

Steven E. Smith Oral History Interview—RFK #1, 4/16/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Steven E. Smith
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Biographical Note

Steven E. Smith (born 1937), a former Chief Administrative Officer of the California State Assembly, served as the Southern California manager of the Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) presidential campaign in 1968. This interview focuses on the formation of the California presidential campaign for RFK, its political strategies for winning voters, and on several of the key players on the RFK campaign trail, among other issues.

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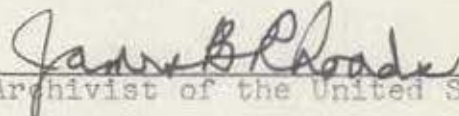
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Steven E. Smith

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Stephen E. Smith

Signed Dan H. Fenn
Dan H. Fenn, Director
John F. Kennedy Library

Date April 16, 1974

Date) 4/19/74

Steven E. Smith—RFK #1
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Robert F. Kennedy (RFK)'s 1968 presidential campaign
1	Relationship between RFK and Jesse M. Unruh
3	Organization of the California presidential campaign for RFK
7	Unruh's involvement in John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s and RFK's presidential campaigns
11	Use of polling by RFK's campaign staff in California
13	Pierre Salinger's contributions to campaign
13	Issue of funding for RFK's campaign
18	Student involvement on RFK campaign trail
22	Strategies for winning the minority vote in California
29	On the necessity of personal security precautions for presidential candidates
29	On the assassination of RFK

Oral History Interview

with

STEVEN E. SMITH

April 16, 1970
Sherman Oaks, California

By Larry J. Hackman

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

HACKMAN: Why don't we just start out by you explaining what you can remember, in either late '67 or early '68, about any conversations you might have had with (Jesse M.) Unruh or the people around him at that point, regarding whether Robert Kennedy should run, or what Unruh should do in '68.

SMITH: Well, in the summer of '67, there was a proposal to have a fundraising dinner in San Francisco, and there was a longstanding agreement by the senator to come out and be the guest speaker. So the dinner took place in August of 1967. The proceeds were used to help Democratic candidates for the state assembly. This was a sort of manifestation of really two things. One of them was that people in the political community, and the public, to some extent, I guess, had the opportunity to recognize that there was a link between Unruh and Kennedy. Secondly, the Unruh organization, so to speak, had a fundraising capability which went beyond Los Angeles.

I was put in charge of the project and was sent to San Francisco and spent several weeks there in preparation for the dinner. It was actually the second opportunity I'd had--or the third opportunity that I'd had--to meet him, the first occurring in the 1960 campaign when he was his brother's campaign manager. Then, later on, on a trip to Washington, I guess, in 1962, I was part of a group that visited him in his office in the Justice Department. But from the conversations that took place around that time and from that point on--that is to say from the summer of '67 on--it was clear from my friends in Mr. Unruh's organization that they were going to do everything they could to persuade the senator to run for president. I didn't get the impression, at that point, that they felt that that was going to be a particularly difficult thing to accomplish. That is to say, I did not get the impression--I have to say this right--I did not get the impression that they, the Unruh people, entertained any thought other than that Robert Kennedy would end up running for president in 1968.

HACKMAN: Who other than Unruh? When you say "Unruh people," who are you talking about in that period?

SMITH: Well, Frank Burns, I think, certainly had that opinion, and Jack Crose, who was then at Unruh's Sacramento office. I don't know whether Jess had that opinion because I don't think I ever talked to him about it. But I remember Frank telling me on a number of occasions that he (Frank) was certain that Kennedy would run, and, I think, as we got into the early part of 1968, there was some thinking that he would run, and run in the California primary, and that we ought to begin to do some thinking about that. But, as frequently happens in politics, there wasn't really an awful lot of advance planning. So that when the time came to--when we got the word that he was going to run, that he was going to announce, and that we had to form a delegation and get it on the ballot, it was a rather helter-skelter process. It did not seem that there had been a great deal of real planning in advance.

HACKMAN: In your early talks with Burns or Crose or others, why did they feel that way so strongly? Did they have anything they based that on--conversations of Unruh with Robert Kennedy that early--or can you remember that?

SMITH: I don't think that I'm really in a very good position to answer the question. You're sort of asking why they thought the way they thought. People think all kind of things in politics, some of which are wrong. So I must say I was personally skeptical about it. I do know that during the same period of time, there were some trips made to Washington and to New York. I suppose at the time, if I can recall correctly, I assume that they came back with some sort of a feeling that he was going to run. Now, this could have been nothing more than a hope on their part that he was going to run.

HACKMAN: Well, most of the meetings that I know of are later, say, November, December, and then on into '68. You had said as early as August, so that was what I was trying to get at.

SMITH: Well, I think I would say that in the August '67 fund-raising dinner conversations that I heard then--of course, none of these are conversations with the senator; it's purely among people who are in attendance or who participated in the planning and direction of that dinner--that the purpose was twofold. One of them was to bring Kennedy out here, to expose him to political people here, to establish that he was--it seems senseless to say that we're trying to establish that he was a political force; he was that already but to introduce him as a factor, so to speak, in the '68 elections. I'm just inferring all of this, but that's my best recollection of what was going on. Then, throughout the balance of that year, in conversations, none of what were very formal--Frank Burns and I didn't sit down and discuss what was going to happen; these were conversations over the dinner table and things of this nature--I just got the general impression that Burns felt very strongly that he was going to run.

HACKMAN: On that August dinner, was there anyone at the Kennedy end or Washington end that you worked with on arrangements for that?

SMITH: No. Actually, until very late in the game, there wasn't really much beyond the mere statement that he was going to be there, that he had it on his schedule and was coming. They sent (Gerald J.) Jerry Bruno out for about the last three or four days just to make sure everything was happening and that we weren't going to have a half-empty hall and that kind of problem that Jerry specializes in.

HACKMAN: How was he to deal with?

SMITH: I found him very good to deal with at that point. Later on my experiences would have changed. But at that point he was fine. After he became assured that this was going to be a successful event, he was very easy to deal with.

HACKMAN: How well did that event go? How well did the senator do, either in the speech or in getting around to talk to people?

SMITH: The senator made an excellent speech, so he made a very excellent impression on the audience. How he did in meeting people and talking to people and making impressions and making friends for himself as a potential candidate, I don't know because I was really involved in the sort of business end of the dinner, making sure that it happened and that it was a success. The dinner itself was a major political and financial success. A political success, I think, for Kennedy and for Unruh, and a financial success by any standard in San Francisco politics. It was very successful.

HACKMAN: Well, what can you remember, then, about further conversations on into the spring of '68, either the first ones that you might have had with Unruh himself, or the development of the thought of Burns and the other people around him as to what he should do?

SMITH: Well, it just seems to me that there really wasn't any particular turning point or staged development, so to speak. These people continued to be enthusiastic about the idea of the senator running and continued to express a belief that he would run, until the first few days in March. When a group of us were called into Jess's office in Los Angeles--he was not present, but Frank was there. He indicated that they had now received positive assurance that the senator was going to run--I guess this was just after the New Hampshire primary--and that we had to do two things. One of them was to set up the machinery for our campaign, statewide campaign, in the presidential primary. Secondly, we had to begin immediately to put together a list of potential delegates. Selecting a delegation is a very complicated task

in California, that requires-- the law makes all kind of requirements for where people have to live and all of that so that Frank immediately sets some people to work on putting together a list of names in a card file and so forth.

That work proceeded, and then, in very short order, the senator announced, and we had some people out here and established. I was directed to establish a base of operations, which we put together in the International Hotel, which is by the International Airport in Los Angeles. We took a couple of suites of rooms and set them up with telephone and all the paraphernalia. Then a group of people, over a period of the next two or three days, put together the delegation, and we proceeded then to get qualified--you know, to get the petitions out and all the mechanical details.

HACKMAN: Who was in on that from the Kennedy side of things? Who was in on it from the Unruh or the California? Can you remember?

