

**Carter Burden Oral History Interview – RFK #1, 2/13/1974**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Carter Burden

**Interviewer:** Roberta W. Greene

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**Biographical Note**

Burden, a New York society and political figure who worked in Robert F. Kennedy's (RFK) New York City Senate office from 1966-1968, discusses the staff and office politics in RFK's New York Office, the office's relations with members of the press and labor organizations, and the Bedford-Stuyvesant Redevelopment Corporation, among other issues.

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Carter Burden—RFK#1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Carter Burden

February 13, 1974  
New York, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

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

GREENE: I imagine the best place to start is how you first met the Senator [Robert F. Kennedy] and how your relationship developed, and how you got to the Senate Office.

BURDEN: I don't really remember the first time. I'd met him, I guess, socially, I suppose, and then in my last year of law school I went with Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] a couple of times—when he was in the city and campaigning. I did not work in the '65 campaign. I did work in the summer between my second and third year of law school for Lindsay [John V. Lindsay] in Queens [Queens, New York] and worked in that campaign for about five months and probably, in part, as a result of that decided I wanted to try to go into government rather than directly into a law firm. I had a chance at working for the city, and the alternative was working for Kennedy. He interviewed me one morning at his apartment and offered me a job, and that was more interesting to me and definitely preferable to working somewhere in the city, so that's what I did.

GREENE: How did he describe what you'd be doing? This was right around the time, if I'm correct, that Phil Ryan [Philip J. Ryan, Jr.] would have been leaving there.

BURDEN: Yeah, yeah. That would be. That's right, because Phil Ryan had

already left when I came to work. The New York office was never terribly structured, and it was always pretty loose. I think both Tim Hogen and I came in about the same time. Hogen subsequently left and I inherited some of his responsibilities, vis-à-vis the press, organized labor, and so forth. Prior to that, I guess I spent most of my time really working on the Bedford-Stuyvesant project and doing.... I did help Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] on a couple of speeches that related to New York, and I did a lot of basic New York constituent work. When I spoke to him, I, of course, was incredibly uptight and self-conscious and shy, and I think he was, too, for that matter. He was not always the easiest person in the world to talk to. As I recall I don't think he really told me what I was going to be doing in

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the office. And of course I didn't ask.

GREENE: Did you get the impression you'd kind of be taking Tom Johnston's [Thomas M.C. Johnston] place when he moved into the head of the office?

BURDEN: I guess so.

GREENE: It wasn't really clear?

BURDEN: But I wasn't really clear that Tom was moving up, or anything like that. It was very loosely.... I mean, I think there was some method in that madness, too.

GREENE: Did you find that difficult to work with? The lack of structure.

BURDEN: Yeah, a little bit. It left a lot of it sort of up to you. It meant that there was a lot of interoffice competition to some extent, which was good from the Senator's point of view, I suppose. But it was hard, especially for me coming out of law school, and I hadn't really had that much political experience before. In retrospect I'm glad it wasn't very structured, but it was hard at the time. There's no question about it.

GREENE: When you first came on did you take the press responsibilities, or that came later?

BURDEN: I think that Tim Hogen did that initially, and when he left, then I sort of picked that up from him, but I think that was his job at that stage.

GREENE: Did you find, especially as time went on and you felt more comfortable and more confident, that you could frequently make suggestions to him on projects and that he was receptive?

BURDEN: Yeah, to some extent. It took me quite a while to gain that kind of confidence and then to acquire some relative degree of competence and expertise, if you will, in given areas. If it was an area that I was supposedly involved with and had some responsibility for, he would listen, and I would feel a lot more at ease in suggesting something. In terms of telling him what he ought to do politically or how he should shape his future, I didn't venture that, and I don't think he would have listened particularly.

GREENE: Did you find yourself going through Tom Johnston a lot to avoid going directly to the Senator?

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BURDEN: Well, sometimes Tom Johnston structured it that way so that it was hard for other people in the office to get to him directly. Other times it was a lot easier to go through Tom. Tom has a great facility, almost in the southern tradition of verbal ease and dexterity, that he always seemed infinitely more at ease with the Senator than I ever felt, for example. I mean right to the end I still felt inhibited and somewhat constrained if I was alone with the Senator and was trying to suggest something.

GREENE: Did you find that Tom would sometimes screen out ideas that you thought were worthwhile and they wouldn't reach the Senator?

BURDEN: Sure, but I think that's inevitable. I think that was part of his job and part of his role.

GREENE: Yes. It wasn't a problem.

BURDEN: It's always frustrating at the moment but, if you really felt strongly about it there were other ways of getting to him. Very often I would send a memo down to Washington and inevitably, sooner or later, he would see that.

GREENE: What do you mean when you say there was a lot of competition? Just who were you thinking of? Yourself and Johnston, and who else?

BURDEN: Well, I don't think that Tom necessarily.... I think Tom resented me in the office initially because he didn't hire me. I was hired directly by the Senator and in part through....

GREENE: You said you had this choice. Did you just go directly to Kennedy and make it clear that...?



BURDEN: No, I think Bill vanden Heuvel was my rabbi, basically. I think that anybody else who was hired in the office when I was there, or at that time, was done either through Tom or with consultation with Tom. I may be projecting it, but I think there was in a way some resentment.

I learned a great deal from Tom. I have enormous respect for his abilities and talents, and I think he was extraordinarily good at what he was doing. I don't think anybody else could have really done Bedford-Stuyvesant the way he did it. In my opinion, he is more responsible than anybody else for getting that project started. He really did the work. Adam [Adam Walinsky] took a lot of the credit, but Tom really was the key factor in all the multiple pieces that went into that. He is an entrepreneur, if you will. He's now working on this cinema tech project, and he knows how to put those things together. So I learned a lot from Tom.

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In fact, the only time that any real sort of resentment came to the surface was when the campaign started. There was enormous jockeying and fighting for what roles people were going to have in the campaign. Tom immediately just sort of left the office and latched on to Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] at that point. I know that Earl Graves [Earl G. Graves] and myself and other people in the office were pissed off because we didn't know what was going on, and it was really sort of....

GREENE: You think he did that on his own rather than....

BURDEN: It was everybody for himself at that point.

GREENE: You mean in wasn't like they asked for him or anything?

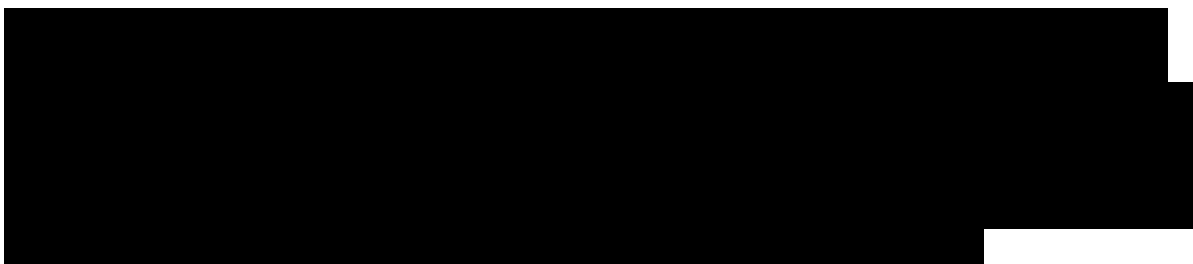
BURDEN: No, no. You fought for whatever you could get at that point. Suddenly when it shifted.... Tom was very secure in the New York office, and I think had the Senator's confidence and everything else, but when the campaign began all that was out the window. It was everybody once again fighting for a foothold. I remember that as being a very neurotic and tense time.

