had been shot. At that point it had not

[-97-]

been confirmed that he was dead yet.

When we all got on the plane to take off, leaving Fort Wayne -- and I was on the plane with the Senator -- it still had not been confirmed that he had died. When we landed, as soon as we landed, we found -- in fact, the reporter got... I take that back. The pilot did get the word while we were in flight that King had died; and they came back, and the reporters all knew by this time. There was some discussion on the plane in terms of what this was going to mean, and the Senator was very distraught and very upset about the fact that this had happened.

I know I remember going back to try and speak to him about what I thought we should do or should not do, and he didn't want to speak to anybody. He didn't mince any words about the fact at that time with me that, you know, he didn't want to be bothered, that he would talk to me later.

When I got into Indianapolis, because of the problems that had arisen as far as the black

[-98-]

community was concerned -- which I mentioned to you in the previous interview -- Jim Tolan [James Tolan] and Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno]... [Interruption] We were talking about the Indianapolis thing, and I'm going to be completely candid in terms of what happened that night. As we got off that plane we got into a thing with Jim Tolan, Jerry Bruno -- what was the name of the guy who was traveling with the Senator all the time? -- Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] ...

GREENE: Dutton.

GRAVES: The Senator and myself. Bruno and Jim Tolan, because of the intrigue that they had gotten themselves involved in as far as the black community is concerned

in Indianapolis, tried to just cut me out of any of the decision making process that went on, from the time the plane landed and we were going to make up our minds what we were going to do about going into the black community, until we actually made the decision to go -- which took about ten minutes with a lot of running back and forth and a lot of very secretive nonsense. It was just

[-99-]

the very childish, kind of high school, bush league type of activities that went on with the three of them, not meaning the Senator. The Senator was not aware of any of this.

Now, I couldn't figure out what was going on until John Lewis told me, because he came out to the airport and said, "They're trying to play games with you. The best thing to do is just ride it out until you get to the hotel," meaning, "just let it go as it's going till you get to the hotel and see what's going on." He said, "And just go ahead over to the rallies."

I did get in the car and go to the rally with the Senator. At that point the Senator really had no indication of any kind of problems that supposedly were going on as far as the black community was concerned -- any dissatisfaction.

We got to the rally and it went very well. The speech he made, of course, is now part of history. There's not too much more I can say about what happened that night in

[-100-]

Indianapolis other than that fact that, you know, the Senator was well received. I'm sure that the statement he made had a lot to do with there not being any riots or disturbances there that night. I remember indicating to him that I thought it was a fine statement he made.

When we got back to the hotel, I was able to figure out by that time that what had happened was that Holgate [Franklin W. Holgate] decided -- and I mentioned his name before, he's the assistant minority leader in Massachusetts, black guy -- to make some moves that were going to make Frank Holgate look rather good at the expense of whatever work I had been doing in the black community. Not necessarily at the expense of Earl Graves, because I think what we're talking about is a little bit bigger than Earl Graves, at least what I was talking about then in terms of my concern as to how we handle the black community.

It turns out that Tolan had put together a meeting vis-a-vis Holgate. Or I should

[-101-]

say Holgate and Tolan had got together and put together a meeting of the same black people who had asked me for money. I had indicated to them we were not going to just give away fifteen or twenty thousand dollars. They talked Holgate and Tolan into having "a private meeting," with the Senator, and they did have their meeting.

I found out the meeting was going on and entered the meeting. It caused some concern on the part of Tolan and, supposedly, the black guys. Tolan called me over, kind of angry, and asked that I not stay at the meeting because the thing that they were supposedly angry about was the fact that I was the one that had precipitated this whole thing. Not

wanting to compound the thing, I left the meeting as soon as the.... You know, if, in fact, Jim Tolan, who was nothing more than an advance man, but a guy who the Senator respected, and a Jerry Bruno and a Frank Holgate were going to be able to turn off all the work that I had done in the past, then this was as good a

[-102-]

time as any to find out about it.

Fortunately, of course.... Again I come back to the point that the Senator was not really aware of all of the intrigue that was involved and only wanted to do what he thought was right. What came out of the meeting, basically, was that these guys were going to get some money, much against my objections. And, as I said before, these same guys that literally just shook the group down, shook up down, are all in jail now. They're all under indictment for various offenses in Indianapolis.

When that meeting was over, as I said before, John Lewis and I had a conversation with the Senator. John Lewis made the point -- in his own grief because he was so close to Martin Luther King -- to take time to go over and say to the Senator -- and he and John talked about it -- that there were some things that were less than correct in terms of how the black community was being handled in Indianapolis, meaning the way that Holgate and Jim Tolan and Jerry Bruno had

[-103-]

approached the thing.