SMITH: John Nolan was there and (Donald L.) Dell, who's the tennis player, Don Dell, were the two that were sent out. I think they stayed most of that three--or four-day period. While the delegational selection process was going on, the campaign organization project was being put together. They had, of course, to talk to Art Seltzer, who had been designated as the statewide campaign manager, and then to Ray King and me. Shortly after that, we got our headquarters and got the delegation qualified for the ballot, and we were in business.

HACKMAN: How much of a problem was there in selecting who to go on the delegate list, between your side of things--if that's a side of things--and the John Nolan. Is there much of a problem in selecting them?

SMITH: Actually, everybody wanted to have a hand in selecting the delegation. I guess there was a certain amount of political prestige involved in being able to say, "Well, I was in the room when your name came up and I gave you a big boost," and all that kind of thing. But my recollection is very distinct that the biggest problem we had was just finding anybody in some locations. In California, the political activists, the people who would naturally be on a delegation, are generally centered in Los Angeles County and in San Francisco and a couple of other places. The law requires that members of the delegation be a certain number from each congressional district. Los Angeles is restricted to the number that it has multiplied by the number of congressional districts, that we had to be very selective about the people that would go on the delegation from Los Angeles. There were a lot more who wanted to, that could not or ended up as alternates on the delegation. So, to a certain extent, we were getting an awful lot of suggestions from an awful lot of people about who ought to go on from Los Angeles. Then our final decision was made, and those were the delegates that were picked.

There really was no person who was particularly dominant in this role, who decided, "Well, this is the way it's going to be." I recall, somewhat to my consternation, that there was a great deal more democratic process than perhaps, I would have liked because I was facing a deadline--fast approaching--of when this delegation would have to be qualified. The thought occurred to me that we could go on discussing who wants to go on the delegation forever and then never qualify because the deadline would pass. But I thought it was quite democratic, and I did not get the impressions that there was any effort that it had to be dominated by Unruh people, so to speak, at all.

One other problem that we had is that a lot of the really good people who should naturally be on the delegation from California and are representative of the Democratic leadership of California and who worked for Robert Kennedy for president, were already committed to the favorite son delegation headed by (Thomas C.) Tom Lynch. So we couldn't use them. I remember we had to go through legal opinions to see if they could resign from that one and get on ours, and it turned out that they could not. So that was a problem. But the biggest single problem was just in filling out all the names, just getting it fleshed out, so that we had a delegation.

HACKMAN: Would Nolan have to call back to Washington constantly to check that list? How much of a feed-in from his point of view? In other words, were your problems people in California wanting to get people on, or was it satisfying Nolan, or getting that

SMITH: I think he conceived his role to be--and I think his role was--really a kind of referee to make sure that this wasn't going to be anybody dictating, and thus ending up with a delegation that would have difficulty being elected because people would be against it because of the way it was put together, and that kind of thing. So he wanted to make sure that nobody made that kind of mistake. I can assure you, from the very beginning there was no--I never heard of any effort to stack it with any particular type of people at all. Unruh, incidentally, took no part in this delegational selection process. He was not there and didn't have any time for it.

HACKMAN: How does the idea come up to use husbands and wives of some of the people who are on the Lynch slate? Is that one person's idea?

SMITH: I think the notion was that these were people that we would want to have on the delegation after the primary was over and there was no more Lynch delegation. (Interruption)

HACKMAN: You were talking about the husbands and wives.

SMITH: So the idea was that when the primary was over, the wives would then resign and the husbands would take their place, or vice versa.

HACKMAN: Can you remember working on any of those to get agreements for people to come on, or do they handle most of this?

SMITH: No, I didn't work on those, and I really don't remember whose idea it was or who implemented it. It was sort of a good idea.

I was just finishing the notion about Nolan. Sometimes groups of people would, you know, when they found out where the delegation was being put together, sort of come. They would want to talk to someone about making sure their group was properly represented and so forth. Nolan would frequently go off and talk to them. I think it was sort of a diplomatic chore he was doing at that point.

HACKMAN: Well, how much did he or anyone else from the Washington end, then, get involved in your conversations about how the campaign was going to be organized--the selection of Seltzer and you and King--or just how much was he involved in that?

SMITH: He was very much involved in I think that some of the inputs that he had after he arrived in town, or perhaps before, were from people who would be for Senator Kennedy, but for long-standing political reasons, would try to make as much of an effort as possible to make sure the campaign was not dominated by "Unruh people" because they felt that they would be excluded from the campaign if the Unruh people were to be involved. Actually, had we been left to our own devices, there would have been no such effort. It had been made very clear to Seltzer and to myself and to Ray, I think--Ray King--that this was a campaign where we were going to include everybody. This was the big tent. We were going to have everybody in and work with everybody.

That proved no difficulty for us. So I think there were some objections voiced by various people either to the Washington office and through them to Nolan that perhaps they ought to try to have someone else, some other basis, involved in the top campaign leadership.

HACKMAN: Did Nolan ever say that? I mean, did he say, "I've talked to Tom (Thomas W.) Braden or I've talked to whoever. . .

SMITH: No, no, he wouldn't. If he had talked to anybody, he didn't indicate who it was or that he was even under any kind of outside influence on the thing. But our understanding was that the senator had asked Unruh to put together the basic personnel for the campaign, and, through his instructions, that was done.

It then seemed to us--to be quite direct and frank about it--that Nolan had substantial objections to both Ray King and myself at that point. After he had that option to talk with us at considerable length, I think those objections were overcome pretty much. I think this was a rather natural kind of thing

for him to do, really, because he was in a state different from his own-- every state's politics are a little different--and you don't want to fall into any booby traps in the campaign, and you don't want your candidate to lose votes because of the personalities who are supporting him. If he's going to lose votes, let him lose them on his own or win them on his own without that kind of problem. So I can understand the process very clearly.

HACKMAN: Can you remember what kinds of things he'd particularly ask you in interviewing you or talking to you? Also, did he feel he had to have commitments?

SMITH: No, I think, in my best recollections of the conversations that he and I had, his main interest was in probing, you know, exactly how were we going to organize the Southern California campaign. Who was going to be involved? Who did I have in mind for this position or that position? I think he was trying to find if there was any area of potential weakness or uncertainty or anything of that sort. In the final estimation, I presume he came away satisfied that we were competent and that we were going to have an open campaign in which everybody who wanted to could participate. I think, in the final estimation, we did.

There were some people who just could not, I guess, bring themselves to come into any operation in which Unruh was associated even by title. I think the whole question of Unruh's involvement in the campaign has been exaggerated, however. He didn't direct the campaign. He did not participate insofar as the day to day campaign management of the thing was concerned; he participated in none of the operational decisions. Now this was by choice, his own choice. He had a job to do of his own. He considered himself an advisor to the senator on what ought to be done and not done in California politics. I think he considered it his best role to be that as the delegation chairman, after it was elected. I wouldn't say he wasn't interested in what we were doing, but he just had confidence that that would be done properly. This is in contrast to his role in the 1960 campaign for John Kennedy, in which he actually was the campaign manager.

HACKMAN: Traditionally, California has been organized on a north-south separate basis in campaigns. How did that develop in the '68 campaign? Was there discussion with Nolan or among yourselves that possibly that should be done differently in '68? Can you remember what reaction you got?

SMITH: No, there was no proposal that it should be done separately. From the very beginning, there was a concept that we would have a statewide campaign manager and a Southern California campaign manager and a Northern California campaign manager, with the statewide man moving sort of back and forth wherever he felt his presence was needed. Because he--he, speaking of Art Seltzer, the statewide campaign manager--lived in Southern California, he spent most of his time here. But his role was to make sure that we had as much of a statewide campaign as possible. As a practical matter, in California you really have two states to consider once you get beyond Los Angeles and Orange County. It's not really Southern California, particularly. It's just L.A. and Orange, together.