GREENE: What happened when Graves came on? Did that make much difference?

BURDEN: No, not really. What happens to these things by the way?

GREENE: They're completely protected. You make the decision as to when they can be opened and under what conditions, and nobody sees them or hears them.

BURDEN: [REDACTED]



GREENE: Was that true while he was in the senate office, too?

BURDEN: Yes, that was in the senate office.

GREENE: Oh, really?

BURDEN: I just found out about that. I found out that it has just before the campaign started, and I remember being

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really shocked about that.

GREENE: Were you consulted at all before he was hired? Had you met him before he came on?

BURDEN: I'm not sure about the time. I'm confused about the timing there.

GREENE: I should have checked the date, too, on just when he came on, but I'm sorry I didn't.

BURDEN: I remember, yes. Now it comes back to some extent.

GREENE: He was in a quasi role to begin with.

BURDEN: There were a whole bunch of people who were sort of semi....

GREENE: Volunteer types.

BURDEN: We called them associates, actually. He was, in at Bedford-Stuyvesant, and I remember meeting and talking with him a couple of times in Bedford-Stuyvesant before he actually came on the staff. I remember talking to Tom about it now, in retrospect. On paper, Earl looked pretty good. I mean, his background was good. There was a strong feeling that.... There was a lot of criticism about not having a black on the staff, and there was a general recognition that that

had to be done, and Earl was certainly as good as anything that seemed available at that point.

GREENE: Did he have problems with Tom?

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: Was it the competition thing, or he couldn't take orders?

BURDEN: He couldn't take orders. There was never any really direct competition. I think Earl felt slighted at times. Tom always standing between the other people in the office and the Senator bothered Earl probably more than other people, or a lot more. Because all that kind of thing was terribly important to him. But substantively he really didn't have a hell of a lot to do. Basically, Earl was out for himself anyway.

GREENE: How useful was he on the Bedford-Stuyvesant thing?

BURDEN: I think there were times when he was more of a problem than a use, to tell you the truth, because there was so much community rivalry, so many factions. The day

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before yesterday I gave a commencement speech at the Jewish Home for the Aged [Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged], and the average age of the graduates were eighty-four. But they have this program that, what they were graduating from was done by the New York City Community College [Voorhees Campus]. The woman who gave out the diplomas was a woman called Connie McQueen [Constance McQueen] and she's head of that program. I sort of knew the name and I didn't connect, and she turned to me and she said, "You don't probably remember me, but we knew each other when I was part of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Community Corporation." And then it all came back into place. There were about three women out there who were very strong...

GREENE: In the original group?

BURDEN: In the original group.

GREENE: Right.

BURDEN: ...and had caused all the problems with Tom Johnston. Earl was on Jones' [Thomas R. Jones] side. There were probably a lot of mistakes politically made, at that point. But Shirley Chisholm [Shirley Anita Chisholm] and Connie McQueen and I forget who the third one was. And Connie McQueen said, "Yes, I was the only one who wasn't called a matriarch because I didn't look the role."

GREENE: I'm not sure I ever heard that distinction.

BURDEN: Exactly. I didn't have the courage to say that either. In any case, I think that Earl was very much part of the Jones faction. I'm not sure that in retrospect, Jones stood for truth and justice any more than, you know, Shirley Chisholm did, necessarily. If you were looking to Earl for political advice in Bedford-Stuyvesant, whatever political advice Earl gave it would be political advice that would serve Earl, and not necessarily what would be in the best interests of Kennedy.

GREENE: What about in terms of entree to people. Was he ever any better received than anybody else, simply because he was black?

BURDEN: Well, he's a very charming guy, you know. I took two trips to Mississippi with him and, you know, I probably sound too.... I mean, everything I say I stand by. We had a falling out over that just before the campaign started. But, you know, Earl is a very sophisticated, charming guy. He knows how to use his blackness. You know, there's nothing wrong with that. It would seem that he's been very successful since then. I don't know, I think that Earl in his chosen field would have been

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successful whether white or black. I don't think being black has hurt him at all, to tell you the truth.

GREENE: But was it any particular asset to Kennedy beyond having somebody to display?

BURDEN: To have somebody black? He had to have somebody black on the staff.

GREENE: But beyond that?

BURDEN: Well, I think on some occasions it was useful to have Earl. I mean he was very close to people like Johnny Ford [John Ford], who was elected mayor, and to—I forget his name now, but he went with Earl and, you know, to—from the first Evers campaign. I can't remember his name but I mean....

GREENE: He was real good friends when he went down.... At the time of King's [Martin Luther King, Jr.] death he was with one of the leaders who was a local.... I know who it is. I just can't think of his name.

BURDEN: Yeah. I do too. Youngish guy.

GREENE: Yes.

BURDEN: The guy who marched over the bridge?

GREENE: John Lewis [John R. Lewis], is it?

BURDEN: John Lewis, exactly, who was head of SNCC [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee] at one point.

GREENE: SNCC. Right.

BURDEN: Anyway, he knows people. He knew Coretta King [Coretta Scott King], and I think he was helpful during the King death, and so forth. How useful he was during the campaign I can't evaluate, because I didn't really have much dealings with him. He was off....

GREENE: Do you feel that he was treated by the Senator or by Tom Johnston or other people on the staff, like a black, that he was really treated any differently than [unintelligible].

BURDEN: No, he really wasn't, I think that Tom treated him.... Tom was aware of his limitations as a human being and that he was not totally trustworthy, that he was smart, and that he was capable when he put his mind to it. I really don't think that he was just sort of designed as the

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token spade and that was it.

GREENE: How much contact would you have with the Washington staff?

BURDEN: Very little. I mean we had some when I was working on a couple of... I did write a couple of speeches and I consulted all the time with Peter Edelman on that. You know, minor things. Then Adam and Peter would be up periodically, and Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] would sort of drift in and out like a ghost on occasion.

GREENE: But there was no problem of overlapping or...

BURDEN: Well, there was always...

GREENE: ...conflicting authorities or...

BURDEN: ...a lot of over, overlapping, I mean, they sort of used that apparently a...

GREENE: ...checks and balances.