Of course, again, we have to understand, as we talk about this thing, that you're dwelling with an individual that at best it's difficult to deal with when you're talking about Jerry Bruno. When you're talking about Jerry Bruno in terms of how he reacts to the Negro community, you have to recognize that a person like Bruno is a guy who lacks formal education, and I'm sure has some problem psychologically in terms of his size. You know, you add these two dimensions together, and just his background and his sociological upbringing, and you have a guy who's just this side of being a racist, if he isn't. In addition to that, you know, you're compounding that with any of the things he feels that he's lacking as an individual. You put that up against a person who's black and say to him that, you know, "This is the guy you've got to deal with," meaning an Earl Graves or a Tom Smith [Thomas M. Smith] or a Hank Jones -- all of which are just aliases, such

[-104-]

as my own name -- and you have a guy who's not going to get along.

That was the case with me, because I wasn't about to treat him any differently than I treated anyone else. Initially, when our relationship started off in the Senate office, I treated him with all the respect and awe that he was supposed to receive, within reason. And it just didn't, you know, help one way or another. He's just always kind of considered me a thorn in



his side, in terms of my working abilities, and likewise looking over my shoulder to see what it was that I was doing that he could possibly look to cut out in some way.

The strange part of it is that this is as true today, when we run into each other as it was a year and a half ago when we both stopped working for the Senator because of his death. I had two girls in here who were formerly secretaries in Senator Kennedy's office and

[-105-]

they were just talking about his own inadequacies yesterday, they were kidding around about if they wanted to get him riled all they have to do is say, "Earl Graves," to him. Even today in August, 1969 he still starts to rant and rave. So I guess it's just something that he will never overcome; and I guess it's just one of those things.

I think it was rather unfortunate. and I don't know quite where it would have all let to, as far as the campaign is concerned, as we had gone along. I think as things got more lined up, meaning the campaign, and positions got a little bit more straight and everybody was kind of beating out their own position in the campaign, hammering out their own position, I think it would have.... We'd have had a head-on collision somewhere down the road, or, to use one of my favorite terms, somewhere down the pike.

The only thing that probably would have avoided that and made it possible for me not to have any real problems was the fact that Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]

[-106-]

recognized the job that I was doing in the Negro community. But, again, the reason that something like that was able to go on and that we could have that kind of nonsense was that, in the final analysis, there was not one black person or group of black persons that anybody in that campaign at the highest level, or otherwise, felt enough confidence in to be able to let that person make a judgment, even when it came to the black community. We always had to turn to the white experts in the black community. So we keep coming right back to the fact that it smacks of.... You know, a black guy is not even good enough to make a judgment as far as his own black community is concerned, much less to make some decisions in terms of what happens in the white community; and this just smacks of racism.

It's a matter that we're going to give the black guy -- which is what our society is all about in 1969. You know, a black guy's a good guy, but he's not quite as good as a white guy; and that's what you're talking about.

[-107-]

That's what you're talking about in business and that's what you're talking about in the very business that I'm in. You know, with all the credentials I can come with as far as having worked for the Senator and the work that I've done and my own expertise, whatever that might be, you know, you still have that same problem.

No matter how people relate to you, whether or not you're talking about the community I live in.... I consider myself probably head and shoulders above many of the

individuals in the community that I live in, which unfortunately -- and I say "unfortunately" because I'd rather it be an integrated community. Head and shoulders above many of the individuals who live and surround me in the surrounding community where my home is and yet, you know, there's no doubt in my mind that they consider me.... They feel happy about the fact, you know, that they can at least say that they have some kind of person who has some position publicly, or had some position

[-108-]

publicly. So that kind of justifies it in their mind, but I'm sure that they look upon the thing as being not just another neighbor, but a black neighbor. And, you know, I don't think we're going to see that change in my lifetime, probably won't see a change in my children's lifetime. If the present Administration and the direction it's going is any indication of what we can look to, then I would say that we have a very, very long road still to go.

Of course, I don't know whether or not that answers what happened on April 4th, but anyway I think that it kind of.... What we've said in the last ten minutes I think kind of sets the tone for how I feel the campaign was going at that point and how I think, as I look back on it, it would have probably come out. There would not have been any black persons that would have made major input. I don't mean guys who got on the bandstand and played a guitar or guys who could run very fast and were

[-109-]

good athletes. I'm talking about persons who have made a major contribution, who were black, to the campaign. That was a problem they had; those persons were non-existent. And we were pretty well into the campaign and the time of the Senator's death; we were in the California primaries. I know it would not have been any different if you'd have brought Louis Martin in, if you'd have....

There's nobody I know of politically that they would talk about bringing in, or persons who would have come in, that would have had any greater credentials or input into that campaign than I did. I had no problem with Louis Martin coming in with all his credentials, but Louis Martin would have been coming in only as still to be the black guy. I had an opportunity to see Louis Martin -- when I talk about Louis Martin I'm talking about the former deputy chairman of the Democratic National Party, who's a first-rate guy -- and I had an opportunity to see Louis Martin operate within the framework of what supposedly

[-110-]

was supposed to be his "deputy chairmanship." Louis Martin had less authority than some of those guys who, you know, had come on as advance men in the Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] campaign. I mean, I sat in on those meetings, and Louis Martin practically had to raise his hand and ask permission to speak. And I mean I'm talking about at top level meetings; I attended those meetings, and Louis Martin was the black guy. Then when Larry O'Brien took over for the Humphrey campaign, he asked me to come in, and I was privy to

these meetings. We sat around that table with six Cabinet-level officers and the rest of the supernumeraries who were involved in that thing. Louis Martin, you know, was a guy who made some input as far as what he thought about the black community, but it was always an uphill struggle; and he was recognized as being a black guy and not a leader, just a black leader.

