

**Thomas M.C. Johnston Oral History Interview – RFK#3, 01/21/1970**  
Administrative Information

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**Date of Interview:** January 21, 1970  
**Place of Interview:** New York, New York  
**Length:** 57 pages

**Biographical Note**

Thomas M. C. Johnston was Executive Assistant for Senator Robert F. Kennedy, New York City (1966 - 1968), and Robert F. Kennedy's representative for the Bedford-Stuyvesant Corporation. This interview focuses on the formation of Bedford – Stuyvesant, political consequences of Bedford – Stuyvesant for Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], and RFK's attitudes towards Bedford- Stuyvesant, among other things.

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**Suggested Citation**

Thomas M.C. Johnston, recorded interview by Larry J. Hackman, January 21, 1970, (page number), Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library.

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Thomas M.C. Johnston – RFK #3  
Table of Contents

| <u>Page</u> | <u>Topic</u>  |
|-------------|---|
| 242         | Reflections on Jack Newfield’s account of Bedford – Stuyvesant  |
| 243         | Early conversations and stages of community projects  |
| 247         | Problems with self-run community organizations: Haryou – Act, the National Urban League, and others   |
| 249         | The start-up of Bedford – Stuyvesant: forming ideas, planning, choosing a location, existing community groups, Robert F. Kennedy’s [RFK] interaction with the community, funding, corporate structure |
| 265         | Communication amongst public officials: RFK, Senator Javits, Mitchell Sviridoff, John Lindsay   |
| 266         | Press and public meetings regarding Bedford – Stuyvesant  |
| 267         | Bedford – Stuyvesant staff turnover, board members, and projected future  |
| 271         | Political consequences of Bedford – Stuyvesant for RFK  |
| 274         | Putting a board together: RFK’s input   |
| 275         | The Restoration Corporation side of Bedford – Stuyvesant: formation, challenges, group dynamics, reconstituting the board, RFK involvement, and involvement of Senator Javits and John Lindsay        |
| 290         | Accomplishments of Bedford – Stuyvesant, RFK’s involvement. And the effect of RFK’s death   |
| 292         | Differences with Adam Walinsky  |
| 294         | Seeking funding from the private sector for Bedford – Stuyvesant  |
| 295         | RFK’s attitudes towards Bedford – Stuyvesant  |
| 298         | Getting International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) set up in Bedford – Stuyvesant  |

Third Oral History Interview

with

THOMAS M. JOHNSTON, JR.

January 21, 1970  
New York, New York

By Larry J. Hackman

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

HACKMAN: Have you read [Jack] Newfield's chapter on Bedford-Stuyvesant?

JOHNSTON: Yeah, but not recently. But, that's a good place to start. I mean, I haven't . . .

HACKMAN: I was just going to ask you what you thought of it in general, what you just remember, whether there was any inaccuracy. It probably doesn't make any sense to go over that directly. Anything else that . . .

JOHNSTON: Basically, I'd say he has a pretty good account. I think that . . .

HACKMAN: Best you've seen?

JOHNSTON: Yes. He worked harder at putting it together, and I think it has a better, a pretty good feel for it.

HACKMAN: All right. [INTERRUPTION] Why don't you just start out then with what you can

remember about your first conversations about either, specifically, Bedford-Stuyvesant or something like Bedford-Stuyvesant?

JOHNSTON: All right.

HACKMAN: You know, were other things considered?

JOHNSTON: Well, we talked about the volunteer project, the different projects we got . . .

HACKMAN: We didn't talk about all the different ones. You talked about trying to . . .

JOHNSTON: We had sort of the idea of how we got going in those things. In the New York office--it was New York City, really--we had a chance to get really, really able lawyers who were, generally, in most cases Democrats who were in their thirties, working for big law firms, who didn't have much chance to do directly any satisfying kind of political work or public service work. So if you could work it out with them so that they could give you a certain amount of their time, with the understanding that they wouldn't always be free, and that it wouldn't be in any way full time, they could take on quite a lot of jobs that you really wouldn't be able to trust to too many other people on your--well, that you couldn't afford to hire people to do and you wouldn't trust to just, say, a high school volunteer. Once they got the sense of what the job was--you could leave them pretty free to do it.

So we had a lot of projects--which I think I've gone over earlier--ranging from getting hot breakfasts in the schools for the emotionally disturbed children, to air pollution, to work with the labor unions, to getting quite a number of research projects, upwards at some times of fifty or sixty. One of these was working in Brooklyn--in central Brooklyn, in Bedford-Stuyvesant, to see just really what we could do that would be of help for this community group--with a number of people who were members of a common community group.

This was at the time when, and followed the year during which there was a lot of activity with the poverty program and getting applications in. The poverty program had been passed in 1965--or known about in '64, and the active involvement really underway in '65. Lots of groups were forming, and they had a lot of trouble often getting their applications in and getting them--just even often in the question of getting them typed up. So in our first year a lot of our time was spent with groups who had an interest in getting an application in, and who didn't need so much political help or anything, but just the sort of help of. . . . There wasn't even an OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] regional office at that time.

HACKMAN: Is this basically in the metropolitan area, or is that upstate too?

JOHNSTON: Well, we did it upstate. We didn't have an upstate office, so what we did is we took all the counties and all the areas and tried to contact somebody in every area and let them know that we were available to help them. That was just something that was kind of an ad hoc, and not a particularly thoroughly done or expertly done thing. But our thought was that by helping them get going that you could really cut down on the time that they could use to take advantage of the program. Then eventually when the OEO set up a regional office here, they got into all of that themselves. It was by then a much bigger job. But I mention that because the way in which we got involved in Bedford-Stuyvesant is really having done this for a lot of groups in east Harlem, all over the city and all over the state. We found that it was helpful, that people were grateful for it. But more than that, it was, in everybody's judgment, a useful thing; and it was Senator Kennedy's idea that it was a good thing for his office to be doing, so . . .

HACKMAN: Let me just ask you one thing: In working with groups, any real problems in deciding who you work with in a community? Are there any guidelines? I mean, do you just take who comes forward, or how do you check something like that?

JOHNSTON: Well, at that point there wasn't, because in most situations there was so little knowledge and so little awareness of how big, or what this was going to be, that generally people were willing to work with each other on a sort of common. . . . The divisiveness set in often. In the case of Haryou-Act [Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited - Associated Community Teams] which had been set up earlier as part of the President's Commission on Juvenile Delinquency back in nineteen-sixty-what? '62, I guess . . .

HACKMAN: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: . . . there was already around it and around Mobilization for Youth quite a lot of those difficult choices that had to be made if you were going to get into that.

But generally I'd say our feeling was, we'd help anybody that wanted help. And we didn't really recommend it. . . . If there were two groups that were kind of after the same thing, our policy was to give them the same amount of help on the basis that somebody else would make the judgement, and that probably anything we tried to do to help one at the expense of the other would, first of all, make the other unhappy, and it might not be useful in terms of it might be the wrong choice. <sup>be a wise -- it might not</sup> So we were really more a kind of transmitter of these things, and just kind of a processing office, at that point, and a source of information.

HACKMAN: No real effort to get Democrats in communities to get together <sup>and</sup>. . .

JOHNSTON: No, because I think Senator Kennedy genuinely felt that that was an almost impossible job. I think his feeling was that most poor people were Democrats, that if we helped. . . . I think he saw obvious political advantages in doing this, and I think in addition, as I say, I think he thought, number one, that that was the thing that his kind of Senate office, whether



Republican or Democrat, should provide in the way of a service. But I think he also understood that it would be helpful politically because, as a rule, if you're a Democrat the more people you have in the lower income groups -- especially in cities, but even in the country -- who are organized and who have effective groups that can speak for them, that they generally become helpful to the Democratic candidate.

So it's not without. . . . If he had been interested in the political plusses of it, I'm not sure that he would have gotten quite as closely involved with as many--by close I mean I think there would have been ways just through making speeches and just kind of generally blessing the whole effort without expending that much effort on it. Because inevitable you didn't. . . . When I say people are grateful I mean, they appreciated the effort.

But generally you found that they weren't particularly full of gratitude by the end of it because they'd hoped to get more, or they were cut back; and you were the guy, you worked in the regional office. I know you know that it's never quite. . . . It's like (George) Balanchine said about ballet, "It's like coffee, it smells better than it tastes." All of these things looked a lot better for a lot of people than they turned out. So you were on the short end of that stick, and he understood that.

So over the short term, politically, I'd say it has to kind of be a stalemate in terms of any real advantage. Over the long run, though, I think it clearly was consistent with the way he felt, where he felt his constituency was--or part of it--and what he felt the point of his being a senator was. Because after all, you have to go back to the fact that he was the one that was active on the President's Commission on Juvenile Delinquency in setting up these model projects around the country. But that's how. . . .

So we did that for a year--really I guess the first year was principally in talking about this kind of thing--that was our major activity. Then we also did something else which is part of the background--

none of this is really in Newfield's chapter; his chapter is accurate, but it just doesn't get into much of this--we were working with Haryou-Act because Haryou-Act is an organization in Harlem which was one of the seventeen projects funded by the President's Commission on Juvenile Delinquency. It was set up in '62; it had a rather large budget by 1965. It had a fellow named Roy (Livingston) Wingate who was the head of it, who's now head of the Urban League in here. We got involved in it working with them on some projects in Harlem, specific things.

Then in the spring of '65, or really about March, I went up there and I said, "Why don't you get the Urban League?" It was really my idea in the beginning. We didn't claim any of the credit, or go after any of the blame as it turned out, but we did get together Haryou-Act and the (National) Urban League and a lot of other community organizations and do a summer program that involved five thousand jobs. We got that because we knew the funding was available, and we thought it would be a very simple matter to work out; and it was, in many ways. That was more than the total of all the rest of the jobs that Wagner had for the summer in all the rest of the city. It's what since then is one of the things that (John V.) Lindsay's been very big on doing, providing a lot of summer work. It's one of the easiest and most obvious things that you can do. It was a great success initially, because it just was the first time that it had happened, to that extent, in Harlem, and it was well run and they had a very--at least it looked very well run--and they had a lot of very energetic, sort of community-type affairs connected with it: it had a newspaper, they painted houses, they interviewed mothers before they went to the hospital, and they cleaned up a lot of dirty lots. They did a lot of useful, helpful things.

The problem was, though, that it was clear that they didn't have the competence built into their organization, and that it was very hard to get blacks who were able to deliver all the things that had to be put together under that pressure. It was a program in terms of the logistics of it, in terms of all the problems that would have challenged anybody at GM (General Motors Corporation) or any big American corporation. It was full of sticky things.

They had a comptroller who had no background at all and [had] never been even an accountant, but who had been a paymaster on an Army base or an Air Force base somewhere during the Second World War. His name was Milledge Mosby. By the end of September when the accountants from OEO--or the end of August, even--the city and all found out that there were just no books at all; there was no way in which you could check what had happened to the money that had been spent. Of course, it provoked a huge scandal because the implication was that somewhere somebody had taken a lot of this money. Well, in fact, I doubt it. But as one OEO auditor told me, he said, "It will take us six years to straighten this out." He said, "There's just one big run of bills and another of receipts. It's like autumn leaves, and there's no way you could put them all together."