Los Angeles basin is sort of one state, and the rest of California is the rest of it.

HACKMAN: In selection of your area chairmen--I guess it's county by county, primarily--can you remember what kinds of people you looked for and how much of a problem you had, if any, in getting people to take those positions--the people you wanted?

SMITH: Well, there were a lot of people who were for the senator, who were good prospects, I would say, for positions of leadership in the county organizations. But, as frequently happened in California politics, a person who is competent will, in a very short time, find a large group of people who like him and a small group of people who just can not abide him. Therefore, everytime we considered somebody for a position of leadership in a county organization or, actually, in any capacity, we always had to sit and listen to people who said that this will be disastrous for the campaign if this person goes in. We sort of had to make a judgment, eventually, whether the person really is, for one reason or another, a potential disaster or whether that's just a small group of people talking. So, in all cases, I don't think we selected a single county chairman any place that there wasn't some opposition to among people who were for the senator.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Can you remember what viewpoint you had about selecting Democratic members of the California legislature as county chairmen? Is that something you sought to do or is that something you would not naturally seek to do?

SMITH: We were, I think, generally trying to find people who would be active in the campaign and devote considerable time to the campaign. So, for that reason, in most cases, we'd seek to avoid having a legislator in that capacity because the legislature was in session in Sacramento. They just wouldn't have the time for it.

HACKMAN: Can you remember, in conversations with Unruh or anyone else, what his understanding was in the very early going in the campaign about how much independence he and, really, you people would have in running the campaign, and what would happen in terms of Kennedy people coming in?

SMITH: I feel in a position to answer that question only from what I saw and experienced directly. I never heard Jess say specifically that he had been told that he was in charge, or anything of that kind. I formed the belief, from the very beginning, that he would be the chairman of the Kennedy delegation and would, just from that position alone, obviously play a major role in the Kennedy organization at the Democratic National Convention. Insofar as directing the campaign is concerned, I don't know. I recall in one of the very early--well, as a matter of fact, the first visit, the 24th and 25th of March, which was shortly after the campaign began--a story was repeated to me that Kennedy had made some complaint to the people who were around him, including Jess, about some sort of a problem that had occurred in the campaign. I don't even recall what the nature of it was. The senator, as candidates do,

was irritated by it and asked something to the effect of, "Why is this going on?" or "Why did that happen?" or some such question. And Jess' comment to him was, "Well, senator, you ought to put somebody in charge here in California if you want to avoid this kind of thing," or some such reply to which, as the story goes, the senator had no reply. That would be really illustrative of the fact that, at least in that early stage of the campaign, if there had ever been any firm understanding between them that Jess was going to run the campaign in addition to heading the delegation, that understanding was not one that the senator really felt that he wanted or was really in a position to enforce.

HACKMAN: What can you remember, then, about a couple of the other guys that are out here earlier--(Anthony B.) Tony Akers and (Charles) Chuck Spalding? What kind of contacts did you have with them? What did you think they were supposed to be doing in California?

SMITH: Well, Tony Akers came into my office, I think for the first time, the first day he arrived. He had had a conversation with Art Seltzer, and then Art suggested that he come and see me. He indicated that he was there to help in any way that he could and that he felt that he needed to have a better understanding of the political framework in which he was working. What kind of an electorate did we have? What were the characteristics of the voters? I then did my best over a period, I guess, of a couple of hours, it seemed, one morning, to tell him the major points I thought we had to contend with in the California campaign. I outlined to him the fact that I felt very strongly that the pivotal vote in the campaign really was the suburban--essentially white suburban--Democratic voter. I pointed out to him and to a number of others who followed him into California, who also sought the benefit of my judgment, such as it is, that in the L.A. and Orange County basin, we had something in the order, I think then, of a million and a half Democrats. Of those, a million of them could be considered in this suburban white category and the other half a million would be centered in an area which . . . (Interruption)

So you take the urban core of Los Angeles, which is where the Negroes and Mexican-Americans live, there are a lot of other people who live there, too. It cannot be called one solid minority ghetto, and then everything else is pure white suburbia. But within that area where they live, there are over five hundred thousand Democrats, and then a million Democrats surrounding them in the suburban areas of Los Angeles and Orange County. I felt they were particularly crucial group. Our polls that we took subsequently, during the campaign, established that was the fact. And, in the final estimation,

the vote did pivot on that vote, I mentioned it because when you make a judgment in politics that's right, you talk about it. The mistakes you either don't remember or you don't talk about them. At any rate, that was one of the things I discussed with Tony Akers.

In the succeeding campaign, then, he became involved in one project and then another, helping out in whatever way he could. I felt that he was attempting to do a good, conscientious job, but it was very difficult for him to understand the political situation which was essentially foreign to him. I say "foreign" in that anybody who's been in politics--and he was-- becomes familiar with his own area, his own state or his own city, congressional district, or whatever. The temptation is very strong to translate the experience gained there and to assume it's universal. He didn't manifest that feeling. He came in and really said he didn't know California and needed to know. I thought that that was good. I think there were other people who came into the campaign from out of the state, who did not have that basic humility, so to speak, and believed that there was a translatable kind of thing from their experience in New York or Washington or wherever that they could plan here.

Chuck Spalding came in and immediately set up an operation at the Ambassador Hotel for fundraising. I had almost no contact with him at all. I don't know how he did on the fundraising end of the thing either.

HACKMAN: Had there been any polls done before Senator Kennedy announced, in terms of how he might do here or in terms of things you could use on where you should concentrate?

SMITH: There was a poll taken by--I don't remember who took it, I had nothing to do with it--a very extensive poll in, I think, late '67, which established that Kennedy could beat Johnson in a head-to-head fight here in California. Aside from that, I don't recall anything else by pure recollection.

HACKMAN: In your viewpoint on the suburban case--the case you made on that--was that based on previous voting at all or was that based, primarily, just on population? Was it registration?

SMITH: Yes, based on registration. We really have two different elections and two different kinds of sets of problems. You have a primary election in which only Democrats are voting. In the general election, everybody votes; then you have to consider Republicans and other kinds of voters. In the democratic

primary, you can almost conclude that the rest of the population has been wiped out and you have only Democrats to concern yourself with. Traditionally, in the campaigns, concentration has been on the urban centers. That's where the Democrats are, so to speak. The only trouble is in California they aren't there anymore. They began moving away quite a while ago and in large numbers. In a general election, most of the Democratic vote that a Democratic candidate gets comes from the urban centers, yes, obviously, because the minority groups--the poor people in general, lower income people--live in the urban centers, urban core areas, and they vote heavily Democratic, so that, in a general election, you have to concentrate there. But, in a primary. . . .

I pointed out--I must have said it forty times during that campaign, to various people--that there were more Democrats registered and there would be more Democrats voting in the Democratic primary in Orange County than in San Francisco County. It just had grown very rapidly. We've always considered it, historically, Orange County has been a conservative area; it's been a disaster for Democrats in the general election. I don't think I can recall the last time a Democrat carried Orange County in the general election. But it's a big county, it's got well over a million people in it now, and it has more Democrats among those million people than San Francisco has. In spite of that, Senator Kennedy was advised by various people, including some Californians, to spend a good deal of his time. . . . I guess practically every time he came out to California, he went into San Francisco. I have nothing against San Francisco. It's a great city; I love it--but he went into San Francisco every time. I think, he made only one visit--and that was very late into Orange County. I think he could have done himself some good, and I consistently advised that we go into Orange County and into other suburban areas as well. That advice was almost universally ignored until very, very late in the campaign. In the meantime, we were doing some polling through The Pacific Poll. Instead of attempting statewide polls which really only show the candidate position kind of thing--which is interesting, but not very useful in the practical sense in a campaign--we were trying to determine what the potential strengths and weaknesses were, where the candidate needed to be spending some time, either by areas or by issues. We took a survey of eleven selected population groups to determine what they felt. These groups ranged from Los Angeles ghetto Negroes, to an area in San Francisco that they call the Sunset District which is essentially middle class and lower middle class, a lot of Irish-Catholic voters. We found some very interesting results. One of them was that the Sunset District San Francisco people were as much a problem for Kennedy as Orange County suburban Democrats, as a subgroup. With respect to San Francisco, the problem wasn't any lack of liberalism, so to speak, but Kennedy was in a contest with another liberal and that was the problem.