GREENE: Tell me, did you ever get a feeling that maybe Robert Kennedy or his top people were not that

[-111-]

interested in the black support, that they felt they had it and they'd rather keep it kind of at a distance and go after support where they weren't so strong?

GRAVES: No. I didn't get that feeling. If anything, it was the contrary. Someone asked me that question yesterday; I don't remember exactly how it went. I read an article yesterday that said -- in the Negro reference book -- the most important part, the place where Negroes can make the greatest influence, as far as the electoral process is concerned or the political process is concerned, is in the primaries; and this is accurate. It's in the primaries that they can swing, really swing, a vote for a couple of reasons. One is, in a primary, particularly a Democratic primary, you've got to court that vote because it's not guaranteed. The second point is that normally the black vote is not a

[-112-]

heavy turnout. There's a lot of apathy, just in general with primaries, and certainly more so in the black community.

If you can get a person who can challenge this apathy to turn it around, such as Robert Kennedy was able to do, then you're going to win that vote. And, as I pointed out, in Nebraska the black vote was the difference; in California it was definitely the difference. I mean, you know, Kennedy died and it never came out, but I mean I think the final vote was forty-eight to forty-five or something like that in terms of percentages -- or forty-five.... It was very close. They were three or four percentage points apart, where in the beginning they were talking about them being ten percentage points ahead. Well, we weren't; and the difference, in terms of Robert Kennedy winning in California, was the black community.

So he never approached it with the idea that he didn't need that black community. He was the first one to recognize he needed that black and Puerto Rican community. That's why we spent....

[-113-]

Larry O'Brine took a personal look at what was going on in each state, through my efforts, to see what was going on. I mean, we just had to win those areas.

In Oregon, as I told you before, although we lost Oregon *we* certainly won, we turned out more people than had ever, ever voted in probably three primaries, if you added them up all up together. The three previous Presidential primaries, if you added up the total vote of the black community, it was greater in the last one, which is the one that Robert Kennedy was in. So that's the kind of turnout and effort we made and we needed.

GREENE: And you think this was generally agreed upon among the other aides?

GRAVES: Oh, yeah. You know, the persons who were in close to it at the top recognized it immediately. I mean there was no question that Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] when he asked me to come out to Indiana, and Larry O'Brien, in terms of getting me on top of things in Nebraska and Oregon -- likewise going over to

[-114-]

California -- recognized we just had to pull that off. There was a great concern about nailing that black vote down. We just had to get the best turnout possible, and we made a real effort.

GREENE: Now, you mentioned last time that you spent primary day with Mayor Hatcher [Richard G. Hatcher] and you had been working fairly closely with him. Do you remember any discussion, regarding this April 4th visit, about whether or not he should go to Gary and how Mayor Hatcher felt about this?

GRAVES: Whether or not....

GREENE: Mayor Hatcher thought he ought to come to Gary at this time. I read a memo which indicated that he felt it would be bad for Robert Kennedy to go there, because it was too early and a number of other reasons. Remember that discussion?

GRAVES: Yeah, I remember. Yeah. Let's see, how did that go? He was going to end up in Gary, you know, because I helped put that together while I was there. He wasn't going to go on April 4th, but he was going to

[-115-]

come to Gary on that Friday or Saturday. King was killed on a Thursday, I think it was.

GREENE: Right.

GRAVES: We were coming into Gary. You know, it had been resolved. There had been some question as to what was the best time to come, but I know for a fact that we were going to go, because I'd briefed all of the city officials for Hatcher in terms of the visit, what we expected, what was necessary, security precautions and the like.

We were going into Gary, Indiana. We were going into Gary, Indiana, either that Friday or that Saturday; I mean that had already been set up. So I don't remember the problems we got in the.... Of course, I don't know what memorandum you're talking about, obviously, but, in terms of the problems involved there, there was some question about what was the best time for him to come in; but he definitely was going in that same week, so I don't think that it was a matter of we had to put it off for a month or something.

[-116-]

GREENE: How did you and John Lewis get involved in helping Mrs. King [Coretta Scott King]? Was this at Robert Kennedy's request?

GRAVES: After the...

GREENE: Yeah, after he had spoken to her.

GRAVES: Well, no. John Lewis didn't really come as a representative. John Lewis was working for us in the campaign. I'd gotten John Lewis to come on board and help us going around the country, because he was excellent. He was well identified, and going into the synagogues and so forth he was fantastic.

In California we didn't send either he or Charles Evers, as I said before, into the black community. We did at times, you know, when the Senator was gone, but where we really sent them was into the synagogues where we could turn around that McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] vote and just say to McCarthy, "Now, what is this, all of this liberalism that people keep talking about that McCarthy has? It's just not there." John and Charlie Evers and Senator Johnson [Leroy R. Johnson] from Atlanta were able to do this.