BURDEN: ...traditional Kennedy technique. When you give eight people the same job and maybe one of them, or two of them, will get it done. But basically, there was. The New York office was very much a local office. We had the Bedford-Stuyvesant project, we had constituent problems and local issues, and the Senator whenever he was in town. There wasn't too much occasion for too much infighting. There was a certain amount of fighting about Bedford-Stuyvesant once it was down the road. I felt that Adam came in and tried to take too much credit. Now maybe the conception had been his originally but, you know, for a year all the work had been done by the people, and that was really the hard part.

GREENE: Is that an isolated thing with Adam, or did you find that on other occasions?

BURDEN: I don't know. I was not competing directly with.... You know, I was a level below Adam so I was not a threat to Adam, and in that same respect, he was not a threat to me.

GREENE: But what about with Tom?

BURDEN: Again, I think that there probably was a certain amount of that. I know that they liked each other. I like Adam. Adam is difficult and his ego can get a little bit out of hand at times, on occasion. The only occasion where it really comes back distinctly is the Bedford-

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Stuyvesant situation. Now, obviously, Tom may have many other.... He was very...

GREENE: From what you could see on that...

BURDEN: ...tactful about that kind of thing.

GREENE: ...at that time did Tom assert himself?

BURDEN: Thomas always asserted himself, but he always did it fairly tactfully and discretely, you know. I learned a lot about how to operate from Tom. He would not have a tantrum or hysterical confrontations, but he would usually make his point. There was no question about it.

GREENE: Can you think of things that people in the office came up with, proposals and projects, that turned the Senator off, that he doesn't respond well to?

BURDEN: I'm sure I can. I just hadn't, you know....

GREENE: Nothing glaring.

BURDEN: I didn't do my homework, I suppose. I probably should have spent a few hours thinking about those days.

GREENE: Would he clearly be the one to establish the priorities? Like if there were a number of things going, would he be the one to decide what came first and what should be put on the back burner, and that sort of thing?

BURDEN: Pretty much. You know, a lot of the daily stuff.... He did delegate a lot of responsibility. He delegated a lot to Tom, and a lot of the stuff inside the office. Really we could determine the absolute priorities. If there was something that you felt strongly about and felt it needed the Senator's attention, and that he should do something about it, you always had the opportunity to get to him. He wouldn't necessarily always agree obviously, but.... I don't know, he only came into the office twice in the two and one-half years that I was there.

GREENE: You're kidding, really?

BURDEN: Absolutely. He worked out of the apartment.

GREENE: I didn't realize that at all. I assumed that at some point in almost every trip he came in there.

BURDEN: No. He literally never came into the office *per se*, which was a frustration to a lot of the people like

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Angie Cabrera [Angelina Cabrera] and all the other.... You know, because they never had a shot at him. So the whole game was who was going to be at the apartment. Tom and Swani [Swani Heinstchel von Heinegg] controlled the schedules generally, so usually it would be Tom, but on other occasions I would be there or Earl would be there, or sometimes, later on, Dall Forsythe [Dall W. Forsythe] would be there. And whoever was in that slot had his ear and could control what got to him and what didn't. I never understood entirely why he worked out of the apartment, other than it was more comfortable and more convenient from his point of view. It also served the purposes of whoever was in the principal staff position at that point, because it kept him away from everybody else in the office. But then, on the other hand, there was a direct phone line between the two places. But as I say, I think he only was in that office twice.

GREENE: And that was probably on what? Social, just to meet people.

BURDEN: Yeah. I think that one time they had to take a photograph or something, and he had to come over. But, I mean, any meetings and stuff that he had were always at the apartment.

GREENE: On the press function.... Do you have any idea how long Tom did that? Tom Hogen, right?

BURDEN: Hannan. Tim Hannan.

GREENE: Hannan, right.

BURDEN: Tim Hannan and Tim Hogen.

GREENE: Okay, Tim Hogen. How long was he around?

BURDEN: Gee, I don't know, I suppose a year and a half.

GREENE: So you wouldn't have taken over the press until middle '67 or....

BURDEN: Yeah. I guess so.

GREENE: Is that right?

BURDEN: But I'm rough about that. He may have been there a year. I think he was there before I was. He had been in South America, and the story was that he had worked with the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. I think he did work for the CIA. I think Kennedy met him on the South American trip. He was hired, and he came back. He had labor, he had the press, and I forget now what other

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responsibilities. It just didn't work out for various reasons, some of which I've never been able to fully understand.

GREENE: It's a name you very rarely even hear.

BURDEN: Yeah. That's the only guy I ever saw fired in that....

GREENE: He was fired? There's not much question?

BURDEN: In a most indirect.... The Senator was very incapable, I think, of doing it directly. As I recall, it was done in a most elaborate sort of indirect way. But he was in fact being dumped.



GREENE: Were there problems that you could see in these areas because of that?

BURDEN: I think his personality, he just didn't strike it off with either Tom or with the Senator, for some reason. He's a very nice guy, and I still see him to this day. Very capable. He was not very much of a self-starter. He was not terribly aggressive. And there was a famous... I think probably the catalyst was, the Senator was doing a trip upstate and Tim went along to advance it, and to handle the press, and so forth. There was a brutal story in one of the, I don't know, Poughkeepsie paper about this character running around with his flapping rain coat, being officious, and ordering everybody around. I think that probably, you know...

GREENE: Did him in.

BURDEN: ...killed him, which was really in a way unfair. He was probably nervous. They spent about half a year just getting rid of him.

GREENE: What was really involved in handling the press in New York? Was it mostly coordinating with Wes [A. Wesley Barthelmes, Jr.], that kind of thing?

BURDEN: That was about all. I mean it is very different than what I have to do now, where you have to go out and sell an issue or a story, and so forth. It was simply a matter of coordinating the various requests that came in, deciding who would see him, who he wanted to see, who would ride in the car, and so forth.

GREENE: What do you remember about his attitudes towards different papers and people?

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BURDEN: Well, he had definite preferences. The funniest one I always remember is Jim Stevenson [James Stevenson] who writes for the *New Yorker* and who wrote several pieces for the *New Yorker*, he's basically a cartoonist although he does feature works of fiction, for the *New Yorker*, but he always did stuff on Kennedy. He was about as silent as the Senator. I mean, he was a very introverted man, but very appealing nonetheless. I liked him. He would always sort of show up at the UN Plaza.

GREENE: You mean on his own, or you'd set it up?

BURDEN: I would set it up. He would come. Usually I would make sure that he got to see the Senator, or when going back out to the airport

that he would come in the car. He never would say anything. The Senator would never say anything, but he was very comfortable in his presence for some reason. Kennedy would say he really liked Jim Stevenson. I would say to the Senator, "Is it all right if Stevenson comes in the car?" He'd say, "Absolutely." He really liked him.

GREENE: And then he'd go write his story on their lack of conversation.

BURDEN: Well, in a way. He could [unintelligible] those pieces if you wanted to, but.... Newfield [Jack Newfield], he enjoyed. Newfield would constantly test him or give him ideas or suggestions, and so forth. I think he liked that.