I think that a great many people expressed a preference for either Kennedy or (Eugene J.) McCarthy because--in this case for

McCarthy--of his position on the war and a general liberal image he projected. Other Democrats--we found in the polls--were gravitating toward McCarthy for other reasons. As it developed, the reasons were, apparently, that McCarthy was projecting an image, nation-wide and in the California campaign, of a very reasoned, quiet, calm, individual kind of man, really; to some extent, the kind of image that (Richard M.) Nixon projected. Whereas with Kennedy--well, our electorate, like any other, watches television a great deal and gets a lot of their information by what they see on the tube. Everytime the people saw McCarthy, he was talking before some college group or in some context in which he was making a speech and being very calm and reasoned and rather unemotional. Everytime they saw a film clip on a news program of Kennedy, he was in a car, driving through a mob, and they were pulling at him and yanking his cuff links off, and there was a lot of noise and confusion and running around. I think what a lot of the people were in the market for in 1968 was a little peace and quiet. And that was hurting Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Who could you make that case to, particularly in the early days before someone like (Stephen E.) Steve Smith or (FrankF.) Mankiewicz or someone comes out on scheduling? I don't know whether you got involved at all, say in the scheduling of that first trip on where he should go. Could you make that point?

SMITH: Well, I'd admit it to practically, you know, anybody who would listen. I admitted it to Seltzer, who agreed. I was involved at all times in preparing the schedules which the California campaign believed ought to be followed. These then went through a number of other hands and came out, in some cases, substantially different. When Mankiewicz arrived I made the point to him. I think his understanding and grasp of California politics or of Los Angeles politics was better than practically anybody who came from the outside. I say that--what I really ought to say, probably, is that it was pretty good. His judgment was basically not very much affected by his many years away from Los Angeles.

Some of the other Californians--(Frederick G.) Fred Dutton, for example I think a great deal of reliance was placed on him, particularly in the context of the scheduling end of things. I think his judgment was poor. That doesn't diminish my high regard for the man. I think he's an outstanding person, I think he had been out of California for so long that his judgment about the shape of California politics was poor. And I don't think he realized that it was poor. So I think there were decisions made in a number of areas, including scheduling, that were essentially made under his influence, that were the wrong decisions. I think the primary responsibility for deciding what a good schedule is should have been with the local people.

HACKMAN: Uh-huh. His viewpoint would have been more urban and minority as opposed to suburban?

SMITH: That and the fact, also, that everytime the candidate came to California, he had to stop in San Francisco first, which meant that by the time he got down here, he wasn't really fresh news anymore.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Other than influencing your viewpoint, your feed-in on scheduling, what impact did the polling you did have on the kind of thing you tried to do or did in terms of organization, registration, whatever?

SMITH: Well, I think within the California campaign, it helped us to understand better what kind of job we should be doing. I don't think as far as the national campaign people were concerned, that it had much impact on them until Pierre Salinger and Mankiewicz came into the campaign. They used these polls. Then Steve Smith, "Steve Smith East" as we called him, began to use these polls that we were taking and began to give them some serious attention. But the campaign was pretty well along by that point.

HACKMAN: What was Salinger's role in the campaign? I had always understood that he didn't spend much time here, that the senator didn't want him to. Was he down here a lot?

SMITH: It seemed to me he spent a good deal of time in the Los Angeles headquarters. I think he made a very valuable contribution in the press operation and also in some of the scheduling problems. I found him to be very well aware of some of the same kinds of considerations that I had in the scheduling. He had run as a candidate here within recent memory, he has some current understanding of California campaigns.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Okay. What about in terms of. . . . You mentioned Chuck Spalding was raising money. What was the understanding, if there was any, on how funds were going to operate? How much was going to come from the Kennedy people and how? And what was your responsibility in trying to get together some out here?

SMITH: Answering those questions in reverse order, I had no responsibility in fundraising. Our understanding was that--and I don't even remember where this understanding comes from, but it just is very definitely part of my memory--we were not to worry about money. But, in fact, we had to worry about it all the time. There wasn't any great influx of money that sort of automatically came in. So I think Art Seltzer really had to do all the worrying about money that was to be done at this end.

And he did a lot of worrying about it. There were a lot of things that we would have liked to have done that we didn't have the money to do or that we didn't have the money until the very last minute. So it made some parts of our operation very difficult.

I don't blame that on anybody. Campaign fundraising is the most difficult chore in the world. What you might call the traditional financial people who had given to the party in California, that base, the financial base was drastically reduced for two reasons. One of them was that we no longer had control of the state administration, a lot of people who used to give to the Democratic party weren't home anymore to us. Secondly, those that remained were people who were still under the rather substantial influence of (Edmund G.) Pat Brown and his, so to speak, wing of the party. They were very strongly supporting the Lynch delegation. So that money, you might say, was turned off. So there really wasn't very much left.

HACKMAN: What about McCarthy and wealth? How much money is there in the CDC (California Democratic Council) people who were supporting McCarthy? Is that a major drain or not?

SMITH: Well, the CDC doesn't really have very much money; I don't think that they were in a position to do very much. There was some wealth directly connected in the McCarthy campaign. Martin Stone was very well-off. I don't know that he personally put any of his money into the McCarthy campaign, but he was directly involved in it--chairman or cochairman of the campaign. But I saw no real evidence that McCarthy had a thoroughly well-funded campaign in California; just had a lot of followers.

HACKMAN: Did you have a finance chairman working under you? Is that part of your operation?

SMITH: No. It wasn't part of my operation.

HACKMAN: How much of a problem, from what you could see, is it to get people to contribute in California, or, let's say--Seltzer had the responsibility--to a Seltzer-run operation, rather than them wanting to give directly to the candidate or a representative of the candidate?

SMITH: Well, I think that is quite a problem. If I were a rich man and was inclined to contribute in politics, I would want to make sure that my contribution--to the extent that it could be done tastefully my effort was known to the candidate.

Some people go to the extreme of, you know, insisting that they personally hand the money to the candidate so he knows where it came from. I think that has a negative effect. But, certainly, I think, in every campaign I've ever known, a lot of California money goes to Washington, and it comes back by that route, simply because people want it known at the highest levels that they've given it. You give money to Art Seltzer or Steve Smith, and we'd say, "Thank you very much," and that's about as much benefit as they think they are going to get.

HACKMAN: Well, in the '68 campaign, in money that did go to Washington or in money that didn't go to Washington, was just in Washington, or wherever, how did it come back? What was the route that it traveled to you?

SMITH: I don't know. Art Seltzer would know that, but I don't.

HACKMAN: Lou Cannon, in that book which I'm sure you've read, Ronnie & Jessie (a Political Odyssey), says there was a \$547,000 budget to start off with. Do you have any idea where he gets that figure and what that means? Can you remember that?

SMITH: No. I remember a figure of that magnitude, but that would be almost certainly for just operational aspects of the campaign. The staffing and the kind of campaign that we would run here locally would not affect the media because that was handled by the New York advertising firm Papert, Koenig & Lois (Inc.). Where they got their money and how they spent it, I don't know. They came in the last few weeks of the campaign and set up shop in our headquarters, but it was as if it were the Los Angeles office of the New York firm. There was no connection. They didn't run things by us and say, "Does this look alright" or "That look Alright." Occasionally we proposed a few suggestions. But to the extent that there was a money operation involved, that funding was handled completely separate from us. So the five hundred thousand dollars would be our end of it, the part that we would be responsible for having to spend.