But

[-117-]

John Lewis lives in Atlanta. So after, when King died, John automatically wanted to go back home, and, in addition, he certainly wanted to be where what was going on. He was a member of the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] board, which is Dr. King's organization. All his ties were there; that's where he lived. So it just made sense that we were going back to Atlanta together.

In terms of how I ended up doing the work for Mrs. King, the Senator spoke to Mrs. King on the phone from my room that evening and told her that he would provide the plane. He said he didn't want any publicity about it -- and I know he was unhappy when it did come out in the way it did -- that he would give her the plane, or provide the plane, to go pick up Dr. King's body. He told her then that he would send me down, and that he would, obviously, come down for the funeral. Anything he could do, he would do, in terms of assisting her, and that

[-118-]

also I would be available to her for the duration of the crisis that was there.

GREENE: Had you suggested he make the call, or did he make it on his own?

GRAVES: I think I remember suggesting it to him as we left the rally. I said, "Well, I guess we should try and reach Mrs. King," and he said, "Yes, let's do that. I think we should call her." Then we got into the whole discussion, prior to calling her, about whether or not we should stop campaigning. That was another discussion that evening. Jack Paar was there and any number of persons.

GREENE: How was opinion divided on that? Was there anyone in favor of going ahead with the campaigning?

GRAVES: No, I think most of it was.... It's kind of not very clear in my mind, but it seems to me that most of the persons were just not interested in continuing with the campaign.

GREENE: Was there any discussion before you left to go to

[-119-]

Atlanta about what Robert Kennedy would be doing in terms of the funeral and what gestures he might make and suggestions for....

GRAVES: No, not really. I remember that as, you know, the time came for me to leave he called me back down to his suite and said the thought that it was going to be helpful, that he was going to ask Burke Marshall to meet me in Tennessee, because he didn't want Mrs. King to feel because Dr. King was a black man that he'd assigned somebody black to work on the thing.

I thought that was unreal because the Senator had never really treated me as being the black guy on his staff, with the exception of the campaign. I had always done things as the guy on his staff; and so far him to feel concerned at that point about me going down and being recognized as a black guy because it was Dr. King, when it would not have mattered to those people down there because they knew me, too. It just smacked of the fact that he was getting some more advice from some of these guardhouse liberals,

[-120-]

you know, or guys who decided they could make some real prudent judgments, or at least in their mind, prudent judgements, about what was good as far as the black people were concerned and how they feel. And there had to be.... The people who sat in on that meeting when they made the decision about my going initially, made the decision about not campaigning any further, and then likewise made the decision about contacting Burke

Marshall, were all white. The only person who was privy to any of that, to any of those meetings who was black was myself.

GREENE: Who else was there?

GRAVES: Oh, Pierre Salinger was there, and Fred Dutton was there, and Jim Tolan was around. He wasn't involved in the policymaking decision of that particular thing. I think Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] was in Indiana at the time. I don't remember if vanden Heuvel was there; maybe he wasn't there. Jack Paar was there. I can't remember all the people. There were several other people

[-121-]

who were of some significance as far as the campaign was concerned who were around. I just can't remember the other names of people sitting in the meeting. It was a small room, too; the room wasn't much more than a twelve-by-twelve room with a couple of adjoining bedrooms. In fact, Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] was in it. She was there.

GREENE: What do you remember about Robert Kennedy at the Martin Luther King funeral?

GRAVES: Well, first of all, there's more to it than just the funeral as far as our role was concerned. It just seemed to me a rather good time with all those black leaders in town to have a meeting with some of the black leaders who were in town to say, "Where are we going next?" I was able to put together a meeting with two different groups. I'm not going to be able to remember all of the people, but we had persons like Sammy Davis and Alan King and Nancy Wilson. What's the singer's name? Eartha Kitt. Bill Cosby. What's Bill Cosby's partner's name? Culp -- Robert Culp.

[-122-]

GREENE: Yes. Robert Culp.

GRAVES: Ben Gazzara. Oh, you know, I mean, I could go on. There was a room with about thirty or forty people we had invited to come over and talk about, "Where are we going from here?" and "What are we going to do?" They weren't all entertainers. John -- was John Doar there at the time? No. Peter Edelman was in the meeting. I was there. My wife even came down for that meeting -- was my wife there? Yeah, my wife had come down for the funeral so she was there at that meeting.

Then we had another meeting with some of the heavies as far as SCLC was concerned. We had Abernathy [Ralph D. Abernathy]; he came over. We separated the meetings. We had Harry Belafonte who was very, very intense and very, very tough to get along with; and he was angry. He was more than angry; he was outraged by the thing of Dr.

King and he, was very.... Cynicism as far as he was concerned, because Kennedy wanted to talk to and, "What was there to talk about?" Bevel -- James Bevel -- came over and Jose

[-123-]

came over, I guess in the course of the evening we must have had many of the leaders of the civil rights movement in and out of that hotel. We had various meetings with them, just talking and mentioning his concern. And I think for the most part it was reasonably well accepted.