That combined with a lot of experiences through the summer helping. We just set it up and then didn't get involved--we didn't have any way with which we could work with. . . . Because we were definitely outsiders. There were lots of moments during which there were real misunderstandings and real problems between them and people who were trying to help them.

Eastern Airlines scheduled some jets to fly up a black marching band from Florida and fly them back for free. Then somebody, one of Eastern's lawyers in Washington, said we can't do that because we can't give away flights; we have to charge, the CAB (Civil Aeronautics Board) will oblige us to charge regular rates. So, they had to renege and Haryou-Act just got furious.

That happened over and over again; and you saw that it became more and more clear that you couldn't just turn over a lot of money to a black community group and say, "Handle the problem." Then when they messed it up--as they inevitably would under a kind of program like that--bring our newspapers and our congressional investigators and our OEO auditors and say, "Now we're going to see how you screwed it up." That essentially was--it seemed to us once we got

through with this experience--the rather basic position of the whole poverty program; that we were not putting white people on the line and making them equally responsible with black people.

So really that is the genesis of the idea of Bedford-Stuyvesant, because what we felt was you had to get people who were white and who had something to bring to it, and get them to really give to it more than just money. There had to be all sorts of confidence and political help and just the feeling of working together and lots of things. Then you had to have them own the land so that if it failed, it was their failure.

HACKMAN: Yeah, yeah.

JOHNSTON: The reason we got into Brooklyn--we didn't kind of have that idea and then look around for a place, nor did we have a place and look around for. . . . The two just happened to come along about together, and they weren't the unique creation of me or of Adam ( ? ) or of the senator or of anybody else. They just began to appear more and more apparent as the way to do it. Then what we got into discussions about was the sort of tactical question of how to do it. The place to do it became more obvious because if you look at the city of New York. . . . First of all, if you look at the country, the second biggest concentration of black people in the country is in Bedford-Stuyvesant--is in really what you have to call central Brooklyn, which includes east New York, Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and the other close areas; there are eight hundred thousand blacks there. The only bigger place is the South Side of Chicago. So it's one of the first places you'd turn to anyway. But beyond that we found in working there that the community people that we were working with were for a variety of reasons much more interested, it seemed to us, and much more willing to work together for the community than they were interested than, say, as compared with people in Harlem, to take the other example.

HACKMAN: Let me just ask you then, what during '65 are some of things in Harlem, particularly pointing at some particular leaders, that lead you to realize you'll have problems if you did something like that?

JOHNSTON: Well, there are a number of things about that. It isn't a question really of any single personality there, but clearly one of the elements was Adam Clayton Powell, because as a congressman and as a congressman of the sort he'd been, there'd become a sort of division of people who were either in Adam's favor--for Adam--or against him. That complicated a lot of relationships and made people who. . . . What you found was. . . . To state the disease and then give you some of the symptoms of it: the disease basically was that you couldn't get anybody to--and it's still very hard, it's very, very tough --get a group of people to concentrate on the actual substance of what they're there to work about. Now that's hard in any group of human beings, but it's particularly tough. . . .

And I think the way you see that manifest itself, first of all, a lot of concern. Part of the cause of a lot of concern about Adam Clayton Powell's role within that community, whether he'll support this, or whether this will hurt him. Maybe it will help somebody who's running against him--a lot of that kind of rivalry.

Second, I think a lot of feeling--and perhaps more important really than Adam Clayton Powell--was just that this is the national capital of the black community--Harlem--and it's a place unlike any one in this country in that this is where the news about the black community is made. This is where, if you're a black leader, or aspiring black leader, at this time in 1965, this is where you'd have a press conference. This is where, if you're going to have a sit-in in a school--well, you just don't do those things out in Brooklyn or even in a lot of other cities around the country. If you really want to make a point, you do it in Harlem.

So it makes it that every issue quickly becomes a national issue there. Now, something like the Ocean Hill-Brownville can become a national issue, or at least a very big citywide issue, but it would have been a [farce?] in Brooklyn. But if that same situation had happened in Harlem, as say, IS [Intermediate School] 201 earlier, it would have been a far more difficult one. It was almost impossible anyway, but it would have made it even worse, for that reason. So I think those two factors: a kind of sophisticated self-consciousness, politically, of every act and interpretation makes it very, very hard for them to pull together.

So there are all these rivalries within the leadership. And there are some terribly effective people there, but they. . . . Then also, Harlem has been the place that has always been the most suspicious of the white establishment and the mayor, and all of that; and their relationship with Wagner was a very, kind of grim one, although that was true in Brooklyn as well. But I think they probably were more cynical about it, and expected even less, and believed even less anything that a white person said. Also there are other facts which, outside the human ones like that. An evidence for this. . . . This isn't just conjecture, anybody that's interested can look at the history of the state office building in Harlem, and the effort to build it there over the last year and a half, and realize that any significant development effort that came in to deal with that would just run into these kind of problems over and over again.

I don't think we felt that we should shy away from the toughest and take the easiest. There's nothing easy about Bedford-Stuyvesant. As a matter of fact, the infant mortality rates are higher in Bedford-Stuyvesant than in Harlem; the crime rates are the same. All of the problems, from dope to sanitation to all the rest, are just as bad in Bedford-Stuyvesant--or on the average, say, if you roughed it out--would come out just as miserable a place to live, and in some ways more miserable because it doesn't even have 125th Street; it doesn't

even have this feeling of being the. . . . It's much more typical of the average black community in a big city than Harlem, because it doesn't have that sense of being the capital of the black community in this country.

But it did have a couple of advantages in addition to the. . . . They're rather limited but they may contribute also to the difference in the people. That is, for one, it boils down to better housing. It's not that great in Bedford-Stuyvesant, but there's a bigger. . . . When the tenements were built in Harlem, they were really rotten the day they were built. These were mostly new law tenements around the early part of the century, and they were wretchedly put up, very cheap. So there's nothing really to do essentially but tear them down at some point. There's very little interest and very little home ownership, relatively. I think at the time we got into it six percent of the people in Harlem owned their own homes, say roughly, and I think in Bedford-Stuyvesant, sixteen percent. It's just a much better housing stock; and that contributes a little bit to perhaps a greater sense of community. I think that's a very secondary thing, but it's often been cited as an important element.

But we felt that. . . . And I think part of it's just the accident that nothing had been done in Bedford-Stuyvesant, either. In sixteen years, there'd been no urban renewal grant given there; there was almost no federal money in all that time given to that area, which is a city the size of Cincinnati. They were at a point, when we got started working out there and getting interested in it, where it was clear that something could be done.

We didn't come, as I say, to Bedford-Stuyvesant with any full-blown idea of how to do it. We began just as we began with these other projects--with a very limited expectation. We were going to help a group put itself together, put in an application--not necessarily for community action, because there was a group known as Youth in Action [Bedford-Stuyvesant] which was getting in business on that--

but just a group that would maybe be able to get something done with the city, and with the federal and state money. We had a number of meetings with people. There was a group called CBCC, Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council [Inc.]. There were some good women on that and a couple of good men. They were working with the Pratt Institute.

HACKMAN: That's about what time?

JOHNSTON: Well, I'd say that would be probably in the fall of '65. Yeah, it was probably before. . . . We were involved. . . . I went to Latin America for about six weeks in that fall. But it was probably after that and into the winter, and then through that next--the next year would be '66.

HACKMAN: February is when Robert Kennedy goes over and takes that first tour around . . .

JOHNSTON: Right, right, right. So we were into it three or four months before, and we gave a . . . Well, I shouldn't say there wasn't anything going on in Bedford, because there was this Youth in Action, which was a group we'd helped work with in the beginning. But they were clearly sort of another Haryou-Act situation. They took their whole report from Haryou-Act, their whole sort of proposal. They had a lady named Dorothy Orr who was <sup>the</sup> head of it. It's been a very disastrous undertaking really from the beginning; it still is. It's almost known in the community as a "hustle on the hustle." It's got no results, a huge budget, lots of people that work on it. We'd had just a very minor series of bad experiences with them, so it was clear that they were not in any way going to be a strong building block for anything.

But as I say, we didn't set out, and Senator Kennedy didn't go to that meeting in February of 1966, with any intention to do anything very major in Bedford-Stuyvesant. He did go out. They said, "Well, look, could we get Senator Kennedy to take a look and see what the conditions are here, and maybe see what he could do." There was a fellow named [Stephen]



Steve Friedman who was at Debevoise, Plimpton, [Lyons], and Gates, the law firm, who was working under this arrangement that I described as a volunteer to help get things going and do. . . . His idea was--or our idea was--that he would work with the community group and Earl Graves--who was then a volunteer and in the real estate business in Bedford-Stuyvesant and a resident of Bedford-Stuyvesant and later came to work for Senator Kennedy--was involved working with Steve Friedman with this group. The group was really, as I say, these women, members of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council. Senator Kennedy came out to a meeting that they held in the Y [Young Men's Christian Association].

They had Judge [Thomas R.] Jones, and they had a number of <sup>the</sup> people from the community, about ten or fifteen, get up and speak. They had taken a tour before, and there were a lot of press people. That was a very, kind of unpleasant meeting because they were really annoyed; they'd had a lot of other people visit; nobody had ever done anything. It was not a very nice thing for him to go through, not pleasant for him. They weren't exactly personal about their anger, but they were in that they said to him<sup>n</sup> effect--and often in rather blunt terms--"You're another white guy that's out here for the day; you'll be gone and you'll never be seen again. And that's that. We've had enough of that. We've had enough of your kind of talk." It was very, very tough.

The New York Times described it the next day. They said that Senator Kennedy was visibly angered. They said something about his lips quivered when he spoke. That was a little bit exaggerated; I don't think he was that angry, or that provoked, but he was upset. He said to me afterwards that we ought to really do something out there. We were planning to, so I said, "Well, we're planning to do something . . . [INTERRUPTION] That's what we're doing." It annoyed him because he said, "I could be smoking a cigar down in Florida." He said, "I don't really have to take that." I don't think he meant that as a senator, but just sort of stepping back from it and saying, "Why do I have to go out and get abused for a lot of things that I haven't done?"

He was used to getting abuse from white people for being too friendly to black people, but it was a relatively new experience for him to get talked to like that. But as I say--one can overpaint it; it wasn't all that extreme. It was just that he and anybody else sensitive was sensitive enough to pick up the fact that these are very frustrated, impatient--by this point--, and downright annoyed people.

But there was still quite a lot of hope that he could maybe do it. Let's just say that there was a sense, which a number of them made clear--nobody disagreed with--that if anybody could do something, the feeling was that he might be the fellow who could do it. This was, remember, just a month or two after Lindsay was inaugurated and three months after he was elected. They had really hoped that Lindsay would do something, but his early appointments, things he'd said, and things he'd done hadn't encouraged them much. So they were kind of beginning to feel like it was the same old thing with just a new, fresh face in there instead of Wagner.

They had lists of grievances, things that hadn't been done in the community for so long. They were just terribly, terribly articulate and terribly, deeply felt.

So we came out of that and we went to some other places in Brooklyn. Quite honestly, he thought that, at that point, maybe a swimming pool or something we could do. . . . I mean we didn't--[LAUGHTER] this is not going to be open for a hundred years--I mean, we didn't have any feel for (that's true) I mean he didn't have any sense of what we could do. Then we're getting him an application to become a non-profit entity, and so on. I don't mean that he was limited about it and I had some great vision that I hadn't told him about. My feeling, too, was let's just see what we can do. But we hadn't done anything very big for anybody else, and we didn't have any sort of idea that we could do anything that very big.