HACKMAN: That would have been a commitment, though, from the Kennedy people as opposed to what you were somehow supposed to come up with?

SMITH: I don't know. Where it was supposed to come from, I don't know.

HACKMAN: In other words, that would have been a budget estimate in the early days.

SMITH: Yes.

HACKMAN: It wouldn't have been a figure that existed or had come up.

SMITH: No. It was some sort of a horseback estimate that somebody came up with of what we would have to spend in the campaign if we weren't having to worry about any media spending, which would be at least that much again in a major statewide campaign.

HACKMAN: Any feel for how well Spalding did in raising money?

SMITH: It's probably very unfair to say this because, as I say, I had only the most vague understanding of what he was doing. He was over at the Ambassador Hotel. I went over there a couple of times on various kinds of projects and said hello a couple of times. But exactly what he was doing and how he was going about it, I don't know. I was under the impression that he was doing very well at it, but that would be for some of these reasons that I've mentioned. The finance people were just not giving.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about what was planned in terms of registration effort in '68, and how that was to work? Who was supposed to handle it, pay for it, whatever?

SMITH: Well, in practically any statewide campaign, the first thing that's thought of is "Well, we have to have a registration drive." So there was an effort of sorts. It was not a very major effort in Los Angeles. It may have been in other places. But, historically, whether you have an organized registration drive or don't, it does not appear to make very much difference in Los Angeles. About the same number of people get registered just by the natural process. It's not difficult to get registered in Los Angeles. A number of deputy registrars are deputized and they go out and they get people registered and they're paid a small amount for their service. So it isn't like having to go down to the courthouse and register. So people get registered in Los Angeles without much trouble.

I've often felt registration drives in Los Angeles are largely a waste of time, but they are kind of like a knee jerk thing. You know, the first thing you think of in a campaign is "Well, let's have a registration drive."

HACKMAN: Well, is that something they kept pressing, the Kennedy people?

SMITH: No, I don't think that they made a big point of it, but, it was. Well, these people like Tony Akers, for example, would try to get a feel for the campaign in the beginning. They would say, "Now, look, what about registration?" Well, either that's something they thought up spontaneously, or someone in the East told them, "Find out what they're doing in registration." Well, again, it's sort of this automatic kind of thing that really doesn't. . . . Perhaps in other parts of the country, where it may be more difficult to get registered, you'd have to have an organized drive. Here, I don't think it makes any difference.

HACKMAN: Yeah. You've sort of gone through a lot of problems. Can you remember other things through the end of March on into April, before let's say, before Steve Smith, Mankiewicz, et al, descended upon you? What were your major problems in that period?

SMITH: Well, I suppose that it's really the same kind of problem that campaign managers had in the other primary states. We always felt we weren't getting enough of the candidate's time in the state, campaigning. We felt that, really, what the people were looking for was seeing the candidate here. But that was a decision that had to be made--obviously could not be made by us. We couldn't say that, you know, we have to have you "x" number of days because other states. . . . We were not in a position, really, of knowing what the other states' needs were, (Interruption) . . . because of polls or other reasons the candidate would have to spend more time there. So I remember that was the problem: that we continually had to do battle to get him in here campaigning. When he was here, I think he did himself--generally did himself--a lot of good.

HACKMAN: I know in the Northern California campaign, as things developed, there were still a lot of complaints from people in California, who still want to get into the campaign or they want something separate. Do you have a lot of that kind of thing going on down here, as things develop through March and April?

SMITH: Oh, I would say at that stage of the campaign, there were a lot of people who wanted to do things in the campaign. It is all part of the science of campaign management, I suppose, to find ways of putting people to work effectively. Somebody will say, "I want to help. What can I do?" You can't just say, "Well, go over and take that stack of envelopes and start sealing them or putting stamps on them." You can't do that with an attorney or a Ph.D. You've got to think of something more meaningful for them to do. That kind of work can always be done by somebody else. So finding meaningful jobs for people is just a very difficult thing, and

I have not won that battle. I haven't been able to solve that question to my satisfaction. So we had that kind of problem. We had people who came in and said they wanted to help. Well, maybe a week would go by, and then they'd start complaining, "Well, I guess I'm being excluded from the campaign" or "They don't want me because I went down there and volunteered," and all that stuff. We had a fellow that went from--a good friend of mine, actually; a little sore at me at the time. He came in and wanted to help, and I told him I'd get in touch with him. He called me on the phone, and I said, "I am still trying to fit you into the right spot. I don't want you to just waste your time." Well, he ended up going off to Indiana, took two or three weeks off, and they put him to work back there in the head of some county operation. He has never ceased to tell me that extreme he had to go to to get involved in the Kennedy campaign. We had that kind of problem.

Then we began to get this development of a legend, I guess you might call it, or a myth--that's a better word for it. I guess somebody wrote it in a column some place, and then somebody picked it up and put it in their column, and before long it got into. . . . I guess I've seen it in all the books that have been written about the campaign. That was that there was a tremendous (a) a lack of performance and (b) an inability to get along with anybody on the part of the so-called Unruh people. That got going, and that didn't help any. It really wasn't true. I would call it a minor problem just in operating the campaign. People began to think, "You know, which of these people are the Unruh people?"

We had a youth operation, young citizens for Kennedy, or whatever it was called. It was a student operation. These kids spent a good deal of their time worrying about whether they were on the right side of this and that and the other thing, when there really was no actual quarrel or fight. So, that got to be a problem. We had some minor operational problems in that some people thought it was a great idea to go out and picket McCarthy everytime he came to town. I established an absolute rule that we would not do that, and the rule was violated two or three times because Kennedy, advance men thought I was nuts. "Obviously, these kids want to go out and picket McCarthy, let'em do it." The problem was we promptly got some bad publicity for doing it. But it was not repeated after that.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Can you remember other discussions about how you used youth in the campaign? This is a big thing in '68. What are the Kennedy people's--if you can group them together--viewpoints on how you can use kids?

SMITH: I never had anybody suggest to me, really, how they could be most effectively used. They do have a place in campaigns. They have evidenced boundless energy where other people have tired or don't want to do something because they want to relax or something or other. These kids will work, you know, virtually any hours and do practically any kind of job that needs to be done. They have--sort of in a microcosm--the same problem that we were having in a lot of other areas, and that is that the party was divided between the Kennedy and McCarthy forces. Similarly on the campuses, obviously, the McCarthy campaign had sort of cornered a tremendous number of young people who then actively resented the fact that other young people were getting involved in the Kennedy campaign, which they felt was a betrayal. So I think our young people spent a fair amount of their time in the college debates, just defending their position that they were for Kennedy for perfectly good reasons. So we had that kind of problem. I feel, by and large, that they were a useful part of the campaign. I never heard anybody suggest how we could make greater use of them, although there were occasions of people that sort of wistfully complained, you know, "Gosh, the McCarthy campaign is full of young people. Why isn't ours?" Well, it was because McCarthy had most of the young people by that time.

HACKMAN: Did they have any funds, or did they raise what they used themselves, or how did that work?

SMITH: They made an attempt at fundraising, but most of it had to come directly out of the campaign. They had a couple of paid staff people. . . .

HACKMAN: This is just about off. I'm going to. . . .

(BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I)

HACKMAN: What changed, if anything, in the way things worked when Steve Smith East came out and the other people? How did things work with you and Seltzer?

SMITH: Well, he has an interesting capability of being able to come into a campaign and take charge of it. It would seem that would make you feel glad he's there. Quite obviously, he could have come in and thrown the whole bunch of us out and said, "Okay, I'm taking over." Instead, he just came in and took over. I sort of got the feeling that, you know, leadership has finally arrived, partly because of the way he operates and partly also because he's a very excellent and knowledgeable campaign manager. He knows how to do things in campaigns. So I got along with him very well.