GREENE: Did you find that towards the period where it got really heavy about his running or not running and the war, that he shied away from Newfield and Breslin [James Breslin] and Kempton [Murray Kempton] and some of those other people that were putting pressure on him?

BURDEN: Yeah, he did. Very much so. That was a very agonizing period.

GREENE: Did that make it real hard for you?

BURDEN: Yeah, it did because we all had a shot on that. He seemed to become more and more withdrawn, and more and more kind of depressed during that whole period. You know, I remember once in the car... Everybody else was probably urging him to do something on the war, and I think that's what he really wanted to do. But there was that other sort of practical side of it that was holding him back. He didn't even argue it. He just became sort of testy, and shut it off. And he definitely did sort of shy away.

GREENE: What about the *New York Times*?

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BURDEN: He had the same paranoia, I think, that all politicians probably have about the *New York Times*, that it still represented the ultimate standard in a way, but that it was unfair and it was prejudiced, and so forth. He would complain sometimes about people like Oates [James F. Oates, Jr.] and so forth, that he felt had never given him a chance.

GREENE: Did you set up some of those luncheons and things with the boards?

BURDEN: No, I think probably Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz] did that directly. At that level then Frank would take over.

GREENE: What is your own feeling reading the papers, of course then, and you

still do. Do you think he really did get treated unfairly by the *Times* or was it the traditional paranoia?

BURDEN: I think it's an awful lot of traditional paranoia. I think that the *Times* can go off on a tangent occasionally, but it may be just purely circumstantial. I think the editorial page, obviously, is completely separate from the news. I think the news end of it makes a very concerted effort to be fair. I think sometimes the editorial board is isolated and have set notions, and don't want to have to be complicated by having their long held assumptions challenged, and so forth. You know, I think there was definitely a skeptical attitude about him, that all things being equal, they weren't skeptical about a lot of other people. You know. They didn't get skeptical about John Lindsay until five years later. And to the extent that other people might get the benefit of the doubt and he didn't, that's true, and yet he carried both the disadvantages and advantages of his background and of his history.

GREENE: If there was a story in the *Times* or for that matter in any paper that he felt was unfair or unfavorable, would he ask you to do something about it, and would you?

BURDEN: He would occasionally.... I mean if it were just a straight reporter, say someone like Marty Arnold [Martin Arnold] or somebody like that, who was quite close to him on the *Times*, or even if it were Newfield or—there was a guy from *Newsweek* who was around a lot—he would bitch to them directly. That's the best way of doing it. Any kind of high level complaints I never made. Now, whether they were made in private in Washington, I don't know. I think probably they were, on occasion. Although I think he had a kind of fatalistic view about the press, but I don't think he felt it could be manipulated, or certainly not in that heavy-handed, stupid way of trying to go to the editors or the

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publishers and try and change things.

GREENE: What about Reston [James B. Reston]? How did he feel about him?

BURDEN: I don't really remember, frankly.

GREENE: Okay. Is there anything else on the press that comes to mind right now, by the way? Maybe some specific anecdotes or that kind of thing?

BURDEN: I'm sure there will. You know, the minute you turn that thing off, ten things will come to mind. I mean, I draw a blank right now. I'm sorry.

GREENE: What about the labor part of the responsibility? What was involved in that?

BURDEN: Well, I really did have the responsibility for labor, which was a little bit ridiculous in a way. One of my favorite experiences—I forget what the year was—but when I went as his representative to the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial organizations] convention in Miami, something I give him great credit for having the confidence to send me. I was the only one in the office who was doing it and who wanted to do it, and he had the courage to let me off. And needless to say, I was not exactly necessarily the image that one would expect down there. I think probably some people felt insulted by it. You know, there's no question about that.

GREENE: It seems like it would be unusual for him not to go himself, at least a token appearance.

BURDEN: Well, he didn't, and I'm not sure whether he'd been the year before.

GREENE: I can remember two different speeches, but I don't remember the years at this point.

BURDEN: I can't either. It was never even discussed whether he was going. I think he might have been away or something. I don't know. Although I do remember checking in with him, so he was there. I don't know. [Unintelligible] He was not on very good terms with Meany [George Meany]. I remember going with him, the guy who used to represent—I think he's either retired or dead now.... Mike Sampson, who represents the Con-Ed [Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Inc.] workers, summoned Kennedy for a meeting in his office. Kennedy had just made a speech that actually I had worked on, an environmental speech where he suggested contracting to buy power from Canada, which was

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clean power, and which obviously none of the unions liked. So we went into this meeting, and Sampson was about four feet nine. He was tiny, like it was a Mike Quill [Michael J. Quill] character with an absolutely.... He absolutely just slaughtered Kennedy, and Kennedy sat there a little bit like a little boy being chewed out by the principal saying very little and Sampson saying, "Well, we supported you in '65," and the whole thing. It was something he had to go and take. It wasn't going to change his position. It sort of cleared the air, I guess, for Sampson and so forth, but it was the first time I'd ever seen anybody really lay into him.

GREENE: What happens after a meeting like that when you're alone and he....

BURDEN: He laughs.

GREENE: He wasn't angry...

BURDEN: No, he laughs.

GREENE: ...that he had to go through that kind of thing?

BURDEN: He knew he had to. No, he wasn't. He knew that that was part of the price he had to pay, and he laughed about it afterwards. But I remember being amazed. It was the first time I'd ever seen anybody.... Because everybody was always quite deferential. God, Sampson just shot his ass off, really. It was quite funny to see.

GREENE: What kind of routine tasks were involved in this labor responsibility?

BURDEN: Basically, staying in contact with various people. If Gotbaum [Victor Gotbaum] wanted to see him, or if Shanker [Albert Shanker] ever wanted to see him, the people like that who wanted to see him when he was in New York, setting that up. I remember arranging a couple of cocktail parties at the UN Plaza for labor people. This was all pre-'68 and it was obviously warming up for '68, or at least keeping that option open, for which we had two sort of smallish cocktail parties, which was attempting to mend a lot of fences or touch a lot of bases...

GREENE: How did he feel?

BURDEN: ...because he didn't really enjoy the kind of ceremonial, and often very necessary, aspects of any political job, and certainly of that office, of just massaging these guys periodically. He was not very good about that. To the extent that we could, the staff was supposed to do it, but they were never very satisfied with a phone call or

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a visit from some staff person.

GREENE: That's what I was going to ask you. Would you initiate this sort of thing? The cocktail party.

BURDEN: Yeah, yeah, I remember that I did. That was my suggestion. I said, "You've got to see some of these guys. If you don't want to go around seeing them individually...."

GREENE: And he would be agreeable.

BURDEN: Yeah, he would. Yeah. So he was agreeable. We were going to take him to see Pete Brennan [Peter J. Brennan] too, which was a very stiff.... He was a little bit uneasy with some of those guys.

GREENE: Can you remember his attitudes towards some of them individually?