I think that Harry Belafonte and John Conyers, the Congressman, were kind of tough and very, very hard, rough. They thought it was some kind of political move. They questioned the sincerity of his wanting to know why, what he could do, where they could go, or, you know, where we could go now that this had happened. In addition to that, when he arrived that night -- we went over and visited Mrs. King, he and Ethel and myself. I think John Doar was with us that night.

[Interruption] Here's what I'm saying is we had... It was more than just coming down for the funeral. The Senator had an opportunity to meet with several of the civil rights leaders and various groups and various persons

[-124-]

and have discussion; and, obviously, it was not all done out of social conscience. It was the part that added the dimension, down the pike, to what we were doing as far as the campaign was concerned. And it would be unreal to say anything other than that.

The next day Jackie Kennedy [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] came and made a visit to the King house. Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] came and he did not get to the King house.

Oh, I know. One of the things I wanted to make is that most of the politicians who had come, the political leaders -- I think you have a better connotation if I say "political leaders" -- had decided they were only going to go to the funeral. The Senator made a point of telling me that he was not just going to go to the funeral. If there was going to be a march, he was going to march, and he was going to march the full length of the thing. And not only did he march, but Ethel marched; and, of course, Ethel was

[-125-]

pregnant at this time. He went the full way, and they went all the way up to Morehouse College and stayed through a good part of the funeral service at Morehouse. Then we left and went on back out to the airport. Excuse me. [Interruption]

He left me in Atlanta. I think I stayed in Atlanta another day to kind of get things together, I don't remember what I did after Atlanta. I think I might have come back to New York, or I don't know if I went from Atlanta to another state to continue to campaign or I came back. No, I think I went back to Indiana.

GREENE: Did anything substantive come out of these meetings or was it just kind of a



way for people to vent their anger?

GRAVES: No, nothing substantive. Nothing at all substantive came out of the meetings, other than the fact that it gave us a chance for people who were in the movement to see Kennedy, see the kind of guy he was, to have some discussions, and just for people to kind of vent their feelings. That's all. Nothing

[-126-]

substantive came out of the meetings, then, although there were some ideas and proposals tossed out about having a big show and raising some money, which I don't know exactly what that would have done. I mean nothing meaningful came out, and that was not one of Kennedy's suggestions, nor one of his ideas. It's just that I think I remember Sammy Davis being particularly hopped on the idea with Alan King of having some kind of show to do something to raise money to keep Dr. King's movement going. As has since been proven, Dr. King's movement is in real trouble right now, both politically and financially.

GREENE: How did you feel about Robert Kennedy's performance, to use a poor word, on occasions like this? Did he come off well? Was he....

GRAVES: I thought he came off extremely well, because.... And he did it out of a sense of really feeling the emotion of the moment. You know, he had a capacity for being very humble at these times, and any ruthlessness that supposedly was there,

[-127-]

as far as his personality was concerned, never came out at those moments.

At those moments he always was looking out for Charles Evers or looking out for Mrs. Medgar Evers, being sure she had a drink of water. I remember that as we marched we had one cup of water and we shared it between about six of us. And at those times I think Kennedy was, you know, the real Kennedy. When he was talking with poor kids in the ghetto -- he understood, you know; he knew what their problems were -- or he was watching a touch football game; that's when Kennedy, the real human part of Kennedy, came out.

The toughness which was Kennedy was not toughness. I always considered Kennedy not ruthless, but a guy who demanded the very best in the people who surrounded him, and had a right to do so because he pushed himself; he pushed us no harder than he pushed himself. If he had the talent he had, he had the right to demand that the people who surrounded him should have equally that amount of talent. And when

[-128-]

they didn't, for the most part, they usually were gone; so if you want to call that ruthless, you go ahead.

GREENE: You mentioned off the tape last time that you'd had some conversations with Martin Luther King before the assassination as far as what position he would be taking in the presidential race. Could you elaborate on that a bit?

GRAVES: Well, I wasn't able to get any commitment out of Dr. King. At best, Dr. King said that he was impressed with Senator Kennedy and that.... I take that back; I got a commitment of sorts from him that he was, in fact, going to support the Senator. He just did not want to do it that early, but he was very happy about the fact he was in it. He had never made a commitment to any candidate before. Because of circumstances being what they were and his being so opposed to the war, he was going to definitely come out and endorse the candidate, as an individual, and not in the name of SCLC. I talked to any number of aides to Dr. King and he would definitely have endorsed Senator Kennedy.

[-129-]

GREENE: Did you speak to Abernathy or other leaders in the SCLC after King's death about it?

GRAVES: Yes, I did, but the.... Well, that's what we accomplished, you know, by those meetings, meeting with some of those people. I just think it would not have been a problem to get the basic leaders or the top persons really, in the civil rights movement, vis-a-vis Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins and so forth, to ultimately come out and support the Senator. And, you know, I felt reasonably confident we had accomplished that.