I had occasion to disagree with him two or three times. I always found him willing to listen to disagreements, occasionally to modify his own views and occasionally not.

HACKMAN: What kind of things? Again schedules, or other things?

SMITH: Schedules. Now, I got really--towards the latter part of the campaign--involved almost continually in scheduling until about the last oh, perhaps the last two or three weeks of the campaign when the senator was here more often than not. At that point, Jerry Bruno was here practically full-time, and he and I just did not get along at all. So they sort of set up an independent operation on their own--like an island, so to speak--in the campaign headquarters and made all the scheduling decisions without consulting, as far as I know, any Californians, and made some mistakes.

I think that the advance men that were used--like any group of people, some of them were very good and some of them were very bad. But I got the distinct impression that they had been instructed at some point that, by and large, the local people really don't know what they're doing, and the best thing you can do is politely make sure they don't get in your way. That's one rule.

Another rule that was established was that policemen were to be kept away. Well, I think we were frequently requested, you know, "Make sure the police aren't there in a particular situation." It was a lack of understanding, really, of the fact that in California the politicians don't turn the police on and off. They don't call up city hall and say to some alderman, you know, "Make sure the police aren't out or make them do this or that and the other thing." Conversely, just in the area of protection, we could not get a police escort in any point for a candidate unless there was a definite crowd control problem. Then it was a police matter.

But merely to get the candidate from Point A to Point B in the motorcade--just a Kennedy parade through downtown--as far as the police were concerned, it was just a guy driving with some buses following them. It got greatly screwed up. It was because our local police take a very hands-off position on the thing. But when they are there because there is a public safety reason to be there, you just don't go up to them and say, you know, "Get lost," because they're not going to. So there were some very bad incidents--one of them in Fresno where the chief of police and some of his people had a press conference and really blasted Kennedy and the whole Kennedy operation for some things that were said to them.

All this was really unnecessary and was an outgrowth of a lack of understanding which could have been corrected had they listened to the local people. But they didn't. And I'll say this without any bitterness, but merely that I feel that if I could contribute anything to the science of political campaigns, it is that in doing this advance work and scheduling, you have to size up local people. Some local people don't know what

they're doing and ought to be ignored, and others do and ought to be paid attention to. It's a one-way street to disaster really. Some of these later schedules that were worked out were just very poor affairs, could have been better. The senator could have done himself more good doing other things than what he was doing.

HACKMAN: Can you remember what did they want to do in terms of not only where he went, but the kind of things he did that were different than the kinds of things you recommended?

SMITH: Well, for one thing, they thought it was a great idea for the senator to be an hour late everywhere. Sometimes there is something to that, I suppose, but, by and large, I think it's unwise.

One particular case I recall: he taped a television show here in Los Angeles and then was to fly to San Diego. San Diego was a very big town--lot of people. Their political voting habits are uncertain. Our polls found them to be a pivotal county, one that neither we nor McCarthy could count on. So he taped the television show in Burbank close to the airport where his plane was to take off for San Diego, which is about a twenty-minute flight by jet.

Well, he had developed a practice--or someone had talked him into developing a practice--that everytime he stopped someplace he should make telephone calls to a list of prominent Democrats to say hello. Then they would feel, "Well, I got a phone call from Robert Kennedy," and that would motivate them to do things on his behalf. Not a bad idea except it became something of a ritual. Well, he finished the television taping and then asked, you know, for the list of people he was supposed to call and where was the telephone, and he went over to the telephone. Well, someone had neglected to put together a list, I guess, for that particular stop or that particular day. So they made a bunch of names. Call Paul Ziffren, call Cesar Chavez. Well, Cesar Chavez is not an entirely easy person to locate at times. So we went through, I think, about half an hour just trying to find Chavez. And they talked to Paul Ziffren, who, I think, is somebody Robert Kennedy talked to frequently, so that was unnecessary. It got to be something like--my recollection is--about forty-five minutes. We got up to the point where he was still talking on the telephone at a time when we had just received word that the crowd was gathering in San Diego. . . . This was at five o'clock when the people got off work. The motion was, "Get off work and they would all congregate in the civic plaza." We got a phone call from San Diego saying, "It's five o'clock the people are starting to gather, and it looks like it's going to be a great crowd. Where's the senator?" He was due there at 5:15."

Well, he got there about a full hour late. It was a great crowd, but they were beginning to be quite restless and a little surly. So, I don't think he did himself a great deal of good there. And because he was late, he missed the opportunity of being on the evening television news programs because they had to get him at the right time. So I suppose that was a scheduling problem--a rather lengthy example of the kinds of difficulties that we were having at that late stage of the campaign.

HACKMAN: What about in terms of motorcades versus other kinds of events? Is that a debate that goes on?

SMITH: No, I think that, by and large, that is a very useful way of getting the candidate around. It's helpful if it's done in some fashion that we have a little advance time and could work up a crowd. But very frequently they were just able to go here, and the advance men would be sent out in some way to get a crowd out. Again, the advance men were told to get the schools cancelled and get the kids out in the street. I guess you can do that in Indiana, but you can't do that in California. If they'd asked us, we could have told them that. They didn't ask us so they spent considerable time going around doing things that couldn't be done.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about discussions on how you'd go about getting out the black vote and the Mexican-American vote? You said you felt there should be more concentration on suburbs, but in terms of the black vote and the Mexican-American vote, how do you do it?

SMITH: Well, it was my view the view which was eventually adopted that we needed to have a topflight, hard-core, professional operation. I proposed a fellow named Willard Murray who has had a long number of years of experience in the black community. He was at that time, incidentally, a member of Mayor (Samuel W.) Yorty's staff--a rather strange situation of having taken a leave of absence from Yorty to work with Kennedy. He had been involved in the Johnson campaign four years earlier in the same capacity of get-out-the-vote director. He was very good at it--to get out the vote in the black community.

But I felt that essentially those people were going to vote for Robert Kennedy anyway. If they never voted in a primary before, they surely would vote in this one. And that was true; the vote turnout there was very strong.

Mexican-Americans, I wasn't quite so certain of. They were very strongly for him, but how well they were voting I didn't know. There isn't so much a lack of political leadership in that community as there is almost a pathological overabundance of it. Everyone is a leader, so you can't find any one guy that you go to, or any five that are leaders and could organize this kind of an effort. So that I think

there was a great deal of talk about a get-out-the-vote effort there, but I don't think it was anywhere nearly as well-organized as the one in the Los Angeles Negro community.

HACKMAN: I have either read or heard that the fellow you selected would primarily use a mail campaign to get out the black vote. I guess the Kennedys' traditional way of doing it--at least the way they did it in Indiana this thing--was the organizational way, a different kind of thing. Can you recall that?

SMITH: Well, actually, there was a mail effort made. We have a device that's used in campaigns called the polling place card. People were officially advised, some weeks in advance of the election, where their polling place is. It sometimes changes so it's nothing that they can remember that that's where they go to vote, like going to the school or the fire-house. Generally, it's somebody's home or someplace like that. So it very frequently happens that people will be so notified, but they'll forget; they'll lay aside the document and then they won't have it.

In the Kennedy campaign in 1960 and in succeeding campaigns, we frequently used this thing. This device was used in Pierre Salinger's campaign. It arrives the day before the election and is a little postcard. It reminds you your polling place is. . . . It's all done by a computer--the addressing of the card and the location of the polling place. Then the card also goes on to extoll the virtues of the candidate. I think that had a great deal to do with the margin by which Pierre Salinger, for example, won the primary in 1964.

Well, this was a decision that was made, that this should be used in the Negro and Mexican-American communities in Los Angeles, but that was by no means the only effort. Willard Murray's expertise is in the area of organization. The mail thing is helpful but not the main thing he does. His technique basically is to have areas and then within that, groups of precincts and then within that, individual precincts. At each level there is a person, there is a chain of responsibility. They all generally end up reporting to him, I guess, daily reports and all this kind of stuff--almost a kind of a military operation. But the payoff is that on election day you have someone or a group of people in each precinct who go out and make sure that everybody there gets out and votes. We felt that we didn't have to go out and determine in advance whether a particular voter was for Kennedy because in that community nearly everybody was. So the pressure was getting everybody out. That's what Willard has done in the past, including in that campaign.