BURDEN: Like with Brennan, he basically knew that Brennan didn't like him, but they knew they had to deal with each other, so it was very correct and very formal and very stiffly cordial. It lasted fifteen minutes. Nothing of substance really transpired.

GREENE: Well, what comes out of a meeting like that?

BURDEN: I never really understand it, but it was obviously important to Brennan...

GREENE: To be able to say that was Kennedy.

BURDEN: ...and it was obviously important that Kennedy came to his office, and he didn't go to Kennedy's office, that kind of thing. It's like an ambassador calling on a head of state or something like that.

GREENE: Who else did he...?

BURDEN: Well, he always had a lot.... Ray Corbett [Raymond R. Corbett] wasn't around, but he had or has a marvelous secretary, who was really the brains behind Ray Corbett, called Agnes. She loved the Senator, and I was always talking to her, because she said, "He's blowing any labor support he ever had and he's got to do more," and all this kind of stuff. He would see Ray periodically. Ray was his supporter so he was not uptight about that. When he had to deal with people he knew hated him, he would sort of freeze. I mean, he would just sort of steel himself to it and go through it.

GREENE: What about Reuther [Walter P. Reuther]?

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BURDEN: Well, you know, that happened down in Washington. Now, I didn't have much to do with the Washington end of it, but I think that there was obviously much more identity of viewpoint there. On a personality basis I can't really tell you, because I never saw them together. But I think probably Joe Dolan can answer that.

GREENE: What about people like Alex Rose and Dubinsky [David Dubinsky]?

BURDEN: Dubinsky was so easy to get along with. I think the Senator really liked him for what he was. I remember at least two or three times Dubinsky coming to the apartment just for a chat, and occasionally there was business transacted, but not that often. I remember Rose on a couple of occasions.

But I think very consciously the Senator tried to stay out of New York politics as much as he could get away with it, and actually the times that he did get involved it wasn't very.... I remember the battle when Ronnie Eldridge [Ronnie M. Eldridge] had just been beaten [unintelligible] and I was with him that day. Well, actually he had gone skiing or something like that.

GREENE: That's right. He came back.

BURDEN: Joe Dolan was in town, and John Burns [John J. Burns]. They were supposed to be putting this thing together. They decided they'd get him to come back. It was a four hour ride which he was not happy about. I went to pick him up at the airport, and he said, "What's going on?" I said, "Well, I really don't know, but Burns and Dolan are at the apartment." Then he said, "Well, I assume I'm here for some purpose." I said, "I assume so, too, but don't ask me." So we got to the apartment and we walked in the door, and Joe and John were there, and he said, "Okay, who do I call? What do I do?" Both of them said, "Well, we don't know, Senator. We just thought, you know, this is the situation." I've never—he blew. He absolutely went through the window, practically.

GREENE: What did he say?

BURDEN: I didn't see him lose his temper, you know, overtly like that very often. He said, "God damn it, you know, you bring me down here and at least you ought to know exactly what I'm supposed to be doing, and why it makes a difference for me to be here. You bring me down here to discuss whether I should be here or not? I mean, this is absolutely idiotic." Of course, by that time, I mean he looked badly because he lost a fight. He got on the phone when it was too late to do anything. I remember him calling

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various people and just knowing there was nothing he could do.

GREENE: That sounds uncharacteristic, though, especially of Dolan, isn't it?

BURDEN: Well, I don't know. I admit that Joe is perceptive, but his sort of lackadaisical style, there's often a good deal of method in it. But on that occasion, it was just a botch up. I mean it was just badly handled.

GREENE: Well, even Dolan didn't get involved in it until pretty late in the game.

BURDEN: Well, that's right. In a way, he sort of let all.... There was really nobody doing New York. I mean, theoretically Steve was supposed to be doing it, but he would do it at a sort of rarified level. If you're in the business of trying to make county leaders, then you've got to have pretty good head counts

and a lot of contacts and a real operation going, which he did not have. John Burns is a very sweet guy, but he's not the most competent operator.

GREENE: Is there anything else on labor I feel like I should have some really good questions for you that don't come to mind?

BURDEN: I think what's interesting is his ambivalent attitude about organized labor. I mean, being a lay transitional Democratic figure between his brother [John F. Kennedy] and, let's say, what came after, McGovern [George S. McGovern] and so forth, that he had a sense that....

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

He knew that that was part of his constituency. But at the same time, he was aware that really his progressive or liberal ideas were out of whack with the Brennans and some of the older-line Meany-type labor leaders, and he didn't really work very hard to cultivate them or to hold them. In a way, you almost had accepted that rather major change really in political alignment, if you will. He related very well to the liberal labor leaders Tony Mazzachi [Anthony Mazzachi], who's the legislative director of the oil and atomic workers [Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers International Union]...

GREENE: I remember that.

BURDEN: ...in Washington.

GREENE: He gave a major speech before them.

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BURDEN: Yeah. Yeah. Mazzachi was sort of my rabbi and everything else in Miami. I mean, I was a little bit lost, and he really was enormously helpful to me. Mazzachi is an intellectual really and probably far more radical than the Senator. But even Dubinsky and people like that he really got along well with, and had no trouble with. But you could already see this breaking away of the old-line traditional Democratic....

GREENE: I would imagine the war had a lot to do with that, too, because that was a definite....

BURDEN: Yeah, but this was even prior to his break on the war.

GREENE: Oh, really?

BURDEN: It was hard to relate to Brennan. His whole point of view about blacks and unemployment and the building trades, and so forth, was in direct



conflict with what Kennedy stood for. I mean, Bedford-Stuyvesant was not exactly any interest of the building trade.

GREENE: In Miami, where you said people tended to feel insulted or shortchanged...

BURDEN: No, only a few.

GREENE: ...is that the kind of thing that you just sensed yourself, or did it actually come back to the Senator?

BURDEN: There was a comment in the *Wall Street Journal*, not so much that people were insulted, but that I was a curious representative to be there. They made some comment about the cut of my suits, as I recall. It may have been my own insecurity, to tell you the truth, but obviously, Meany wasn't about to have a private meeting with me. I learned a lot, and I'm eternally grateful for the fact that he had enough confidence in me to let me do it.

GREENE: What other special projects besides the Bedford-Stuyvesant thing did you work on?

BURDEN: Well, Bedford-Stuyvesant, for the first, probably, year that I was there, was almost a hundred percent of what we were doing, and one of my own individual projects was actually the first factory to relocate in Bedford-Stuyvesant. I don't know what it's called, the E-Zee Metals Company—I think it's probably gone bankrupt since—but anyway, that was my great triumph, getting them to relocate there.

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GREENE: Well, let's see. You came in in....

BURDEN: Well, I came in in—let me see now—it would be in '66, wouldn't it?

GREENE: Yes. Like January '66, February?

BURDEN: No, earlier than that. I started in September. I got out of law school in June and I started, I know, in either August or September.