So we came out and what happened then from February through till May--till I went to South Africa and to east Africa and Ethiopia--I was working with, probably meeting with, every week or every two weeks, with a community group that was a kind of loose group of these women, of some people, (Bernard) Ron Shiffman, George Raymond from Pratt Institute, other people. We just chatted about what would be helpful, what they'd like to do.

We were setting our sights on getting a twenty-five thousand dollar grant from the Taconic Foundation, or somebody like that, to set us up in business to...And the Pratt Institute was going to contribute the sort of planning and work, and we would see....Our feeling was, and my instinct was to guide them to the extent that I was guiding them was saying, "Look, don't just apply for something as a community group that you form. Get an ability to receive money, and get a charter that will allow you to do some development work. See what you can take on that's doable. Maybe we can get a project that the city has funded but hasn't got any ability, manpower, to manage, or maybe we can get something that you all think up. We'll help you with the application, we'll go to the foundations with you--and we went. We trucked in and out of the Taconic, and two or three other places, then finally. . . . And we weren't making much progress.

The more we thought about it--I guess a lot about it over that summer--it occurred to me that they never would get anywhere, that the whole thing was kind of a waste of time. You could see what happened to Haryou when they got a lot of money; they just messed it up, and embarrassed themselves and had to fire half the people that had worked on the project. Yet it had been by every account a good, worthwhile project that had achieved its goals, but for reasons sort of unrelated to any. . . . And I don't think that they were robbing, as I said; it was that they just didn't have the kind of help that they needed. There are seven blacks CPA's (certified public accountants) in the country, for instance, and they didn't have one of them, and there aren't that many to go around.

So it struck me that we should just either drop it; we were kind of kidding these people along if we were telling them and if they were believing that we could really produce anything for them. Because the other thing was that we really couldn't raise that much money. People just looked at us and they said, "Well, that's great." Senator Kennedy's involvement in it was a plus but it was also a minus because people would say, "Well, why would we give to a black group supported by him? We could work through the non-partisan type thing." And so . . .

HACKMAN: When you went to foundations, you definitely. . . . How would you use his name? Would he ever make any personal efforts at that point?

JOHNSTON: In the early, early stages, no. We'd gotten help from groups and individuals, financial, for other projects just on the basis that they were worthwhile projects. We would try to sell them--we would have, if I'd thought of anybody that would have responded to that, but there wasn't anybody. There aren't that many people in the foundation world, matter of fact, there's nobody except the Kennedy Foundation, and that's for mentally retarded children. And the other guys, I would say that almost every foundation I know of--there's some people that in their hearts liked Robert Kennedy and wanted to help on something, but they could never get that past their board--they're very, very cautious about him. This was the problem we ran into somewhat later when we had a bigger undertaking.

But what was clear was that we weren't going to get them much help, and if we got them help, in the terms of just getting them funding, that they would not be able to really carry it forward.

So what then got to be clear, and I don't remember the dates exactly, but he and I had a number of. . . . He had given, back in January of '66, three speeches and talked about the city and the problems. So he had been thinking himself, and Adam had been thinking a lot, about what kinds of things--

that there was something wrong with the way we were going at the poverty program and at the welfare system. When I say he and Adam, I don't mean that they were without a lot of company in these thoughts; there were a lot of other people. But he had made a special effort to put all that together in some speeches, and to really think it through himself.

So in September of '66, he and I were going someplace and talking and I said, "Why don't we get a group of business people, leaders from the business community who will be willing to work as a kind of advisory group, or in some way or maybe in the same group, join on this thing and provide them with the technical help and the political help, just so they can get something done. And then we can help maybe get some funding." At that point he said, "Well, you could look into that." It was just another notion among lots; some of them worked out and some of them didn't. But he didn't say it was a bad idea, so what I did is I said, "What we ought to do is get some kind of a program first, that we could show somebody, so that if we were talking, they'd know what we were talking about in terms of development."

So we had a number of consultants come up who were willing to do it for free. There was a guy named Ken Mabucci who has a consulting firm in Washington. There was a--is it Nathan? Robert?

HACKMAN: Robert Nathan, yes.

JOHNSTON: Yeah. I don't know that they ever actually got involved, but there were a number of people,--Don Schone who used to be at OEO--well, there were three or four groups. Mabucci I remember particularly because he did a whole lot of flow charts and PERT (Project Evaluation and Review Technique) charts and all that kind of thing, and he was going to set up--he'd done this in lower Uganda, or something, he'd set up an outreach unit, or . . . (Interruption) He was doing it in an African country on an electrical project, or something, working as a consultant with the human problems. Also he was the economic development consultant. They were going to put in an office for six months and do it. I thought that was great, I must say. It really impressed me and I thought we really had something; he was going to do it, and how much it

was going to cost, and we had to meet with the community people.

We did this with a couple of other consultants. I'd never had any experience in any of that, either in working with a community or in working with consultants. It looked very good to me and so I said to Senator Kennedy, "We've got these really good-looking documents here, and I think we've got something that we're to go and what we'll do is. . . ."

Then I outlined what we'd do: We'd set up a group of business people, on the one hand, and they would get the money to pay Mabucci or somebody like him. First of all, they would look at the plans and they'd judge whether these were valuable. And the community group would've been the. . . . Mabucci at that point had only given us kind of the rough sketch and if he went ahead he would work directly with the community group and with their people to find out what they wanted. Then he'd translate that into terms that the business guys could look at. Then together the two groups would sort out what was doable, what was desirable and what was feasible; out of that, pick some specific things, get them going, and the community group would end up with the operating responsibility for them. But both would be on the line to make sure that the money was spent well and that the job was done.

He said, "All right, let's take it to André Meyer and see what he thinks, because he'll give us an idea." I remember when we went out to . . . (Interruption) He's French, yeah. We went to see him on one Saturday morning at the Carlyle Hotel. Meyer was very interested in the Vietnam war and getting Senator Kennedy to make a speech against Johnson's policy. He said, "I will look at this material if you will do something about Vietnam." He asked me--Senator Kennedy asked me--to describe what I had in mind, just in general, and the types of people that I had in mind.

What I'd done is get Eli Jacobs who I knew at Yale, and who has a particularly great ability to know about a lot of people. He was the managing editor of the

Yale Daily News, and he has this terrific interest in lots of unrelated information, sort of, and often irrelevant. But in this case--he's investment banker with White, Weld (and Company)--he knew a lot of people in the city and types of. . . . And he's a Republican. He had met Senator Kennedy on a trip about six months before, where he had just come along for the ride, and was really impressed with him. He'd started out really being skeptical and actually thinking it was a big mistake, the whole thing of my working for Senator Kennedy, but was very impressed with him as a person and so was glad to help and eager to help on this.

He put together--we put together--a list of fifteen or twenty names and we showed that to Meyer and said, "These are the types of people we're talking about; we'd like you to pick the ones that you think make the most sense. We'd like you to look at Mabucci's plans." So, two weeks later--he said to come back another Saturday morning; this was, I guess, into October or so--and he said, "I think we can do something. We have to do it; I feel very strongly. I think you can do it." But he said, "All of this Mabucci material is a waste of time." We shouldn't keep using his name, because there were other people; wasn't just Mabucci. But his point was that there were two or three studies sort of together, or two or three proposals. He said, "Well, you have to have an operating organization. You have to have somebody that's there. These people will come and go and leave us with the problems. They won't be any help to us. What we have to do is have a staff." Then he said who we should ask, and he said we should go ahead and do it.

So we talked more about it and I guess a week went by. And Adam and I talked. Adam resisted the idea of the two corporations; he thought there should be one. A lot of people do when they look at it initially, but I think the fact that there have been two has really been terribly helpful. I can explain a little more about that, but in any case for the moment. . . . What we decided is that there would be a community group which would have total final responsibility and another group which had a kind of support role, essentially, and which would get money and get political support, and help

mobilize people with ideas and talents that didn't exist in the Bedford-Stuyvesant community, would put all of those to work for the projects that the people out there thought were the most important, and work together on things in a joint venture.

Then with the lists Senator Kennedy got pared down. . . . And we talked. Then in one day--that was rather amazing--in one day without calling any one of them ahead of time. . . . Not deliberately, but what happened is they just canceled the votes in the Senate one day, like a Tuesday or something, and he happened to be here all day where he hadn't planned to be. We called up; we started, I think, with Douglas Dillon, we then got (Thomas) Tom Watson, David Lilienthal; we had Andre, (James) Jim Oates, (William S.) Bill Paley. I think those five we saw in one day, maybe six. We may have also gone to see David Rockefeller. I'm not sure.

HACKMAN: (Roswell) Gilpatric doesn't come in here?

JOHNSTON: Oh. No, Ros Gilpatric; he was in the first group, and I think not Rockefeller. We went from place to place to place, and Eli and I went with Senator Kennedy and we'd call back from a pay phone to get the next one.

We ended up with. . . . Everybody just happened to be in town and happened to have some time and so. . . . And Senator Kennedy went in to Tom Watson--spent about an hour with each one, and worked on it from nine through to six or six-thirty where he saw David Lilienthal at the Century Club at the end. A couple of people didn't know him at all--Jim Oates from Equitable Life. He just came in and laid out what it was that he was talking about and really gave a pretty persuasive analysis of what he thought was wrong with the welfare and the poverty programs and what he thought had to be done: that you had to begin in one place and work on that; that you had to get <sup>the</sup> advice and the involvement and the judgement of people like this group to work on it; and if you didn't  
. . . .

And he made clear he wasn't asking them to give money themselves. He said, "This is not a partisan



political thing." As it turned out, the group happened to be about fifty-fifty Republicans and Democrats, and included a number of people who were much closer friends of Lindsay and Javits and (Nelson) Rockefeller than of Kennedy, including Benno Schmidt, George Moore, and Oates. Each one said, "I've got to think it over." I think maybe Dillon and Watson said they'd do it, but Paley, Oates, Gilpatric, I think, and Lilienthal--maybe not Gilpatric--but others said, "I better think. It's a very big commitment of time and. . . ."

Then he went to Rockefeller--David Rockefeller--and David Rockefeller's the only one that turned him down; all the others said yes.

Benno Schmidt was the last one. Eli had mentioned him as being a really extraordinarily good fellow, and we mentioned his name to a number of people and they said, "Oh, yeah, if you can get him on, you really have a good man to work on this thing--a guy who'll end up doing most of the work," which is, of course, the way it's turned out.

By the end of, or sometime around the twentieth or what, of November, something like that, he had commitments from this group to work on it. They didn't know what was involved and we didn't know that much, but we had a rough notion of what their responsibilities would be and what they'd be asked, and what kinds of things they weren't going to be asked to do.

Then we went to, at one point--I can't remember the point in time--and talked to (McGeorge) Mac Bundy, and told him that we were looking at this and thinking, and wanted to get a grant from the Ford Foundation to fund it. I'd been working with (David R.) Dave Hunter at the Stern Family Fund--who's an awfully good man--and he had been very interested in it really from, let's just say, September on. He had me come out to Chicago one night and meet with the board; we asked for fifty thousand and were given fifteen, but even that was very helpful. They were reluctant to get involved; it was like a local project to them. They didn't see quite why--his board didn't understand why--if Douglas Dillon was doing it he couldn't fund it himself, and so on. But they gave fifteen and Ford matched that with I think twenty-five,

which gave us forty thousand dollars for a kind of tiny staff with the hope from Ford that we could come back for more once we developed a program.