GREENE: Well, when you went back to Indiana where were you working out of? I know you said you didn't go back to Indianapolis. Were you just traveling around?

GRAVES: No, I went back to Gary. I worked Gary. I worked Gary and then I went and did some work with Dick Wade [Richard C. Wade] from out of Chicago, the University of Chicago. He was in Gary, and there was a lot to be done in those areas and in that surrounding community. I just basically worked Gary and then, of course,

[-130-]

you have to keep in mind that I was also trying to operate four or five other situations in other states, in addition to the national headquarters, vis-a-vis telephones. It's not too easy, as I said before, to run a national operation out of the Marriott Hotel or the Sheraton Hotel in Gary, as opposed to being right there on the scene. So that's what I had going on; there was more than enough to do, and it was not that far away from the.... What was the date? I don't remember. What was the date of the Indiana primary?

GREENE: May 7th.

GRAVES: Then I did go back to New York a couple of times in between there, too, because if you're saying from the time that King died until the time of the primary, I was back in New York and I went out to California for the first time and took a look at what was going on out there and made a report to Larry O'Brien in terms of what I thought the priorities and needs were. I did that, and then I... I don't remember the complete continuity of how I did it,

[-131-]

but I know I was in and out of Nebraska a couple of times, in and out of Indiana and so forth.

GREENE: What was the gist of your report? What did you feel the job was?

GRAVES: That there was going to be a lot of jostling for positions in California as far as who was going to be actually the top dog in the black community, which is what I was looking at. Of course, there was the problems of dealing with Jess Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] and who he... He wanted to have his guys, as far as the black community was concerned, and there were leaders in the black community who did not get along with Jess Unruh, Jess Unruh wanted to have his own operation going, and which he did set up. Larry O'Brien subsequently put another operation over the top of that one to be sure that it happened right, and that operation was the operation that I ran out of the Sheraton-Wilshire Hotel in California.

GREENE: Where is that? In San Francisco?

GRAVES: No. In LA [Los Angeles].

GREEN: In LA?

[-132-]

GRAVES: Right. I also went all the way into Oakland and San Francisco and so forth and met with those guys there. That was the first trip through California. And again, I come back to the thing that when you ask me what my memorandum said, basically my memorandum said that guys wanted to know where the titles were going to go on the door, you know, because the titles on the doors also meant where was the money going to come from. I don't want to mention names, but there were definitely guys, black guys out there, who were leaders who ultimately we had some real problems with, who were interested in being the guys who were going to be in charge. The guys being in charge knew that they were going to be the guys who would be divvying up the money, so they knew there was going to be a lot. They thought there was going to be a lot of money to be put around out there, which there ultimately was, and they wanted to be the guys who were going to be there to help split it up and that wasn't....

[-133-]

Those weren't black guys thinking. Those were just guys who happened to be black.

GREENE: Was there any difference in the way it was handled on the Kennedy side from the way it had been done in Indiana? Was it a little more tightfisted and cautious?

GRAVES: That's not clear to me, what you're saying. Excuse me.

GREENE: Well, in Indianapolis you said they kind of gave into the demands of the blacks for money.

GRAVES: Oh. Okay.

GREENE: Was it the same thing in California?

GRAVES: Well, I got it. Okay. Let me just back up. In Indiana, one, they wanted to win their battle there and, two, things hadn't distilled out to the point that you could really see who was on first and what was on second. By the time we got to California we had kind of identified the players who were calling the shots and then I didn't have to go through a lot of nonsense and aggravation. When I made a judgment in

[-134-]

California we had to spend five thousand dollars, or we didn't have to spend it, that was kind of like we were doing it. When we were out in Indiana that was a problem.

To answer your question: in California we spent money. I just think we probably in California were doing it in a more sophisticated manner. It wasn't a matter that we would not have spent x number of dollars if we thought it would have bought us the same thing it would have bought us in Indiana. We would just probably have taken a harder look at it.

GREENE: Who was handling the money for the black community in California?

GRAVES: Who did I have to get the money from?

GREENE: Yeah.

GRAVES: I got the money directly from Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] and once I told Larry O'Brien, you know, that there was something I thought we had to do, he would just tell Steve, and we'd do it.

GREENE: You mentioned last time that at times when they

[-135-]

didn't want the fact known that they were contributing money here and there, they were doing it surreptitiously instead of by check. Who would handle this money? Who would make the decisions on it? And where would the money come from?

GRAVES: Well, number one, I don't know whether this should be off the record or not. Realistically, you know, well, why don't we just talk about this?

GREENE: Well, you know, the whole thing's off the record, so....

GRAVES: Well, the point is, I mean, there are no campaigns, you know, going back a hundred years when a lot of the expenses in the campaigns were not paid for vis-a-vis cash, as opposed to checks being exchanged -- whether or not you were paying off political favors or you're paying people to walk the streets handing out fliers or you're paying people to walk the streets handing out fliers or you're paying a guy to operate the sound truck. A lot of it was done through cash. So therefore, there was no difference, there was nothing.... We weren't doing anything new in that campaign in

[-136-]

terms of operating or paying people by cash. Your question again was....