HACKMAN: One guy who worked on the black vote, Walter Sheridan, can you remember him at all? What were his feelings on that? Were they different in the way you and Murray would have. . . .

SMITH: Well, he did become involved in it. Willard had one of the strongest personalities of anybody who had ever lived, I'm sure. He would not be the kind of a person you would select for an important diplomatic assignment. Anybody who would be assigned to come in and tell him how to do anything that concerns voters in the black community would not come away feeling that they'd been treated with deference and respect by Willard Murray. So I would imagine that at the end of the campaign, he probably sent a number of people back where they came from with very sensitive, hurt feelings. It's just the way he is. If he's put in charge of something, he's going to be in charge of it. His track record is good enough that you may think that there might be one or two things he'd be doing better, but you just leave him alone, let him do it. So I did. But there were people who came into the campaign. . . .

There was another effort that was organized. There was a fellow that had put together an operation in Oregon, so he was then brought down the last week. After the Oregon primary, he came down and put it together in our Los Angeles headquarters. . . .

HACKMAN: Earl Graves?

SMITH: . . . We are told to cooperate. So what he did was to want a big bank of telephones. We had very excellent rapport with the telephone company, and they came in overnight and put in a big bank of telephones. And the first thing we knew they were filled with people--a girl at every telephone. They were calling away, herding people, you know, tomorrow's the election and that stuff.

HACKMAN: Not (Matthew) Reese?

SMITH: No, this is a guy that just came out of Oregon, just popped in. So we figured he must be good; you know, he must be as good as they say. Well, it turned out that what he'd gotten were a bunch of Kelly girl types from a temporary employment operation. We got a bill after the campaign for some thousand dollars, two or three thousand dollars worth of time. Well, anybody can hire Kelly girls for that, but we were told he was the great expert.

The Earl Graves operation--I didn't have too much directly to do with it, but again I think there were some mistakes made because people weren't really thinking as clearly as they could at that point. So he came in with a group of guys--I don't know, it seemed to be a dozen

of them or so--some of whom. . . . I guess they were all housed at the Ambassador Hotel, and all of them given a rented car to get around town in. Several of the rented cars ended up clear across the country several months later. The police departments wanted to know whether we wanted to prosecute. You know, there just wasn't very good control at that point. But I think that the get-out-the-vote effort in the black community essentially went off just about as scheduled without their making much of a significant difference.

Now, it must be said that anytime you take anybody in either of the two big minority populations and say, "All right, now you're in charge of a project," immediately, for all practical purposes, you excluded a lot of other people because people in that kind of a political context don't--either because they don't want to or somehow they can't. It's not the kind of a situation where you can tell a guy, "All right, you're in charge, but you've got to get all these other guys in working with you." Some people just can't work together. Well, the people that couldn't work with Willard Murray were, of course, immediately button holing everybody they could and saying, "Black people aren't going to turn out because we're not going to work with Willard Murray" or, at least, "he's not letting us work with him," or whatever. Well, naturally, when you hear that kind of thing, you're alarmed. You're from out of state, and somebody comes and says, "You don't know anything about California and I do. I'm the big leader in such and such an area in the black community, and Willard Murray is hated throughout the black community." Most black voters had never heard of him, but these people would go on like this, so some people were alarmed. Their reaction was to bring in some people to see whether they could make sure that there was an effective get-out-the-vote effort. There was.

HACKMAN: But what about in terms of dealing with black militants in this area. I know the senator, I guess, met with some other people maybe on two occasions. Did you get involved and have a chance to advise on that as to whether it should or shouldn't take place, what kind of commitments you should make to these people, or what kind of

SMITH: No, I didn't. Paradoxically, one of the people who could very well have been involved in that part of it would have been Murray, whose assignment out of Mayor Yorty's office had been to establish contact and rapport with the militants. His group relationships with them were excellent, in spite of his rather odious employment with Yorty, who was not very well regarded in the community.

Had I been called upon to give advice on that point--I don't think I was called in to advise--I would have thought that there

were other people that the senator ought to be seeing other than leaders of a community whose votes he already had, had those leaders been inclined to turn against him, there would have been nothing they could have said or done that would have hurt Kennedy in that community.

HACKMAN: What kinds of people should he have seen that he didn't out there--I mean other than going into the suburban areas and making appearances? Are there political people out here, people with influence, that he should have talked to, should have called, that he didn't pay any attention to, or that his people didn't pay any attention to?

SMITH: I felt that in the early stages of the campaign, it might have been possible for him to have brought over some of the McCarthy people if he had made not an appeal to them but had made some contact with them. I must admit I did not make a very strong point of urging that. It was a weakness there at the beginning. As the campaign got further along, naturally, because a campaign is a very competitive situation, they would not have responded. I suppose that even then, after the campaign was over, he would have needed them anyway. Some point between here and Chicago those two men would have had to find some way of working together. I don't know whether McCarthy could ever agree to this. The McCarthy campaign would have had to have run out of gas and collapsed, and those people would have had to have someplace to go. They either retreat into bitterness, you know, say, "The heck with all of it. I'm not going to participate anymore this year because I don't like any of those people," or they could have joined Kennedy. I think they would only have--speaking of the California types that I'm familiar with--done so if their feelings had not been too bruised up to that point. Kennedy could have done that.

HACKMAN: What about on his stand on issues within the state? Can you remember feeding in anything on that side, and what he should be speaking about?

SMITH: As a result of some of the polling work we did, I felt he should be talking about some of the issues which the suburban white people were concerned about. I think it's perfectly proper for a liberal to evidence the fact that he understands that these are what these people are concerned about, what their hang ups are, what their fears are. I don't think you have to feed their prejudices or run as a law and order candidate or any of that kind of thing, but you can at least let them know that you're thinking about them. But, I think, instead of doing that, he talked, as politicians will, about the kinds of things that concerned him and that sort of turned his juices on --the problems of race, poverty, and that kind of thing. That didn't give the middle class

white man a feeling that he was on their side too. Perhaps, conversely, I felt that it gave the middle class white man a feeling that nobody knew what his problems were or really gave much of a damn.

HACKMAN: Was there anyone--Mankiewicz, Salinger, others--who sympathized with your viewpoint on that or made that case to the senator, that you know of?

SMITH: I know Jess Unruh did just before the debate. The Senator gathered a group of people--I think it was in San Francisco--to discuss the debate and discuss what they were likely to find, what he ought to say, what points ought to be made. There was apparently some sort of an effort made--the people who were there were obviously too many, and they needed to get it down to the people who had to be there--to move people out, and that was very successful. It got down to the point that, I think, apparently somebody was kind of gently nudging Jess toward the door. If I understand the story, the senator, when he saw what was going on, made it very clear he wanted Jess to stay and be a part of that group.

Jess made the point--he says alone, except for Ted Sorensen--that so far in the campaign, the senator had been missing on these issues that we're talking about and had come across with a complete identity with the problems of the poor, particularly in the urban ghettos, and that he ought to try to make use of this last opportunity. And he did. In the debate, I think he made an allusion to Orange County and how impossible it was to move "10,000 black families in overnight."

Also in the last couple days of the campaign he made, I think, his only visit to Orange County, to a suburban shopping center there, which was good.

HACKMAN: What about trying to get support of different labor leaders or labor groups? Did you get much involved in that effort; discussions of it?

SMITH: I did not get very much involved in that. The UAW (United Automobile Aircraft, and Agricultural Independent Workers of America) were very much involved in supporting him, and they in turn are very closely connected with Cesar Chavez's union.