Throughout the fall I'd been getting people to go out there and visit, in addition to the Mabucci's and the other consultants. People like I.M. Pei had gone out. Lots had gone out and not grabbed hold, and not seen anything that enthused them really, although they were interested in trying to do something. Pei had developed a couple of ideas that he, even by, I think, early in January or February, had some very specific projects to propose. One of them became the superblock which the (Vincent) Astor Foundation funded. Another was turned down by the community group because they didn't like the design--not the design but the basic concept of covering over the railroad tracks and making a shopping area.

Then at the same time--this is mostly all on the side of the Development and Services Corporation--we were faced with the problem of getting a staff. We had an organization; we had some little initial funding; and we had an idea of what its responsibility was. Also, it's important to say because, as I say, in the beginning we were talking about very small items, whether it be a swimming pool or just being helpful in mildly just acting as go-betweens to get them in touch with the government. By the fall, and thanks to Adam and the senator and everybody that was in it on our side, we had really figured, "Why don't we, if we've got that kind of a group, and if we've got a good solid community group--" or what looked like it not even so much a community group, it's just a good, really good community to work with"--why not really try to make it a decent community to live in?"

It was clear, the more you thought about it, that you couldn't deal with just part of that problem. Over the long run, you have to make. . . . If you're going to have good schools--and that's attractive to people--you also then have to have good police protection and all the other, hospitals and sanitation. So you really can't talk about doing pieces of it, or fixing up 114th Street and not doing something about the next block. That's why when Senator Kennedy announced, when we had

the announcement on December tenth, he spoke of seizing the web whole. That really became the focus.

And what's distinctive I think in the long run about it is that, . . . And we understood second, and it was made clear to these business fellows and to the community group that it was our judgement that you couldn't do anything in a hurry and right away, that you had to do some things to prove that you exist; but that the job was one that would require at least five or ten years just to begin to make any sense and would require a lot of money and a lot of. . . . So that what we were starting had to be a pretty modest beginning and shouldn't be overplayed.

Of course, with Senator Kennedy's involvement in it, it made it tough not to have a lot of attention given to it. So what we genuinely did. . . . Although people in Lindsay's administration and others never believed that, and a lot of people would be skeptical because it sounds like something Lyndon Johnson would say, it was true that we really did not try to encourage a lot of press attention to it. It just struck us--and it always seemed to me with most of the things that we were involved in in the city--that it was ridiculous, especially in an early stage, to have much attention on it. In this case I think we're still in what you'd have to call an early, or let's just say, beginning to get out of the early phase. But we're still not very far from. . . . And the obvious, sort of almost cynical reason for that is: If it fails it's much easier to sweep away whatever you're working on if you haven't blown it up out of proportion.

That's something I never understood about the Johnson administration and so on. It seems to me it's so clear that these things come back to haunt you when they don't work out, that if you were smart--I don't mean you'd hide it--you'd be very precise about describing it initially and then let it begin to speak for itself.

In any case, that's what we decided to do because we felt if we'd blow it up into a big deal, or go out of our way to do that, then we're going to bring down the wrath of the community--create an awful lot of impatience and a lot of expectations that we're not going

to be able to deliver on--and we'll be back into doing exactly what's happened in the poverty program. But the problem with that theory was that we still had to deal with Lindsay and with Javits and with other people whose support we had to have in order to get any foundation or government support for the project.

HACKMAN: Had there been much contact with any of those people, let's say, from February, or when he's first starting talking about it, on through that year?

JOHNSTON: No, no, very little. Just because, first it all coalesced really within a two-month period, let's say, really in October and November. At that point, there was. . . . I think then Senator Kennedy talked to Senator Javits and we talked to [Mitchell] Mike Sviridoff. Yeah, and then we were working with Mike, who was working for Lindsay, and so Lindsay was. . . . Yeah, so it's not fair to say there wasn't, but there hadn't been any big elaborate amount of. . . . But Sviridoff was pretty much completely up to date on it. He was then the head of the Human Resources Administration, and we knew that if we were going to work successfully out there, it had to be involved with the city. Lindsay knew about it. We had a meeting one night at Twenty One [Club] where Lindsay, Sviridoff, the senator, and I think Mrs. Lindsay, and I was there. They talked about it just generally and Lindsay was interested, but I think a little suspicious; he has always been rather suspicious of it, and rather thinking that this was something that Senator Kennedy was doing to get kind of into his turf and give him a hard time.

Senator Javits was much more relaxed about it. Although I don't think Senator Javits was particularly relaxed about Senator Kennedy's getting these business people involved, because that was kind of his strong suit. And to have people like George Moore and Benno Schmidt, both of whom had been on his finance committee, André Meyer. That seemed to Javits I think to be appropriately his thing he did well. To see that Senator Kennedy could organize them and get them together for this, I think, did leave him with kind of

mixed feelings.

On the other hand, what we felt is if we didn't make a public announcement--and this is the point I was going to make--if we didn't make a public announcement of it, it would look like we were doing something clandestine. It just wouldn't, in a sense, exist in a legitimate way. And the people like Lindsay and like Javits would not be involved in it and would not have to help us or do anything for it. So we had a public announcement on December tenth. That included Willard Wirtz; I think he came up from--or was it Wirtz? Somebody I think from one of the--I forget; I guess it was Wirtz. And they had Javits and Kennedy. Rockefeller didn't come.

Rockefeller was never sympathetic to this project and really tried, I think, in a variety of ways, whenever he had a chance, to kind of torpedo it. He tried to persuade Mrs. (Vincent) Astor not to give money to it. He believed, genuinely I guess, that it was just a political operation of Senator Kennedy, and that the whole thing was kind of a fraud. I think he thought we weren't serious and that these business people would--I just gather that from hearing back--that these business people would find out that they were being used.

See, it did represent something of a shock to the Republicans to find five--four or five--very substantial Republican people plus these other guys working for Robert Kennedy. And they predicted the worst things, I think, privately. Although Lindsay and Javits really didn't do that as much. I think they felt that you had to do it if he asked you--and that was sort of their attitude--it's too important not to. There was also a little bit of the feeling on everybody's part that if so-and-so else decided to do this, it must be all right--in other words, if André Meyer, if Douglas Dillon did it. So that helped a little bit, I think, in getting them to be affirmative about it, getting both the businessmen and then the other political people.

But we had the public meeting because, as I say, it got it out in the open and made it legitimate and made it clear what it was. It allowed you then to get on with the fundraising for it, and the work in the

community. That went okay as I recall. Lindsay was there and spoke, Javits spoke, Kennedy spoke, and then some people from the community spoke, and Wirtz from the government.

Then, one element in it was that we had--still on the Development and Services side--[Edward C.] Ed Logue, who'd been the head of the urban renewal in New Haven and then had gone on to Boston to do that, and who was known to a lot of people here in the city, and who'd been invited down by Lindsay to do something called the Logue Report, which was a six-month study funded by the Ford Foundation to study housing in New York City and recommend administrative reforms and programs to improve the situation; and had just turned down Lindsay who had offered him the job of housing administrator. For a variety of reasons, he'd decided not to do it. Among these reasons was his interest in running for mayor of Boston, which at that point was pretty tentative and which was far off in terms of a decision. But we wanted to find a guy who was the kind of a person who would know how to get things done, and who was a mobilizer of people and resources and had a track record, and who sounded and looked and who was good, we hoped. Everybody recommended Logue. I went up and met him and toured his work up in Boston and spent some time with him. I must say I was impressed with the guy. He and I talked and drank, [LAUGHTER] slept at his house, and had a good time together. He's a terribly. . . . Do you know him?

HACKMAN: No.

JOHNSTON: A very, very charming guy. He's now down here as the head of Rockefeller's state housing authority. He said, "I can't do this full time. I've got a job here with the BR--Boston Redevelopment Authority--but I'll do it forty or fifty percent of my time; I'll give it that much time. I'll come down and set up a staff and recruit somebody to take it over full time, and then I'll get out." That was the deal we had with him.

Maybe it's helpful to just follow through on that and say what happened to him. What happened is that he then began, I think, to get seriously interested in running for mayor; that's where his real interests were.

So he gave us very, very little time, essentially. He delegated these authorities to some very casual people in terms of getting anything done or in terms of dealing with the community sensitively, really, finally, or really in terms of anything that we all agreed was important. So by March it was a very unhappy situation for everybody in terms of his performance; and I suppose he was unhappy with us. But he hadn't even handled the board meetings very well. He'd had some good ideas and he made some real contributions; it was he who thought of the Sheffield Farms building and just pointed and said, "That ought to be a community center." I think that is the reason it is going to be one; it's a hell of a good choice. But he didn't really have any time to spend on it and he just wasn't interested in it that much. And we were expecting too much for that.

So we had a long meeting of three hours, one of the longest things I've ever seen Senator Kennedy go through with one other person of this sort and he just sat there--Senator Kennedy did--and just asked over and over questions about where we were going, what we were doing in each of these areas. At the end Ed Logue said, "I think I've got the message." It looked like we'd made some progress. But it was one of those meetings where it was clear that if Ed didn't plan to spend more time on it, that this would be probably the end of our working together on it. As it turned out he may have gotten the message but he wasn't able to spend more--he didn't spend more time for whatever reason.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

JOHNSTON: He went back and was interested in running for mayor, or what turned out to be so interested that he got into the race, ran, and lost. So by the end of April or May it was clear that we had to part company, and I was told that that was my job to work it out. So he left--or maybe it was even earlier than that, maybe it was April--he left and we began to look for somebody else to take his place.

Eli Jacobs turned out to be the guy who would take it on in the interim, although he didn't want particularly to do it, but he was willing to do it. The job was then to recruit somebody who would be permanent. Then

we got John Doar at the end of 1967 to come up, after leaving the Justice Department, and start right around the end of that year. That's kind of the story on the D & S [Distribution & Services Corporation] side of it.

I think two or three things though to add to that: one is that the theory of involving these white businessmen, getting them on the line to work, has in a sense-- I mean not so much the theory but the assumption that we could do that--has turned out to be true. We have been able to get them involved in a way that's for most of them far more significant than their other charitable non-business activities. They are there when they're needed and they're there on a regular basis and they have spent, at different periods, quite a lot of time on it. They continue to do this even now that Senator Kennedy's not there, but I'm sure that one of the initial attractions was working with him and knowing him, and that very interestingly turned out. . . .

Well, before we get into that, I think one of the reasons that they'd been involved and really spent time with us was because it's a small group. They're all pretty much interested in impressing the others that they're able and effective and so on. So that while they're not competing with each other, they certainly don't want to look foolish in each other's eyes. And it's not a big enough group so you could lose yourself in it. So I think that aside from all the other things about their commitment to the effort, and their interest in working with Senator Kennedy, and things that are maybe exceptional to this situation, one of the things that it clearly proves is that if you can get that caliber of people and then lay a lot of responsibility on them very visibly, that you can get some very good work out of them.