GREENE: Of '66.

BURDEN: I think so.

GREENE: Okay.

BURDEN: I graduated from college in '63.

GREENE: Because his first visit to Bedford-Stuyvesant was in February of '66, right?

BURDEN: Un-hunh.

GREENE: So between February and May was the period that Johnston was putting the whole thing together, with those weekly meetings, right? Now, you weren't involved in that, would you think?

BURDEN: No, but it was still.... I mean the whole change of setting up the second corporation, not the development corporation but the fight between Jones and Chisholm occurred when I was there. So what do we have?

GREENE: Okay, that was February and March of '67.

BURDEN: Yeah. So I came in September of '66.

GREENE: Okay, the public announcement was in December, so you came on and got involved before it actually was announced.

BURDEN: Right. Right.

GREENE: Okay, why don't you describe the kinds of things you were doing in that period.

BURDEN: Well, I remember going out to several of those meetings in the fall, the first one being at Jones' house. I did some work with Pei [I.M. Pei] and the people in Pei's office on the original Superblock thing.

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GREENE: That was January....

BURDEN: Yeah. As I say, I was working on this relocation thing which involved getting federal funds and a number of other things. I did some work on that original seven million dollar grant, that Kennedy amendment. I'm a little vague at this. I know that my first year was pretty much spent outside of the basic housekeeping stuff in the office.

GREENE: Did you really have, besides relocating this factory.... Or perhaps that became a full-time task. But besides that, were you pretty much working with Tom, or did you have...?

BURDEN: Yes. I was really working for Tom. He was the ringmaster. There was not question about that.

GREENE: What are your recollections of the February-March blowup and the reorganization of the Restoration Corporation [Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation]?

BURDEN: Well, you just were dealing with some very explosive personalities, and it became increasingly apparent that Tom Jones was not the most stable guy in the world, either. He came into the office several times and met with Tom and with me, and just went berserk about these women were cutting off his balls, and he couldn't go on. So gradually the decision evolved the way to get rid of him was to set up a new corporation where he was more in control. It was sort of bizarre to me at that time. Having been in politics for the last five years and being with a number of community types and seeing community groups jockey for position and power, it's much more understandable. This was clearly, and they recognized it to be, the vehicle of a real cornucopia for that community, so whoever got hold of it was going to benefit substantially. So the existing structure—in Bedford-Stuyvesant, it was the community corporation as it is in many of the low-income communities—wanted to hold onto it just the way, for example, in East Harlem the community corporation controls the school board and controls virtually any kind of government program in the area. It's a small handful of people.

You know, a lot of the criticism about the poverty pimps is justified, in my opinion. I think the basic attempt in Bedford-Stuyvesant was just not to break that a little bit, but at least to bring in more people, hopefully with real community basis, who weren't part of the ingrained, existing power structure that controlled everything else. In any community that's a tough fight. I haven't followed it closely enough since, and I don't really know enough about Bedford-Stuyvesant politics since to know the extent to which that has

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succeeded. They have a way, even though they lost that battle, of ultimately taking it over anyway. But that was the premise, and it was, you know, a very emotional trauma.

GREENE: Did you feel that Jones' grievances were largely legitimate, that it really wasn't a functioning body and they were being unreasonable in terms of expansion? Or was he mainly out for himself?

BURDEN: Well, it was a little bit of both. I think that argument was legitimate in many respects. They didn't want to let power out of their hands. At the same time, Jones could be extremely unreasonable, and Jones wanted to control the situation.

GREENE: Were you involved at all in trying to select people for the expansion before it blew up?

BURDEN: Just marginally. Just marginally, because I hadn't been there long enough and I really didn't know enough about Bedford-Stuyvesant. I think that Earl did have some input into that, I assume.

GREENE: Do you remember how and by whom the scheme was hatched to do what they finally did, let them vote and after they refused to expand and dissolve the board and form the new one? Do you remember how that transpired?

BURDEN: As I recall, I think it was Tom Jones, and.... I remember it being discussed and I'm sure there were other people involved, but I can't remember exactly. I don't think the Senator was directly consulted on it at all.

GREENE: Well, my understanding, at least, is that after they had hatched this scheme then they called and he was again out of town, and just got his okay.

BURDEN: Yeah, that's very much the way Tom would operate. He would work it all out and then it would be presented to him in a fairly general way. But he backed Tom up.

GREENE: Do you remember being nervous in that time? That always seemed to me to be a really daring and potentially explosive kind of a maneuver.

BURDEN: It was. It was basically sort of exciting for me, because I hadn't been there that long so my neck really wasn't on the line. Tom's was much more on the line than mine. I remember just a lot of activity and a lot of emotion and a lot of late nights, but that was adrenalin for me, because I didn't have that much to lose, if you will.

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GREENE: Had you met Frank Thomas [Franklin A. Thomas] at that point? Or do you remember anything about the search for...?

BURDEN: I do remember the search, and I don't remember exactly when the first time I met him was. I remember when he was being considered, meeting him, being favorably impressed. Everybody is. There's always the flaw.... I remember when he first signed on. And then there was a big battle, which Earl did a lot to nurture, about what kind of car he was going to get. They were going to get him an Oldsmobile and he didn't feel that an Oldsmobile was suitable to his position. There was a big internal battle for about a month about whether he was going to get a Cadillac or an Oldsmobile.

GREENE: I never heard that.

BURDEN: Yeah, yeah.

GREENE: Do you remember any criticism, also, of the fact that he quickly became a member of so many boards of directors and was given so many honors?

BURDEN: That was a little bit.... It wasn't immediate. A lot of that was due to the fact that he met with the business boards, the Watsons and the Paleys, and so forth. I know personally that Paley [William S. Paley], both from the point of view of the Museum of Modern Art and from the point of view of Columbia University.... Everybody was looking for a black trustee at that point. Not Kenneth Clark necessarily, not the guys that already were on every other board. Frank was largely a new face. He impressed everybody. He was solid. He was businesslike. He was responsible. Just through the exposure he had to the Bedford-Stuyvesant board, he was asked to join five or six different trustees' groups.

GREENE: Did you regard him, or did others around there regard him, as kind of Benno Schmidt's [Benno C. Schmidt] boy?

BURDEN: Well, to the extent that Benno Schmidt was by far the most active business member and that they automatically fell in together. From the beginning he was not, he didn't come in as Benno Schmidt's boy.

GREENE: No. I meant, was that an alliance that was apparent?

BURDEN: I think it grew out of their working relationship. It could have been an alliance quite frankly with anybody, but Schmidt was the key guy and the guy who spent the most time on him.

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GREENE: What about the fighting that went on after the whole thing was reorganized and Frank Thomas and Judge Jones....

BURDEN: Well, that was there from the beginning.

GREENE: Was it?