GREENE: Well, you said when they do not want to use checks because they don't want it revealed where the money came from, who made the decision on it, where did the money come from, and how was it...?

GRAVES: Well, I think it was just a pretty standard procedure that, for the most part, a lot of what went on in the black community was done by cash rather than by.... When these politicians in the black community -- and I said to you that they were somewhat concerned as to who was going to run the show. They assumed that that money was going to be handed out in cash, and not going to be in check. Then if there was going to be a payroll or an operation that cost ten thousand dollars a week, that ten thousand dollars would be passed out in cash.

GREENE: Would that come from Helen Keyes? Was it the same source originally, just in a different form?

[-137-]

GRAVES: Helen Keyes worked out of the national office and I think that that probably came right out of the funding that was in the southern California headquarters.

No, there were moneys that I received for expenses. I had a separate fund that I operated out of through Helen Keyes. She paid me directly, and there was never any quibbling about the money that I spent: but, of course, they knew me and I knew what I was doing, and the moneys I spent was.... You know, if I had to go somewhere and drop five hundred or a thousand dollars, those moneys were always available. And they used to pay me back. They'd give me the money by check and I'd get it cashed. It didn't matter because there was always some way of justifying, or I had some kind of receipted way of knowing where the money had gone.

GREENE: How many people do you think knew exactly what you were doing?

GRAVES: You mean in numbers or in stature?

GREENE: Well, I don't mean.... Were people aware of the kinds of things

[-138-]

that you were doing? I don't really mean just you. I mean, in general, how much knowledge did people have of what other people were doing, even those they might be working fairly closely with?

GRAVES: Well, I guess probably more people had an idea of what I was doing as opposed to my having an idea what they were doing, because I was working in the area that was rather an easy thing to identify, working in the black community. That always has a lot of intrigue attached to it. So, therefore, I would think that a lot, many people understood what I was doing, *what* I was doing. *How* I was doing it is something else again.

GREENE: That's really what I mean.

GRAVES: Yeah. How I was doing it was.... That was limited to how well it was accomplished. You know, what had to be done and my going, my sitting down and getting out telegrams to all the leading ministers in southern California the Sunday before election day and my lining

[-139-]

up ten of us and going out and actually preaching at the black churches on the Sunday before election day. Not a lot of people close to that -- O'Brien knew about it, Burke Marshall, or somebody like that, somebody who would have appreciated the need for what we were doing. But other than that there weren't, you know. They just knew we were winning; how we were winning, that was left up to me. I don't think there were a lot of people, actually, who were anxious to come into the black community to find out, whether or not we're

talking about Indiana or you're talking about Nebraska. They'd just as well read about it in the paper as come over.

GREENE: Well, getting back to Indiana: when you went out to Gary and wherever else you were before the end of it, the primary, was there much of a difference in the kinds of people you had to deal with and the way it was handled from the Indianapolis situation, or was that a fairly standard setup?

GRAVES: You mean, how things went for me in Gary as opposed to Indianapolis?

[-140-]

GREENE: Yeah.

GRAVES: Indianapolis was an atypical campaign. Even Gerry Doherty [Gerald F. Doherty] who I know had a very suspicious opinion of me because of what had happened in Indianapolis, we met again when I was doing some things for the Humphrey campaign towards the end, around October. By that time he had gotten the word that, you know, things were not as he had read it or had been told in the very beginning. I'm sure that his esteem for me, if you want to call it that, was certainly greater than it was when I left Indianapolis. I'm not altogether sure we could say that the feeling was reciprocal.

GREENE: How much of a factor were McCarthy and Branigan [Roger D. Branigan] in the black areas? Were they competition at all?

GRAVES: No. Their identity in the black area was greatly overstated and it was greatly overreacted to. You know, I think in California I mentioned to you the thing about the McCarthy records

[-141-]

and all the nonsense that went on with that -- just a complete overreaction to the thing. It was just complete panic. Twenty people trying to make judgments and all kinds of strange calls coming in in the middle of the night. And were it not for the fact that I could call up a Burke Marshall and just say, "Look, you know, this is what I think should happen. I think they're overreacting in this thing about bringing in Dr. King's father and flying him in and putting him up on a..." I mean, absolutely unbelievable some of these judgments and it's just a matter that fortunately the cool minds prevailed. But....

GREENE: What about McCarthy's use of students in the ghetto?

GRAVES: It just didn't work. It just didn't, you know. I just went into these areas, and it just turned out that McCarthy was using all white students because he had no

other volunteers. It was not any real competition for him, because what I did, I used to go onto these campuses and go to these black student

[-142-]

unions. It wasn't easy, but I used to get the kinds from the black student unions, where possible, to run headquarters for me and let it be their own operation, their thing; and we used to call it "our thing" in every state we went in. In fact, Carter Burden's little campaign we've got going here now, we call that "our thing." So that it's something they're doing and it's their operation.