Now, on the other hand, that work's only as good as the staff makes it. My feeling is that we haven't begun to utilize those guys or the people that they can mobilize. But that's another story and that just relates to the problem of getting the job done in terms of a white group; and that's been a difficult one because essentially the job of the white group is to put itself



out of business at some point. It's like a support motor on a rocket launch and its job is to burn itself out at some point, hopefully not too painfully; but that's the nature of its life. The job of the restoration community group is to get stronger and stronger and more and more competent to the point at which it doesn't need the André Meyers and the Benno Schmidts and the Douglas Dillons, except in a very peripheral way as friends--doesn't need them helping in the formulation of its plans or in raising its money or in doing its political work. It becomes at some point ideally a kind of government out there with its own resources and its own access to resources.

There are lots of ways that this can happen, among them is just getting such a good job done that it attracts resources and people and holds its own politically, and in every other way. But even more than that it may in fact be able to work out things with the city government so that it takes powers and resources from the city government that aren't being handled well by the central government and takes them on. So that in a sense what you're creating, and what the white group's responsible for, is helping to bring into being a form of decentralized government.

Now it's still very, very early to have any idea what that'll look like or whether we're even moving, really, toward that. But it's not our idea to set up another good-works project in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Because it would have been easy, if that had been our interest, just to build a swimming pool or do something out there and quit. To get all of this geared up and to do all of that work to get to that point, the only real thing that justifies it is if it allows to come into being an entity out there which is genuinely in the hands of that community and which is not really dependent on the D & S group that brought help to bring it into being.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: So that process is painful and difficult and there are no precedents--very clear at least precedents--to us. So it's been hard for the staff of that organization to really fully, fully under-

stand always what it was supposed to do. And it's been hard then, I think, for them to fully mobilize the board members. But it has been very successful, I think, in terms of getting willingness to help and responsiveness, whatever they've been asked.

HACKMAN: Yeah, okay. Can you remember, as this whole thing was being put together, ever talking to him about sort of the political consequences for himself? Did he see much negative? Was he ever, you know, reluctant because of . . .

JOHNSTON: No. Actually, as I mentioned in another time we talked, my interest was not. . . . I mean I got interested, as I said, in trying to put together a group to get a good candidate against Lindsay. But that was exceptional for me because I. . . . And I got involved in all the political things.

But in general, when we looked at this. . . . I was amazed looking back on how sloppy we'd been about the political thing, the straight political. As I say, we did everything right by Lindsay, Rockefeller, Javits, and those fellows. But, for instance, we forgot entirely to talk to anybody in the Democratic organization in Kings County, which was really stupid and which was just my fault. I mean, we just hadn't; it didn't occur to me that they were relevant to it. Well, they weren't really relevant to it, but it created a lot of problems for us that were stupid things to have to deal with. But it also shows that--well, I don't know what exactly it shows--that I wasn't being very smart about it.

But it also shows that Senator Kennedy didn't have. . . . It didn't come into his mind, either, as being. . . . But it was my job to figure that out. In any case, if he had thought of it in kind of political terms of organizing people out there, he would have made sure that we had a much closer contact. Somebody was invited. I mean, [Abraham] Abe Stark was there, and we had the sort of. . . . But there was nobody. . . . We didn't bring together any of the district leaders, or anybody, and tell them what was going on. It was silly, because we usually did that as a pro forma matter in almost every other. . . . Whenever we even visited a

school, we'd let the local councilmen know just so they'd not be upset. But for some reason, we got carrying on here, going on with it, and didn't do that.

Now that's in a kind of parochial, local Democratic organization sense. In the larger sense, I think he just felt that he was exasperated at being in the Senate and not being able to do anything. He was talking, and making speeches and voting, and he wanted to get his teeth into something and make something happen. This was an opportunity to do it; and I don't think he really very carefully weighed the minusses or the plusses in that sense. I think he saw some obvious plusses in working with these businessmen and getting to know them and being kind of thought of better by them.

But I think he also understood the potential for disaster, if you just move into a black community like that and begin to work on it. As we looked back on it, and as people talked to him--or even in the development of it the first year--a lot of people who were knowledgeable about the city and were Democratic politicians here said, "You shouldn't have gotten into that. It's too risky, really, because you've got everything to lose and it's Lindsay's problem; it's not your problem. Let him struggle with it. You can analyze and you can talk about it." Well, that was of course precisely not the kind of guy that Robert Kennedy was and he wasn't happy to do that.

HACKMAN: Who was saying that? Can you remember?

JOHNSTON: Yeah, Paul Bragdon, who's a very nice guy and just as idealistic as anybody. He's now at N.Y.U. [New York University] in terms of their public affairs, vice president at N.Y.U. in charge of public affairs. He's from the West Side, a guy in his thirties, very attractive fellow, and he before had worked for Frank O'Connor and knew the New York political scene. He was not somebody that Senator Kennedy saw a lot of. But I remember he told him that. A lot of other people suggested that in one way or another. They weren't quite as frank about it as Paul was. But that was the wise advice, clearly, because you're just buying a lot of problems; you're giving Lindsay a chance to undermine you in some way; you're risking quite a bit.

The chances that it can be screwed up, that there'll be a scandal and that the thing falls apart, are great.

HACKMAN: Who was the congressman over there then?  
I've forgotten.

JOHNSTON: Umh. There were four or five.  
Edna Kelly . . .

HACKMAN: Edna Kelly?

JOHNSTON: Yeah, Edna Kelly, [Eugene J.] Keogh, . . .  
Each one had a piece of it. This was before  
Shirley Chisholm's . . . Ah, who's the  
fellow that's the--[Emanuel] Manny Celler, [John J.]  
Rooney, I think maybe? In any case, there were five  
people with pieces of a district. Hugh Carey didn't  
have one, his didn't touch there.

HACKMAN: Did you have to do any checking? Did you  
do any checking with those people . . .

JOHNSTON: I think we called them and told them before  
we were doing it that it was happening.  
They weren't particularly happy about it.  
Looking back on it, I don't think that made any sense,  
but we had so many real problems that we just didn't  
deal with them. We just didn't do it.

HACKMAN: Can you remember there being any opposition  
from either within Robert Kennedy's staff,  
but I guess more likely just among his major  
advisers, to the whole idea?

JOHNSTON: No.

HACKMAN: There was none?

JOHNSTON: I don't think anybody really knew much about  
it.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: And it might have been that I wouldn't have  
known about it, maybe, but he never. . . .

I think people felt that it was consistent with him. First of all, when we began it you couldn't tell really what it was. People just didn't know what it was and they just joked about, "What is Bedford? What is this whole thing?" So for months, it was not clear what we were going to be about or what we were doing to do.

But once it became clear, and became clear that we were seriously dealing with a real community group and not just a Thanksgiving basket operation, then I think a number of people probably began to wonder about it, but nobody that I know of. I think also a lot of people felt that if Bill Paley, Tom Watson, all these other fellows were in it that there must be something--that was part of the deal.

HACKMAN: In putting together the list of people to call, can you remember talking to him about, particularly, the people who aren't his friends? Well, you said that one came from Eli Jacobs, Benno Schmidt, I guess. But what about Moore and Oates?

JOHNSTON: Right. Well . . .

HACKMAN: Where does he come up with the idea for that?

JOHNSTON: Well, we came up with the ideas for them, Moore and Oates. But I think he relied primarily on André Meyer. See, what he wanted to do--and this is interesting in terms of the way he worked--he wanted to make it a project that would be André's in the sense that he wanted to be able to say to André, "All right, it's in trouble, you get it bailed out." So he didn't really care, I don't think, who the businessmen were as long as André Meyer thought they were the best people for this. He left it up to us to propose, really, and André to dispose.

So we'd mention somebody--I forget who--somebody who was older, and André said, "Oh, no, no, he's too old; he's not helpful." Then somebody else would say. . . . I don't mean to say he had lots of negative ideas. Out of the list we gave him he checked off eight or nine names. That was the way--it didn't work that way, quite,

because André was the kind of guy that like to operate behind the scenes so he wouldn't be the chairman. That was fine. It didn't mean he was any less committed, but it meant that in fact, somebody else had to become the leader ultimately. It was Dillon for awhile. Then Schmidt emerged as the guy that was the most involved in it.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Well, does it make sense to you then to look at the other side, at the [Bedford-Stuyvesant] Restoration Corporation people?

JOHNSTON: Yeah.

HACKMAN: How do you really get into the role, if at all, of the process of choosing those people?

JOHNSTON: That's where the real ballgame is. You could put together a group of businessmen--especially nowadays, they commission, or whatever--for any worthy project, or any worthy study, or any worthy effort, in twenty minutes, especially if you're a Robert Kennedy or if you're a senator from any state, in your state. So to do that is a pretty minor thing. I think it's major only in the sense that you--it depends on how well you use them. As I say, even there we've had, I think, sort of limited success. But they have been committed; they've stuck with it.

Also, I don't think it's any great thing to have a community group that's sort of a nice, interesting group to work with. We'd done lots of things with groups like that. There are a lot of groups in the community, in different communities, in the city who are quite good to work with on everything from child-care projects to recreation to other larger things.

But the problem really was, and the test and the real effort was, to somehow mesh the abilities and the needs of these two different groups together to make something that would work where they could be harnessed together and work together. That's really the major reason for not putting them together in one group. But it also meant that you had to have a first class community

staff and a genuinely real community group. You couldn't just have ten people that were interested in some project out there. Because if you were going to build anything as big as even as what we've built--which is just the beginning--if you were going to build anything of that dimensions, it had to be in the hands of people who were considered by the rest of the community to be leaders, in one way or another, and people that they respected, and were representative.

Now, I think the problem is that if you had a normal democratic procedure, such as an election, which worked and which was so traditionally useful in the community like Bedford-Stuyvesant, that's the way you would put together a community group; you would not do it any other way. The difficulty with that is that the average participation in poverty--at least in New York City, and in Brooklyn in particular--the average percentage of eligible people who participate in the poverty elections for poverty groups and community groups is under one percent. So the result is that people who get on the board in that situation are just the people who bother to get a few friends to vote for them. Even though you could say, "Well, that's better than any other system," in fact it doesn't work out to be better than any other system.

We didn't just decide that it wasn't any good as a system; we had enough evidence all around us in the city of groups that, once they got elected, couldn't rule. And the reason they couldn't rule was because they weren't representative. Nobody had ever heard of them and there wasn't any variety in them or any strength. So what we felt would be better would be to not try--and in this we failed--to involve ourselves in the process of deciding who that group would be, but instead to just let the people that were there, who had bothered to come to these meetings for eight months, let them constitute themselves as a group, which they did; and which they called the Bedford-Stuyvesant Rent and Rehabilitation, I think it was called, R and R. They were genuinely the most unhandpicked people you can imagine.

The only thing we did do was encourage Judge Jones to get involved--he was already involved; he was already a member of the group--to get involved more, because he was the only man who was involved in it, or who was willing

to. The only other people who'd really had the patience to come to all these meetings were women. They put on a couple of men, but they were patently men that they controlled, who were people that did what they said. Judge Jones brought on some people that he thought were additions to it. But there wasn't any particular. . . .