BURDEN: I know that Earl hated Frank, too, because Earl could manipulate Tom Jones, and therefore Jones was his boy. So I think that Earl was the one who blew up the whole thing about the car into a big thing and said, "Man, all he cares about is his car," and so forth, which wasn't entirely fair. Although I think probably the external image was and is very important to Frank. He just has redone his

brownstone out there, and I heard from someone the other day that he was asked to have it photographed for *House and Garden*, and he really wanted to do it. Finally, somebody suggested to Frank, “Do you think that’s such a good idea?” Apparently it was quite a lavish redecorating job that was done. He wanted to do it until finally somebody explained that it might not be too helpful to have it splashed all over the magazines.

GREENE: Wait until he changes jobs.

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: Did Johnston have problems working with Jones?

BURDEN: Everybody did ultimately, because Jones is slightly psychotic in my opinion. Under pressure Jones would just absolutely freak out, and particularly during that whole board thing when he was raving most of the time.

GREENE: How did the Senator handle him?

BURDEN: He’d just stay away from him. He let Tom Johnston deal with him.

GREENE: Was there discussion of trying to ease him out?

BURDEN: Yeah, but by that time they were stuck with him. I mean they had created him.

GREENE: They had gone that far.

BURDEN: They had really made him. They had too much invested in him, in a way, to dump him. It was too much of a concession of defeat. There was a good deal of this thought. [Interruption]

GREENE: How closely informed was Robert Kennedy kept about the

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Bedford-Stuyvesant thing once it began to roll along?

BURDEN: Tom Johnston had a lot of day-to-day discretion and authority. Also the Senator did know how to delegate responsibility, and once he had confidence in somebody he would really let them go with it. He didn’t have a lot of day-to-day contact with it. He really didn’t need to. Tom would set up a day, for example, in New York City where there were people that he had to see in connection with Bedford-Stuyvesant, and he would go and see the various businessmen. He obviously would be consulted on the big decisions, like the board thing, but only after it had all been

orchestrated, really. A great deal of the credit, I think, has to go to Tom Johnston in terms of....

BURDEN: It was a massive thing to put together. It really was.

GREENE: Would the Senator come up with ideas of his own or was he...?

BURDEN: He would, but I tell you Tom was a great generator of ideas.

GREENE: Generator.

BURDEN: He really was. I mean it was almost a matter of sort of choosing among the ideas that he generated, and that some of the other.... Schmidt was very innovative, and so forth.

GREENE: And Johnston got along well with the members of the D and S [Bedford-Stuyvesant Development and Services Corporation] and the Restoration Corporations?

BURDEN: Very. Oh sure. Tom was on a lot of boards, too, as a result of that. He was on the board of the Whitney [Whitney Museum of American Art], and the City Center, I think as a result of working with Schmidt. He got along very well. In the beginning, the guy that he relied on a lot and that was very helpful in terms of suggesting businessmen was Eli Jacobs [Eli S. Jacobs].

GREENE: Yeah, I was going to ask you—in fact, I should have asked you before—if you were around at all during that period with Eli Jacobs and if he really was...?

BURDEN: Yeah, I was around before that whole corporation was created, and did participate in a lot of the discussions about who would be good, and so forth.

GREENE: Jacobs was originally Tom Johnston's suggestion, as I remember. Right?

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BURDEN: I think so. Yeah. He was a friend of Tom's.

GREENE: How did he feel when it became obvious that he wasn't working out? Of course, he was only going to be there temporarily, from the beginning.

BURDEN: Yeah. I don't know, Tom, he could recognize.... He was pragmatic,

and he wasn't the kind of person that he would have such a stake in that he'd have to hang on to regardless.

GREENE: Did he recognize the shortcomings?

BURDEN: Yes, he did. He was very helpful in the formative stages in terms of which businessmen to seek out, people like Oates, the insurance guy, and so forth, people that I didn't know about and that Tom didn't know about.

GREENE: Did you have anything to do with Paley's getting involved?

BURDEN: Well, I talked to him about it. I did suggest it, but, you know....

GREENE: Suggested it to the Senator, you mean?

BURDEN: Yeah. I also had known Schmidt, and had enormous respect for him and heartily endorsed that suggestion, but I think that was [unintelligible] suggestion?

GREENE: What about once Doar [John M. Doar] comes on? Or do you remember, first of all, that whole search for who went to succeed Jacobs?

BURDEN: It was never felt frankly, as I recall it, that Eli was supposed to be just transitional or temporary. My recollection is fairly vague about that whole period and who else was looked at. I remember several people coming in. When did Doar come on?

GREENE: Very late.

BURDEN: It was late.

GREENE: Just before the campaign. I don't remember the exact date, but it was a matter of, maybe, six weeks at the most.

BURDEN: So, as I say, I basically don't have much recollection of Doar's role or how it worked out and everything

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since, because once the campaign started, that was it. Then we were all doing something else.

GREENE: Could you see problems brewing with Thomas and almost anybody



who would have moved into the D and S position?

BURDEN: Yeah, sure.

GREENE: Was their discussion, at that point before the campaign, of what kind of a future this arrangement had?

BURDEN: [Note: Greene said "Thomas", but Burden thinks she said "Jones".] Well, there was. Everybody knew he was a little bit unbalanced, but it was something we were stuck with and the feeling was, once the thing was on solid ground and was operating and had something to show, that there would be more flexibility in terms of either getting around Jones or getting rid of him.

GREENE: Did I say Jones? I'm sorry. I meant Frank Thomas, in terms of the two corporate structures, and a problem with, really, Frank Thomas and anybody that....

BURDEN: There was a lot of thought given at once point to having just the one combined board. There was a feeling that you could never really get anything out of the Watsons and the Paleys and the Schmidts if you had them sitting down with Tom Johnston and Shirley Chisholm. You know, never the twain shall meet. I think there's probably some validity in that on paper, obviously, the theory was that Thomas and Doar were not competitive, that Doar was only there to support and to bring additional resources, and all the rest of it, to Thomas. Doar was so low key and so tactful, that although there would obviously be some competition built into the structure, if anybody could diminish it, it would be a personality type like Doar. I think that's partially one of the reasons, I suppose, he was hired for the Watergate investigation. He really doesn't threaten people.

GREENE: He's very discreet, too, and I think they need some of that in there.

BURDEN: Exactly. Exactly.

GREENE: My understanding, from talking to Frank Thomas, is that he was unhappy with the whole idea that two boards.... Before he even came on that was one of the major reasons for his reluctance to begin with. I wondered, even before the campaign distracted everyone, if you could see

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that conflict brewing.

BURDEN: Again it was like the whole theory of having eight people do the same job, that everybody was aware that Frank Thomas was smart enough to

know that he would like to have all the power at Bedford to himself. But Kennedy and Tom Johnston had to make the judgment that the overall objectives would be better served if there was this division. There was a basic reluctance to put all the marbles in the Jones-Thomas corporation. There's no question about that.

GREENE: Because theoretically, I think if Thomas wanted to, he could just do away with the D and S, isn't that right?