You know, because the credibility of politicians, at best, in the white community leaves a lot to be desired. I just felt that if we were going to have something going on, if we were going to have any credibility to it, we should certainly let them for the most part, with guidance, do it the way they wanted to do it in order to make it work. Therefore, we had black students, you know, and a whole black community who went to school in that particular town -- let's say Omaha, Nebraska -- going up against carpetbagging white students for McCarthy which just, you know, was no competition. The, of

[-143-]

course, you had my own experience to lean on and you had names you were bringing in, such as John Lewis. I had Johnny Ford [John Ford] running that particular place and the same thing right across the country, not just Indiana or not just Nebraska.

GREENE: Can you remember specific occasions when Robert Kennedy came to Gary, or wherever it was that you were when you traveled with him, and helped prepare an area for a visit? Would you get involved in the advance preparations?

GRAVES: Yeah, I did, but then, again, you had the same thing that by the time that.... If Kennedy was coming in they'd send a half a dozen white advance men roaring into the community, I'd pick up the phone and call Larry O'Brien and tell him he had ten minutes to get them out or I was leaving. He'd call up the advance crew and get them out of the area because I'd advance it. If I was going to advance it, I just would do the whole thing. I wasn't going to have somebody coming in and fouling

[-144-]

it up or trying to tell me how to do it. And the guys, for the most part, who were, you know, the advance men.... It just was an aggravating thing to, at the meeting, have some guy.... I mean Lee French, as bright a guy as he is -- and he's a lawyer and everything -- couldn't shine my shoes, as far as I was concerned, when it came to doing advance work. I'd forgotten more than he'd known. Hell, in the army I ran a battalion, and he's going to come in and tell me how to get a group of people together? It was bad enough if he's going to tell me how to



get a group of people together if we're on white advance; but here we are in the black community and I've got to go out to listen to Lee French who just first heard what advance was two weeks prior, coming in trying to tell me what to do? I'd just found that unacceptable.

GREENE: Well, what kind of response would you get from Larry O'Brien?

GRAVES: He got them out of there. That's what the response was.

GREENE: And you would do the advancing?

[-145-]

GRAVES: Uh huh.

GREENE: Was there anyone among the advance men that you thought was better at handling arrangements in the black communities?

GRAVES: No. They all treated it like there was some intrigue involved in it. There's no more intrigue in doing the black community, other than the fact the people happen to have black faces and it wasn't Whitey.

GREENE: Did you get involved in preparations for that last northern Indiana motorcade?

GRAVES: No.

GREENE: No?

GRAVES: By that time I was on my way. No, because I still was not enjoying any great credibility where it was happening from, and that was in Indianapolis. Because you have to understand that the people who were involved in Indianapolis were Walter Sheridan and Gerry Doherty, and you still had Holgate in Indianapolis. Those were already three where I had

[-146-]

problems, and it just only straightened itself out when I got out of Indiana. Kennedy said, "You know, we're not going to have this, and Graves is going to do it." Larry O'Brien said it, and then it was no problem.

GREENE: What kinds of things were you doing for Mayor Hatcher on primary day? Was that get-out-the-vote?

GRAVES: Yeah. Well, he had a problem that had to be resolved and being kind of, you know, liaison in terms of being sure the moneys were gotten out. I remember

sitting in Mayor Hatcher's -- Gary Schropshrier's rather -- home in Gary, Indiana -- which is Mayor Hatcher's law partner -- counting out probably fifty thousand dollars in ten dollar bills going into little envelopes. Watching girls do it right out on the floor of that living room so he could hand it out on election day to his poll watchers and election day captains. So we did that and it was just a matter of his knowing....

Hatcher had great respect for me and my ability to get things done for him, and he felt that he

[-147-]

wanted to have me there because he had a direct link to Kennedy when I was there. So it served a twofold purpose.

GREENE: What did Kennedy think of Hatcher, do you know?

GRAVES: He had great respect for Mayor Hatcher.

GREENE: Yeah.

GRAVES: I've got to be down at...

GREENE: I'm just about through. Is there anything else on Indiana that we ought to talk about? Would you agree, by the way, with those who say that if the election had been held earlier he probably would have done better? Did you get that feeling in the black areas that maybe the Branigan charges were catching on or the...

GRAVES: No.

GREENE: No?

GRAVES: The mystique of Robert Kennedy in the black areas could not have been hurt by anything. I'm convinced of that now, whether it was a Martin Luther.... I think if you had a real all-out effort like in California to show that Kennedy had

[-148-]

tapped Martin Luther King's phone. I mean, you'd have to have pictures of Kennedy. You'd have to really have done a character assassination to have even made an inroad. That might be, could have hurt if they'd kept dwelling on that for a long period of time and he'd had a real operation to put that together. Maybe, just maybe, he could have done something with that, but other than that, when you start talking about places like Indiana and so forth, couldn't have touched him.

GREENE: Anything else on Indiana?

GRAVES: No, I think I've kind of dwelled on Indiana. I was happy to leave Indiana.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-149-]