First of all, the obvious question is: Was Judge Jones a great political ally of Robert Kennedy? Did he control Judge Jones? Was this his way of keeping this group under his thumb? I think the answer has got to be mixed on that, quite honestly. I think Judge Jones, on the one hand, was a guy that had worked in Democratic politics and was clearly easier to work with than a lot of these women and understood a lot more clearly about how to work in the political situation, and so thereby, implicitly, would understand, would be willing to deal with Robert Kennedy. I don't mean that he wouldn't be difficult, but he would be somebody that Robert. . . . I think we all recognized that, and were happy that Judge Jones was there.

On the other hand, as I say, we didn't produce him out of wholecloth. He had been elected to the state assembly, the state senate; he was a judge; he was very, very well respected in the community and was a member of all the groups that we'd been working with, on the planning boards and so. . . . They elected him--they did--chairman of the group, because he was obviously, of all the people, the person who'd had the most experience and the most involvement.

Also I think it's important to add, he was one of the people who was very tough on Senator Kennedy back in February. He'd never known Senator Kennedy before, and was in no sense a crony. But on the other hand, he was a guy that we thought we could work with, who was interested in the project and who also seemed to us friendly.

So it would not be realistic to say that we just walked into the community and said, "Oh, here's a black leader. Fine. We'll work with you." But we didn't go searching around for the most loyal person and make sure that he passed any loyalty tests. Because I don't think



that you could get anybody that's any good--and I'm sure this is true now and I think it was true even then --anybody who would be able to carry any weight in the community had to be somebody on whose loyalty you couldn't count as a white politician. I think that concept of people being loyal in situations like that is pretty tough anyway to hold on to.

There wasn't any hope, or any basis for hope, that we could get a controllable, handpicked board. What we figured very clearly--and we talked about this and understood this--is that we had to produce for them. We had to be able to deliver money, talent, political help to get the community's job done. If we could do that, we thought we could win the support of the people out there. If there were differences, we thought those differences would be fought out between them without us getting involved; that was the rough idea. We talked a lot of times to [John] Jack Conway, a lot of people who'd done organizing work in unions. They came in and helped us, and looked at it, and worked with people and talked to people. We had a lot of very able guys who'd had political organizing--in community and labor unions, especially--experience. What you boiled down to out of all of that was that the only thing that really organizes people are issues that move them, and by issues in this case, programs, things that they think are worth fighting for, things that really get them where they live. What we figured is, if we could produce enough of that, that would be the organizing vehicle.

HACKMAN: Did you talk to Adam Walinsky at all? Or were you . . .

JOHNSTON: Well, I don't know. He'd been up in Syracuse and it was one of those things where we just never--I think also, maybe he had some other project going in Brooklyn. I remember, I think probably Peter Edelman had talked to him. Senator Kennedy had met him, and we knew him and all. But on this, we just never got into--and I don't know why. I suppose partly because Conway and others suggested. . . . First of all, they seemed to have the answer in terms of what we were talking about. Then we talked to people locally about it, union

people. I think it's just one of those things where we never got around to meeting up with Walinsky. I think we even scheduled a meeting that he couldn't get to, or something. But we did take advantage of a number of people who did have a lot more experience than we had.

So we got into it with that kind of naive feeling that if we did the right thing, that the community would pull itself together and follow behind. Basically, that naive feeling is still a good thing to work with. I think actually that a certain amount of naiveté in these things isn't bad if you're willing to also recognize that you are naive about it, and that you can't just assume that everything is as it looks all the time, and that just be stating your good intentions, you're going to get acceptance and get support for what you're doing.

I think one of the other huge arguments in favor of a two corporation setup--I think there are a lot of disadvantages, but one of the big advantages perhaps all by itself outweighs the disadvantages--is that as a separate entity it was always clear to people in Bedford-Stuyvesant that we were there only at their sufferance, that this group could pull out at any moment, that it had no vested interest in staying in Bedford-Stuyvesant. In fact, it didn't even have to stay in terms of its organizational mandate; it was set up to help a group in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

If they'd been merged, you would have had a situation where it would never have been clear--even if they'd been in the minority, which they would have been in this case, the whites--it would have always looked to people that the black group was being influenced by the whites on it. Whereas here, the black group is completely on its own and can vote clearly for the record whatever they want, and is always free to say to the white group, "Get out." I found that it's a huge advantage to make clear in one way or another. When you're working in the black community nowadays, in the last few years, it's awfully, awfully helpful to be able to have them know that you're ready, at any moment they don't want you there, to pick up and leave. One of the problems that the social workers and sort of settlement house people have, I believe, is that they seem to be there and trying to cut out a piece of the turf for themselves--and often are--then often get

to be the most disliked people that you've almost ever seen. But we had that advantage, and we still have it; I think it is a strength. I think the fact that they still want us there is some evidence--in a time in which not many white people are welcome in black communities--it's a pretty good sign that we are producing for them. I don't think it shows any extraordinary love of the individuals involved, although there's, I think, still quite a lot of respect, and there was with Senator Kennedy.

Now what you need to make that work, though--that's all fine theoretically--you need to have good people involved both on the board and on the staff of the community organization. Just having said that the elections don't solve the problem, all that does is make you realize you've got a hell of a problem: How do you get a good group? Well, we had a group which we thought was pretty willing to work. I'm not at all convinced that they wouldn't have been good at a different level of performance. But they were basically women who had I think--thirteen out of twenty were women--basically spent most of their lives listing grievances against the city for things undone in Bedford-Stuyvesant: promises not kept, projects that were announced and never completed or even actually started. As a result, they were thinking very, very small and very, very--well, that's unfair. They weren't thinking small; they wanted big things done, but they had gotten so used to. . . .

It was interesting how true a lot of what [Daniel P.] Moynihan said about the matriarchy turns out to be when you really get into it. Because Moynihan's point that these women are terribly, terribly powerful, really, in that community just became clearer and clearer. The reason they're powerful is because nothing is happening--men aren't getting jobs--nothing is happening that really can engage a man or make him fulfill himself as a man in a serious work. That goes from individual employment all the way up to the job of building a community, or whether a community is really taking its own fate in hand or simply bitching on the side because it's being screwed by somebody else who's got its fate in its hand.

So as a result we found very quickly that there was a strong undertow of almost, it seemed, a desire not

to do anything very substantial--now, that's unfair. A lot of women out there would not agree with that, but I don't say that that was really unfair. There is an element, I must say, because they were the ones who were patient enough to sit through all the meetings. They were the ones that--it wouldn't have existed without them. But after they gave birth to it in a way, then they became terrific handicaps for it, because they didn't. . . .

To take a couple of clear examples so it's not just me saying that: We had a situation with [Franklin A.] Frank Thomas--who's now the head of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation--where he was pointed out by [Robert M.] Bob Morgenthau, who I was talking to. One of the things we did early in the fall was begin interviewing people who might be candidates for this job, blacks who would be--and interviewing whites. As I said, I went and saw Logue. We also realized that we had to get a guy, a very high caliber black fellow. I must have interviewed thirty people, all kind of retired colonels and guys working for the government and chemists at Kodak in Rochester--all over--and some very good people.

It was not our plan to pick the person and then say, "This is your guy," but this was the kind of thing that we had the ability to do in terms of getting some interesting people. But ultimately those would have to be people that the community group found acceptable. Now, I wouldn't say that's the most democratic way to go about picking a community leader or a community staff person, but as a practical matter, there was nobody in the Bedford-Stuyvesant community, at that point, who was black who wanted the job who was up to doing it. There was one man named [Donald] Don Benjamin, who everybody agreed who knew anything about him, was not the fellow to do it--just wasn't that able. He was a very attractive, nice fellow, still is, but he's not really that competent.

In this search for people I mentioned to Bob Morgenthau, who was then the U.S. attorney, that we were working on this project and did he have any ideas. He said, "Yeah, don't you know Frank Thomas?" I said, "Who is he?" He said, "Well, now he's deputy police commissioner in charge of the legal division, but he used to be with me as the U.S. attorney. Before that he was at HHFA [Housing and Home Finance Agency]; before that he was a Columbia Law

student, a SAC [Strategic Air Command] navigator, a Columbia undergraduate. He was born in Brooklyn. He's a hell of a guy." I met him, and he was a hell of a guy. So we persuaded him to be willing to be considered for this job. It was a natural in that everybody on the board knew him. What it really took was not so much their willingness to have him--because he was clearly head and shoulders above anybody else I'd interviewed, and also anybody else out there--but the big question was: Would he be willing to give up a very secure and a very promising position where he could go into business or into politics or whatever from that nice, cozy job? Was he willing to give up that and go out into the completely unknown set of circumstances, with a group where he'd be head of the black group, but where there was also a white group.

He had a lot of problems with that. He never has liked that much. But he's never, also, either intellectually or actually, come to the point where he's said, "I'd like to abolish it." He knows that he could do that. If he told us tomorrow that that was a condition of his staying, it would be abolished. So I think that's a proof that, in fact, it's probably not a bad thing. What he doesn't want to do is change it so that both boards are together. I think he'd like to have the staffs consolidated, but not the boards. On the other hand, he doesn't want to just have an advisory group. He'd like the businessmen to have a staff in a way, or have a kind of line responsibility.

Well, he agreed to do the job, in spite of that he didn't like much the way it was set up, or at least agreed to consider it. He was interviewed by the committee, and then they voted on him. It was very close, like eight to seven, but he won. The women were smarter than Judge Jones in this instance, and they got themselves appointed personnel committee. They talked to him, after the election, after they voted him the job but before he accepted it, and they said, "If you take this job, we just want you to know that we're going to pick all your people for you." He said, "Well, if that's the case, I'm not going to be taking it." That's of course what they wanted to hear. So he told us he wasn't going to do it; and that was that. So what we were stuck with was a guy who was clearly inferior.

This wouldn't have mattered if the black group had been just kind of a front group and for our operation to be the people that were really going to do things. Because this other fellow would have been actually very good, better than Frank, in terms of being just a front guy. But we really felt, and feel, have felt all along, that if you don't have a strong black group, that you don't have anything ultimately out there. So you will start with the strongest possible.

What we were finding as we went into that winter, into February and March, is that they were falling apart; they were having fantastic arguments; they were splitting up with the women unwilling to do anything that, for instance, expanded the board. They were willing to accept two new people, even though the press release and the original charter, the original statement about the community board said they would expand themselves to make themselves more representative. Judge Jones proposed a number of people, a CORE [Congress on Racial Equality] person, a labor leader. They said, "We'll take the head of the Salvation Army," and one other person, I forget, some other lady. That was it. So they put themselves in an incredibly undefensible, bad position.

Then they proceeded to attack Judge Jones, and really attack him. He has a white wife--and I think that's probably an element in it, I gathered from some of them--but mostly I think the major thing was that they just systematically wanted to destroy whatever men there were in any situation. The result was bitter fights. You'd come and you'd see Tom Jones after a meeting and say, "Did you vote on this?" or, "How did it go for that?" He'd say, "We never got around to that. We were just arguing about me and them."

So it got to the point where it was quite clear that unless something happened--that this group almost had become a civil war and--that it would fall apart. And probably the know-nothing approach was stronger than the--by know-nothing, I mean they were just the same old grievances and really the same thing they'd been doing for a long time. And this would be a mighty embarrassing end to what we'd, by then, begun to hope had some real promise.