BURDEN: I'm not sure I know what you mean. Legally or in terms of that structure?

GREENE: Yes.

BURDEN: I suppose I don't remember that specifically.

GREENE: That he could almost just say "we don't need you anymore," since that was sort of the ultimate goal anyway, which was to work into an independent....

BURDEN: The theory is that they always needed.... The hope there was to bring the private sector into the rebuilding of the ghetto, and that the Schmidt-Doar operation represented the private sector, and that you could get companies or corporations to take a risk with Schmidt and Paley and Watson. Whereas they wouldn't with a community-based corporation.

GREENE: What about Graves with this whole two-board structure? Did you ever hear complaints about it from him?

BURDEN: I'm sure there probably were some. I don't remember specifically at this point.

GREENE: What's your feeling about how the Senator felt about the project towards the end? Was he pleased?

BURDEN: I always felt, I think everybody in the office felt, that it got better press than it deserved. Being close to it, you were much more aware of the problems and the failures. One of the biggest disappointments which, I think, the Senator fully shared, is that the private sector really didn't come forward. I remember that Watson was about to open up a new factory somewhere in Connecticut or something, and he'd already been on the board for six months, and everybody started scrambling to try and tell him, "Well, what the hell are you...."

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GREENE: But they did come in at the end.

BURDEN: Yeah, but that was a last minute switch, and only after heavy lobbying, not only by Kennedy directly but by other members of the board, Schmidt and Paley, as I recall, went to him and said, "Look, you've got to do this." That was sort of symptomatic. Here was a guy who was on the board and it didn't occur to him that they put the IBM [International Business Machines Corporation] plant into Bedford-Stuyvesant. There was a general disillusionment about what the private sector was really willing to do in terms of a project like this.

There was always, inside and being close to it, an acute sense of the pettiness and foibles within the community itself. Frank Thomas' concern about what car he was going to get, Tom Jones jockeying for power against somebody else. You know, the energy and the time that was wasted on how lavish the offices were going to be and who was the chosen one in a given moment, and so forth. But the press.... And I remember Newfield did an article for *Life*.

GREENE: He also has a good chapter in his book on it.

BURDEN: Yeah. Everything that was written about it was just euphoric, based on the concept and the idea. So to that extent I think that it looked like a success. I got the distinct feeling that the Senator, before he died, everybody was unsure whether the thing would work or not, or how much difference it would really make.

GREENE: Did you feel, though, that it was at least partly because it was really a laboratory for this type of project, that what you really needed was some significant margin of success to show what could be done, and then business would generate business?

BURDEN: There was a recognition of that, and that's why the first projects were just very visual ones. The rehabilitation of the...

GREENE: Superblock.

BURDEN: ...superblock. Before the superblock there was sort of a neighborhood restoration project, just painting the outsides of the buildings. Very visual, symbolic things. You lost perspective being very close to it. I mean, I kind of have a different perspective about it now, and I think that it was a lot more successful than it seemed to me to be at the time. I think probably the Senator had, in a way, more distance from it than any of us in New York had, and he had that perspective.

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GREENE: What about the fiscal soundness of the project? Most of these community projects seem to crumble on fiscal responsibilities. How do

you account for it?

BURDEN: Well, as I mentioned, the thing that didn't work out, and I think the expectation or the hope was that it would become economically self-sufficient and viable, and that the private sector would provide the funds that in every other instance government had had to provide, and that it would either get ripped off or the money would stop. Basically, the money that got Bedford-Stuyvesant off the ground was federal money, anyway. It wasn't private money.

GREENE: I was thinking even of the fact that there were no major accusations of corruption and misuse of funds, and that kind of thing. Do you think it was the two-board structure?

BURDEN: Yes, I think that was one of the reasons for the two-board structure, very clearly.

GREENE: How long did you stay on, by the way? Did you go back after the campaign?

BURDEN: Well, we went back for probably a month and a half to close the office. That was about it.

GREENE: And you didn't stay in touch with the Bedford-Stuyvesant project after that?

BURDEN: No, because by that point, we all had been completely removed in terms of being with the campaign anyway. I had had, over the last year anyway, less and less to do out there. It was on its own feet at that point. Tom still played.... But even he had a lot less to do with it at that stage.

GREENE: Do you have much feeling from looking at it, even at this distance, how important Robert Kennedy was in keeping that going?

BURDEN: Oh, it wouldn't have happened without him, clearly. I mean, he was the glue that put all the elements together. If it hadn't been for his initiative and what he represented and his commitment to it and the enormous amount of work that Tom did and other people in the office did, it certainly wouldn't have happened. It needed that vehicle, and if the vehicle hadn't been Robert Kennedy's office, it wouldn't have worked either.

GREENE: Was there much concern at the time of the assassination

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whether or not it would stay afloat without his leadership?

BURDEN: I think there was. But as I say, I was not very close to it at that point and you can probably get a much better answer to that from other people. But, you know, Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] immediately took a very active role in it, Tom was still involved, by that time, you know, Benno Schmidt was. Once it was going it had a much better chance of survival without him, although as I recall there was concern. I think it's one of the reasons that Ethel took such an active role.

GREENE: What are your recollections, by the way, of the amount of help and support you got from Lindsay and Javits [Jacob K. Javits]? I guess Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller], very little help.

BURDEN: I think that Javits was important in terms of the amendment that brought seven million dollars, or whatever it was. It was jointly sponsored. Beyond that, I don't know if we got any help from anybody.

GREENE: Did you find Javits cooperative, though, when you needed something?

BURDEN: Yeah, we didn't really need that much from him. He would come to the board meetings and, you know, bluster on. Lindsay could have been probably more helpful than he was. I think there was sort of a formal cooperation, but no in-depth cooperation.

GREENE: He wasn't doing anything to promote it.

BURDEN: Yeah. Well, you know, they didn't like each other particularly, Lindsay and Kennedy. I don't know really how Lindsay felt about Kennedy, but I know Kennedy didn't like Lindsay. Slightly irrational.

GREENE: What's your feeling of why?

BURDEN: I think basically that, consciously or subconsciously, Lindsay was a threat. The only irrational reactions to people I ever saw in Kennedy was when there was somehow a threat.

GREENE: Who else comes to mind?

BURDEN: Well, he didn't like McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy], needless to say. He really didn't like him at all. Any sort of politician that in any way had aspirations to his constituency he didn't like.

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GREENE: Did he ever refer to Lindsay as a lightweight?

BURDEN: Oh, yeah. Sure. He had sort of an implicit contempt for Lindsay. As I say, it was largely irrational. I don't think he even had that much to do with Lindsay. He had a lot more to do with McCarthy, obviously, in the Senate and so forth, but with Lindsay it was all sort of an emotional reaction.

GREENE: Is there anything else on the Senate that we should talk about even if we don't do it today, but that you could suggest and I could prepare for next time?

BURDEN: Okay, let me give some thought to it this time. I should have probably given more thought to it before.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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