HACKMAN: You said Salinger had a lot of impact on the press relations thing. What kind of problems existed in that area? Where was he helpful? Can you remember?

SMITH: Well, I don't know about the problems. He was particularly helpful in talking to local press guys; they very

quickly looked to him as a spokesman for the campaign. I think that the press relations people we had working were reasonably good. It was just, I think, his judgment--my memory for two years ago should be better than it is--I can't recall the specifics of it except I just felt that it was helpful to have him involved.

HACKMAN: Did Mankiewicz play much of a role in that or was he almost completely. . . .

SMITH: Yes, he was involved in very much the same operation. Also he became a student of the polls that were taken.

HACKMAN: Is the thing that I handed you earlier the thing. . . . Does that come out of your operation?

SMITH: I'd have to read it.

HACKMAN: Okay, just take. . . .
(Interruption)

SMITH: . . . of different areas. Robert Kennedy really didn't carry any place in California where there was not a significant minority group population of some sort.

HACKMAN: These are some other things I found with that as part of the things. Here, maybe these are your
(Interruption) Who did the polling for you, like on the April 13-16 thing?

SMITH: The Pacific Poll is my company.

HACKMAN: . . . ask you about. You mentioned you had a couple earlier contacts with Robert Kennedy. What were they?

SMITH: Well, in 1960, I think, I was sent to the airport with a couple of other people to meet him. He was coming in to talk to Jess. Jess was the John Kennedy campaign manager in California. You know, just to meet him and drive him in.

Then, in '62, I was working for a fellow who was running for Congress, an assemblyman who was running for Congress. And there were a couple of other assemblymen, so Jess took all them and me, the group, back to Washington so they could be photographed with President Kennedy and this kind of thing. Then they went over and met with Robert Kennedy in his office, and they talked first. We all sort of left the building together. Robert Kennedy was getting into a very large black limousine of some sort. Jess made some humorous comment to him about the car, and he said, "Well, Jess, all you have to do is get your brother elected president and you can have a car like this."

HACKMAN: Did you get any feedback at that point on his feeling about California politics, either how the '60 campaign had come out. . . .

SMITH: No. There was a discussion about how things looked in California insofar as these congressional candidates were concerned. He struck me as a listener. He was taking in information.

HACKMAN: Anything on what role Unruh should play in the Brown campaign in '62.

SMITH: Uh-huh. Then I met him again at the San Francisco dinner in August of '67. (Interruption)

HACKMAN: . . . campaign?

SMITH: In my opinion, candidates for the presidency ought to, as a matter of being responsible people, take better care of their own personal security. I think that this is not said in the benefit of after thought because I made this point several times during the campaign. I wasn't a Cassandra about the thing, predicting doom, but I did point out that I felt that some better precautions ought to be taken about the senator's personal safety. Security was consistently ignored. There was sort of a halfway effort at it that was mainly, I think, aimed at making sure he didn't get pulled out of his car by someone shaking his hand. But as far as any really great danger to him, there just wasn't any thought given. I think mainly the thought was that either it couldn't happen or that there wasn't anything that can be done as a practical matter to protect a man. I think that last viewpoint is completely inaccurate. I think there are relatively simple things that can be done, that do not interfere with the candidate's accessibility to the people or anything else. I think that future campaigns ought--there should be some consideration given.

I have a feeling that may be quite inaccurate, but, nonetheless, it is so strong that I think I'll die still feeling the same way, is that if I had been with Senator Kennedy in that hallway in the Ambassador Hotel, he might not have been shot.

I was in the hotel. My responsibility for the evening, sort of delegated to myself, was collecting all of the election results in the various counties in Southern California--try to serve as a kind of an independent guide as to what the trend was and when it was safe to conclude that he had won. The TV people had computers and all this stuff. They had their own systems, some of which proved quite inaccurate, and I thought we ought not to depend upon their kind of source of information. But I was staying with that operation.

I think Frank Burns came in--the senator's suite was down the hall from where we were--and he said, "Look, he wants to go down to the Ballroom very soon now,"--or words to that effect-- "Have you reason to believe that it isn't okay?" I said, "I don't think he ought to go yet because we have not heard from some areas that we ought to hear from." The count, for example, in Orange County was extremely slow; that was one county I was worried about. We had only fragmentary information from San Diego; L.A. was coming in but not fast enough. I said, "A half an hour isn't going to hurt anybody. Wait until we have some more information." Burns was nervous about the fragmentary returns and liked that idea. He went away. Feeling very strongly about that, I called the senator's suite and talked to somebody--I don't know who--and gave him the same information: "I think it would be a mistake to go downstairs now. Wait for a while until we have more information." I got the impression that the person I was talking to really didn't understand quite what I was saying, fully, and the conversation ended inconclusively.

The next thing I knew, the people just outside my door, in the hallway, were saying the senator was coming down the hallway with a bunch of people. It had been my intention--as, you know, campaign people generally like to be with the candidate in his moment of triumph--to take leave of my monitoring his election returns and go downstairs with the senator. But I was, at the moment, trying to get some information about a particular county--I forget exactly where it was--why we couldn't get more information about it. I finally just decided well. . . . I was also working in my stocking feet so I would have to put my shoes on in a hurry. I figured well, you know, let him go downstairs; I'll watch it on television.

Curiously enough, for some reason which I can't completely explain, during the course of the campaign whenever I was with the senator, which was during most of the time he was in Southern California except for the last two or three days of the campaign, I made it a practice whenever he was going from one place to another on foot, to place myself in front of him and sort of move as if I were clearing a way. I think one of the reasons is that I recall in some campaign--I think it may have been John Kennedy's campaign in 1960--he (John Kennedy) found himself in a situation where he didn't know which way he was supposed to go. He was just sort of standing around and with some irritation turned to the people around him and said, "Will somebody please tell me what I'm supposed to do now?" Perhaps, as a part of that, I've always made it a practice to sort of lead the way to wherever Senator Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, was supposed to be going. I think it helped to expedite his getting from one place to another.

So I believe that had I been a part of that group, I would probably have been walking in front of the senator as he left the stage and went back into the kitchen. His assailant could very well have probably done the same thing he ended up doing, but he would have had to have gone by me to do it. But it's just one of those historical curiosities that I will always wonder myself: you know, had I been there could I really have done something to prevent this. But in the larger context, I felt before then--feel obviously even stronger now--that both the candidates and the people who manage candidates need to be a great deal more concerned about their personal security than they are.

HACKMAN: Were there any times in the '68 campaign when you had a chance to talk to him at all about how things were going?

SMITH: He asked me one time--I happened to be in the front seat of his car--how I thought things were going. I told him about the poll we were just then tabulating that confirmed basically the information that other polls had shown that same week--the published polls--except we showed that the Lynch delegation would not do as well as the other polls were saying they were going to do. He thought that was interesting. Our poll said the Lynch delegation would get 12 percent of the vote, and they, I think, ended up getting 12 percent of the vote. Our poll was taken a week before the Oregon primary so that the Kennedy and McCarthy vote was not what it ended up being in the election.

I also told him that our previous findings had shown that the great undecided vote was in the suburbs. I couldn't let the opportunity pass without getting that point across to him since I told everybody else about my concern about suburbs. I don't recall that he said anything in response to that. It was the only opportunity that I had to discuss anything.

HACKMAN: Were there any plans for what would happen after the California primary, what he might do, or what. . .

SMITH: Yes, my understanding of my work contract was for five months, for March through the convention. I think I recall Frank Burns saying that he thought the likelihood was that I would probably stay with the California delegation, but not to be surprised if I was asked to go into some other parts of the country before the convention. At the convention, all of us would just be available for whatever the Kennedy people would want to have done at the convention. As it turned out, I was

executive secretary of the California delegation for that; went to Chicago. That was a traumatic experience. They should give out little battle ribbons for the people who were at Chicago.

HACKMAN: Anything else that you can think of?

SMITH: No.

HACKMAN: Okay.