So we did what was quite a risky and quite an unusual thing. Judge Jones and I just sat down and figured, "We've got to get a new board." I said, "Put together the board that you think, the names of people that you think ought to be added to the board, to make it more representative." He put the head of CORE, Brooklyn CORE, the most militant fellow in the city, one of the CORE leaders. He put the head of the Afro-Teachers Association, [Albert] Al Vann. He put some labor leaders, quite a variety of men, a preacher, this and that, and so on, some friends, but not people all loyal to him or anything, and some very good people. We worked it out so that at the Friday night meeting, he would propose the expansion of the board. If they'd turned him down, which we thought they would--and they had the votes to do it--then he would say, "If I fail to get this through, I feel that that's a vote of no confidence, and I plan to resign as chairman and resign from the board." That was significant. That's what happened, they voted him down. Then he announced, "I'm forming a new group tomorrow morning. It is going to contain the people that I've asked to be expanded on this, and it will include anybody who wants to go with me."

So he gave them a chance, in effect, to go with him to the new group, but none of them took it. They were startled. They didn't know what he was really doing, what he was up to. It was very abrupt, and you certainly wouldn't want to do that to any group normally. But on the other hand, he had made clear that he was resigning before he did it. I think they interpreted that as just giving up completely. They turned him down; and what they did in a political sense was make their own position whereby--by turning him down--they gave themselves a really indefensible position. Because it's very hard to stand up for limiting it to two people, one of whom is from the Salvation Army, when these other really good people with constituencies of their own were on the other list. These were people that were, as I say, not in any way controlled by, or just friends of somebody else. These were people who were very independent and speak for themselves, on the whole; there were a few other people who aren't as strong in that way.

So what happened is that he did that and we'd had the thing prepared, the minutes, all ready to be incor-

porated and all in the new group, just in case. The new group met the next day. Frank Thomas was among them; then he was willing to go to work for the new group. We and Lindsay and Javits recognize the new group, and we got on with it. After that the old group was very bitter; and I don't blame them a bit. They felt like they'd really been had in that they existed, they still had the rhetoric ringing in their ears--it had been four or five months before--about how they were rebuilding Bedford-Stuyvesant. But they were left without any money, and they hadn't anything in the bank, or not much at that point, and they didn't have anybody that was backing it. So there was a series of real fights and explosions and a lot of bitterness in the community and strong feeling and so on, and a lot of community meetings and all. But in the end it boiled down to the fact that they just became a very strong dissident in terms of this operation, very critical.

What's interesting now is that in the last six months, or year, they've been saying to Frank--there were a couple of rumors once that Frank was going to leave--a number of them, the same people that were so tough, have been calling up saying, "You can't leave. What you're doing is so important." They're saying that this is the only good thing out there. So I think a lot. . . . There are a couple of real diehards I don't think will ever give up, but they're certainly far from the brightest people in the group. The majority of them recognize that this is working. So that's a form of compliment.

If you're looking at the whole experience, and saying, "At what moment was it in the greatest jeopardy? And at what moment would you say that Senator Kennedy's involvement and your involvement, or let's just say his staff's involvement in it was most critical?" I would have to say that moment. Because if we had let it go. . . . I also have to say that, knowing that a lot of people who. . . . Very few people know that was the way that happened, and knowing that would make it even worse in a way, in terms of these people because they felt, a lot of people felt, "You shouldn't be into that," or, "If you're going to do it, you should do it more gracefully." Well, the result is, I think, that because white



people have had that kind of hands-off, pure attitude, and "Let's let the democratic processes all work," the result has been that they haven't been involved in it, they haven't been responsible. If this had failed, this would have been my failure as much as anybody else's; it would have been clear to everybody. It would have been also the failure of this group, the white businessmen.

What was clear was that you didn't--most times, people haven't done anything like that when they've been faced with this kind of deteriorating. In most cases, they maybe haven't had the power, the opportunity, and the chance to do it, but we did. A lot of other times the city and Mayor Lindsay could have done this sort of thing, maybe not as abruptly and as painfully as this really was, but he could have and should have done it over and over again, in one way or another. He should have used his political power responsibly to help create stronger community groups. Whereas in fact, he's just given speeches, and let them fight with each other, and as a result has ended up with groups that don't represent anybody particularly, that are too busy fighting with each other to do anything, and with whom he can't work, really, to get anything done.

So, even though I must say it wasn't the smoothest in terms of. . . . To shift horses like that in mid-stream is not a very nice thing to have to do, and it was terribly risky. I remember I called Senator Kennedy up; he was skiing. [Interruption] This is interesting, not so much only about the specifics but about the way he just did things. He was away skiing, I guess, for the week or for four or five days. It might have been around Washington's birthday, and that might have come in the middle of the week. So he was in Washington maybe Monday and Tuesday and then up in Waterville Valley or someplace Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. This meeting, the big meeting in the community to do this, was coming off Friday night and so it would all be in the fire then. I think we had organized it by Thursday so we knew what we were going to do. I thought then I better call him and apprise him of it; but it wasn't until then, and I just sensed that he would not want to know about it before then, and at that point would only want to know. . . .

What I said is, "I'm calling to tell you that I think we should do this. I'm not sure at all that we can pull it off. We may just mess up the whole thing, but the way we're headed, they're going to drive Judge Jones to quit. You're not going to get Frank Thomas to accept the job and the whole thing will be a mediocre, second rate effort." I said, "On the other hand, it's not the way I would do it if I had to re-do it, but I'm afraid we're involved with people that are not going to make any effort. The only way is to give them a chance to expand." Then I explained just briefly how we were going to do that. He said, "Do you think you can do it?" I said, "Well, I don't know. What we'll try to do is get Javits and Lindsay to support it." He said, "They probably won't do that." I said, "I think then even if we don't, we have to just go ahead ourselves with it." So we talked about it some. Then I said, "I think I'll call you on Saturday and tell you what happens." He said, "Good luck." But he didn't get all nervous or say, "Send somebody over to look at it," which is sort of the way so many people do things. He just listened and heard what the situation was and then I think he figured, "If this guy. . . ."

As I say, I hadn't had any big experience in working in communities, and a lot of people knew a lot more about organizing, and about a lot of those problems, than I did. But I think his sense was that if a guy works on it and knows what he's doing and has some basic sense, that you go along with him. This really was, though, a terribly nervous time for me, if not for him, because if we had lost it, and had the thing. . . . [Interruption]

But I think, without going on and on about that, there was a lot at stake because it was obvious that we'd geared up this group. We told them there was a community group that we would be helping to work with them, that we could sort of assure that they were good people, that they were interested in this, and they were going to go forward with it. There was all this sort of overlay of hopes and plans and things; this was the genuine base. As I say, we wouldn't have fiddled with it or encouraged Judge Jones to do anything or try to involve a lot of other people if we hadn't really felt that this was the key to it and that we had to build it on a solid base. If we'd just been doing a public relations thing, we would have had some kind of crummy elections someplace, or just

had this group and let it go at that.

But in any case, we had the meeting Friday night, they had the meeting, they had minutes taken, and so on, so it was all on the record. Judge Jones made the proposal; it was voted down; the new amendment was brought out--or the new plan--he'd then resign, told them about forming a new group. The new group met the next day.

Then we had a real problem with Lindsay, getting his approval. Javits agreed right away, really said, "Fine, whatever you say." [Interruption] Lindsay was out of town, and everybody was out of town but his deputy mayor, [Robert W.] Bob Sweet. He didn't know anything, except he thought that Robert Kennedy would obviously be trying to play political tricks with this. He said, "I'll agree if one third of them are Lindsay, one third of them are Javits, and one third of them are Kennedy blacks." I said, "You know we don't have that kind of a relationship, and neither do you. But if you think you can establish that kind of a quota, and if Mike Sviridoff agrees (and I knew he wouldn't) when he gets back from where he is in Arizona," or someplace. "That's fine with us. That's not the problem. This is a good group and one that you'll be happy to work with."

So we got that wrapped up at quarter of four and the New York Times put everything together at four. They had a story saying that there was a telegram--and we sent a telegram from Javits, Lindsay, and Kennedy to the new group saying, "We support you." Then Senator Kennedy came down. He cut out a day of skiing, came down here and spent Sunday phoning members of the new group and other people in the community. He phoned about thirty or forty people, state senators from out there, all kinds of people.

It's kind of hard, it sounds kind of in the distant past, but at the time it was a terribly traumatic thing, because the group that had been jettisoned, sort of ~~or~~ had found themselves without all the support that they had and bereft of a lot of their members, a minority, but still a good number--this group started calling community meetings, demanding open confrontation, and there were people. . . . And it went on for weeks. It was quite a fight and really quite a tough thing.

In the end, the fact that the new group was a good group, and that it had good people on it, people that commanded respect in the community, and the fact that the people who were against the new group were so divided with each other that they often ended up attacking each other at a meeting that had been called to attack the third group, or the new one, that all of that helped. The fact was also that Judge Jones had made the issue of expansion the issue. Also, I think it just helped that the political people were clearly going to stick together and weren't going to support one group against another.

Now, if Lindsay had been, wanted to be difficult and really hurt us, what he could have done was stick with the old group, or some other combination. But the nice thing was that Mike Sviridoff understood how destructive that would be. Mike kind of thought that if he were handling this it would have worked out better, that we wouldn't have had this abrupt thing. And maybe it would have. But the only thing I can say is that he and his people fudged on most of the similar situations and didn't do anything. So I guess if you define "handling it better" as kind of basically not moving in and using any of your resources to work on it, then probably they would have done it better. In any case, it was very bloody and messy.

I would think anybody looking at the Bedford-Stuyvesant experience, in terms of what it took to get it wherever it is today, would have to take into account whether they were thinking of doing it themselves in some other setup and in some other area, or were just interested in it just out of curiosity or out of some interest in just the facts. They have to understand the importance of Senator Kennedy being able to pull that off. Because that transformed the community group from what was clearly a mediocre group that we'd never have been able to work with and develop a staff that could handle programs of any dimension. It transformed it into a group that I think today could really take on and run, and is running, very successfully a number of complicated enterprises.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: Now, that didn't by itself do all that, but it made it possible. Frank Thomas was aboard; he was committed. The board itself has been

able to really produce in terms of community support and so on, so that it's got a base. Since then--and this is very important, because it's only. . . . That was what, 1967?

HACKMAN: Um-hum.

JOHNSTON: Yeah, in the early part of '67. All right, now it's 1970. So it'll almost have been three years since that happened. That's when you'd have to really date the substantial beginning of the project, not at the December tenth, so much, '66, but some time in early April or May of '67. Three years have gone by and what they've done in effect, I think, is show that they can. . . . They've had a total of about fifteen to sixteen million dollars, which is not a very big amount of money in the community in dealing with those kinds of problems, but they've been able, through the. . . . There's no need in going through the list of things that they've accomplished, except to say that obviously they've brought in, like the sixty million dollar mortgage pool and stuff, as money that isn't counted up in the same way and isn't money that's given. It is money, nevertheless, that's terribly helpful in specific, rather non-visible ways to the people in Bedford-Stuyvesant and to the economy generally.

Those achievements aren't all perfect; they're not even necessarily all the things that should have been done first. But the fact that they have been able to do them in a city where no other group has anything like that kind of a track record. . . . There are lots of groups that have done one good drug project or one good demonstration, playground or. . . .

And I think what's true in the country, unfortunately, is that this group has actually put more things in action and gotten more things going, and successfully going, relatively, than--according to John Gardner and people like that--any other group in the country. Now the reason for that. . . .

But the major point is that that's still no more than a kind of platform from which they can achieve something substantial. If Robert Kennedy had lived, first of all,

I believe it would have been further along. Because he had that ability--whether personal and political, and his position in it and so on--to really demand that things be pushed through. He didn't spend a lot of time from day to day on it. He didn't, as I say, when we came up with the scheme thing--when he was up skiing and heard about this--he didn't drop it all and come back. He did come back on Sunday to spend a full day on it. He would be there when you needed him.

HACKMAN: What are some of the other points on through the . . .

JOHNSTON: When he was involved himself?

HACKMAN: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: Well, I think he'd come to all the board meetings he could get to, or any gathering of two or three board members, because I think he--well, he and I talked about it--he understood that that was one of the things that kept them involved. If he was willing to drop whatever he was doing, come up on the plane, maybe go back the same afternoon to Washington . . .

HACKMAN: You mean the D & S people.

JOHNSTON: Yeah. If that was important enough for him to do that, this trickles out into the community as well. Frank Thomas and Judge Jones had come to all the board meetings and all the executive meetings from the beginning, and often other members of the board. So we'd have, in effect, a kind of joint board meeting all the time. If he was willing to do that, that was clearly worth the time of these other guys. Plus they were just glad that he was there; it made it more interesting. It was also often things that were important as far as decisions, in which it was good to have him there.

Beyond that, I think recruiting Frank--he really worked on trying to persuade him and spent a good amount of time. The same thing with recruiting the guy that ended up as John Doar. We went through a number of people before we got John, and he worked on that.

Then he spent a lot of time making sure that we got the Labor Department grant, wrote a program in Congress called the special impact program with Adam, which really laid out the money to--which in effect specified a program which we could qualify for, which a lot of other people could have qualified for, but which gave us eight million dollars right offkin the early stages. He was able to get into it. . . .

What he would do, whenever he came to New York, which was a couple of days a week, I would say that there'd probably be something that related to Bedford-Stuyvesant during an hour or two of his schedule. It might be meeting with doctors to talk about a plan for sort of a comprehensive medical plan approach to the whole community, a lot of the more speculative, or things that were. . . . Then any problems that had to be ironed out. If you had somebody working on something, and he knew about it, he'd want to call that guy or get him in to find out what was going on.

Dr. Birnbaum was working on a college plan that ended up being a community college that we got a thirty-three million dollar commitment for. Although, since then, the community college thing has fallen to fighting so much on who should be the president that we've lost the whole college, I think, or at least for the time being. But again that's something where I think if he'd been here, he probably could have managed to turn that around.

He'd get into the sort of sticky situations. He did a certain amount of the formal showing up and things and he was also involved in the planning parts of it. But he didn't have to mess with the details of it day in and day out--and actually I didn't once it got going--that wasn't his way of doing it. His idea was that it should get going itself and that these businessmen should take it on; and it becomes their problem and their project.

HACKMAN: What is the point you mentioned last time, when at one point Adam [Walinsky] gets involved and you've got to straighten this out? When does that come?

JOHNSTON: It was at the point at which we were talking to the Ford Foundation . . .

HACKMAN: That's early, then.

JOHNSTON: Yeah, it was before--it was like October before . . .

BEGIN SIDE I TAPE II

JOHNSTON: Adam and I had worked very closely, although we differed a lot about it, we just had a lot of . . . . The great thing with Adam is you can really differ; at least I found you can differ with him and he can convince you or you can convince him. So it was a fruitful kind of back and forth. And that was one of the great things with Senator Kennedy; there was just never any, at least I never sensed any feeling of that kind of rivalry or pettiness that you often associate with a lot of political operations or even just plain government operations. On the other hand, we did have a difference insubstantively on how we felt about some of these things. What happened is a couple of times Adam came up--also we had a difference in the style in which we approached it. I was a little bit more, I suppose you'd have to say, sort of gentler with people. Adam is more gentle now than he was, but he used to be and still is a little bit. . . . I like him, not in spite of it, but perhaps because of it, a lot. He is pretty direct, and he in effect, I think at one point, told somebody at the Ford Foundation that they were just wasting his time and that he was explaining this to them and they didn't get it. Actually, what he was explaining was something that I didn't agree with, and I certainly didn't agree with the way in which he was getting this guy really angry. The guy said, "What is this, anyway? Who is this guy? Aren't you together? Can't you put your stories together? Can't I talk to somebody other than him?" So I just said to Senator Kennedy that I thought that--just as I wouldn't come in and start working into Adam's speech something of my own without trying to at least coordinate and make sure that if it was his speech, that it be worked in--that, as in this case, we really had to have an understanding that whenever he came up to New York to talk about Bedford-Stuyvesant with anybody, that he



and I went over it beforehand and that we talked about it, because he had to know who had been talked to and so on. So in effect what it meant was that he didn't get that involved after that in talking to people.

HACKMAN: Did Peter get involved at all in Bedford-Stuyvesant things?

JOHNSTON: More on the specific things, like health; he got very involved and worked very hard on it and spent a lot of time. Other than that, no.

HACKMAN: Yeah, okay. Can you remember getting involved then in further efforts to get financial help from the private sector? Did you have to get involved in much of that, or did the D & S people then pick that up pretty well?

JOHNSTON: Well, you mean by that the . . .

HACKMAN: I guess grant, fund . . .

JOHNSTON: Other foundation grants?

HACKMAN: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: Yeah. I did the one with the Astor Foundation, pretty much. By "did it," again it was just a question of getting the people like Pei, and Logue, and the senator, actually, to meet Mrs. Astor and meet the . . . That was amusing because it was Douglas Dillon who'd seen the possibility. He said that she might like to do something, and that he--Senator Kennedy--should be in touch with her. We went over to see her and we expected to meet some old dowager, you know. She's a very vivacious, attractive woman who 's not real young, but she's really plenty of life and fun. She talked for an hour and was very excited about it. They agreed on everything. Then at the end, she said, "I want you to know I've never voted for anybody but a Republican, and I never plan to." He said, "Well, that's fine. That doesn't make any difference on this. I don't want your vote, if we have your support on this." So she ended up giving a million dollars. That was the first grant, big substantial grant.

HACKMAN: Yeah, yeah.

JOHNSTON: Then we had a number of other. . . . And I had to work, you had to work kind of on them all, because they were all fitted together. On the other hand, for like the Labor Department grant, I didn't myself have to, I didn't work that much on it. Actually, Benno Schmidt and Eli and Frank Thomas really hammered that out themselves, really worked on it. Schmidt really wrote it himself, with another lawyer working with him. That was the biggest one of all, the biggest piece of money.

HACKMAN: Yeah. I guess, the other big thing then is just: What can you see about the development of Robert Kennedy's attitudes, specifically toward Bedford-Stuyvesant, but then toward the whole concept behind it as time passed, bringing in the private sector, really, and the total web thing?

JOHNSTON: I think probably you'd have to say that [Interruption] that was still an unanswered question in his mind, that really the evidence was not in on that, and I don't think it still is, really. I think what he felt, probably, was that we'd gotten it past the point of no return, in terms of just the fact that it had a life of its own, and that these guys were taking hold. I think he was very impressed with their willingness to work on it, and very encouraged by that--their personal willingness to get in and grapple with it, and their effectiveness in terms of it. On the other hand, I think he felt that they could have done more. I think that he certainly said that in a nice way to them, but ~~tyha~~ was also part of trying to get them to do more.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: Just sort of privately, I think, he was rather encouraged by it. But that's sort of on the personal level in terms of their good will and their willingness to work. Now, in the terms of just the private enterprise's involvement in all of this, I'm not sure what. . . . I certainly can't and wouldn't want to speak for him. As I say, it was still--by the last time that he was able, before the campaign, to get into these

judgment in terms of things

kinds of questions--it really wasn't clear, and it still isn't. But I think just from his feeling about it, I think that you'd have to say that--and from what we've learned--that the involvement of the private sector, and the involvement of private citizens is essential, but not sufficient. It's clear, too, that they can really only bring to it certain things. Among those things, there's certainly not adequate resources of the sort that it takes to really make a big dent in this. I think what you feel, what he felt, is that they're terrific in terms of their ability to help think things through and get things done. On the other hand, when you talk about really putting the money up to do it, you have to be talking about tax incentives, grants, and lots of other forms of financing, loans, and all kinds of other things from the government.

HACKMAN: Do you think just in . . .

JOHNSTON: So let me just say, I don't think he ever felt, even at the outset--and that's of course the journalistic way--that a lot of people have seen this as a sort of alternative to government involvement. I think what he means--what he meant--really, throughout, was that these private citizens involving themselves--and businesses--are in a way the personal follow-through on the government's commitment. But he didn't make that kind of watertight, intellectual dichotomy between the two, and say one is government and one is private. I think his distinction would have been between blacks and the whites.

HACKMAN: In your dealings on that--and elsewhere, if there were--in his dealings with businessmen, do you think he saw them realistically and their motives realistically, and what you could expect businessmen to do about social problems? That's not very clear. What I'm really trying to get to is the profit motive and what you could expect.

JOHNSTON: Yeah, I know what you mean. No, no, that's a good question. The problem is that I think he was pretty realistic about people generally. So I think the general answer is yes, even businessmen.

I think he was pretty perceptive about, and understood, a guy's limitation, and he knew that there were businessmen and businessmen. I mean, there's one guy that will rout up five hundred thousand dollars for his campaign, and another guy that'll devote ten years of his life to working on a project that doesn't bring him any money. Then there are all kinds of very, very limited and unenlightened ones. He understood that.

I think, as a group, he did not feel particularly comfortable with businessmen in general. On the other hand that was kind of superficial; because he could really make an effort with them. Whenever he'd hear upstate--we'd be in Elmira or out on Long Island someplace--and somebody would say, "Here's a group of businessmen, and they all voted for your opponent, and they're all. . . ." Well, he'd make a hell of an effort with them and really impress them. I think the groups that actually heard him directly and had a chance to talk with him--we had lots of lunches at different banks, and Wall Street, and places; we made a big effort to get him to know them and for them to know him a little better. It was all pretty superficial in that it was very quick. It was a couple of hours at the most at any of those situations.

Generally, they came away very impressed, and he came away, I think with--well, now, it depends, it varies. Sometimes he'd get some of these asinine things; and I guess they might have considered his views asinine, but it depends on how abstract the discussion got. If you're talking about a specific. . . . That's what was the beauty of Bedford-Stuyvesant in terms of that relationship. Because you never got into arguments about whether we should put such-and-such a percentage of our GNP [gross national product] into redevelopment of the cities, or that kind of thing. That's when he would get infuriated, and people would get infuriated at him, because they would say, "We can't afford to do this." And he'd say, "We can't afford not to do it." And they would be at pretty much a stalemate. On the other hand, if they got on a specific subject or a specific--by "specific subject" I mean something other than that kind of an allocation of priorities and resources and things--or even better, on a specific project like Bedford-Stuyvesant, then I think he got along really well with them, and had a lot of respect for them. A lot depended on the circumstances.

HACKMAN: One other question. On getting the IBM [International Business Machines Corporation] set up out in Bedford-Stuyvesant, is that primarily Watson, or does Burke Marshall have to do a lot on that persuasion, or . . .

JOHNSTON: Yeah. A lot of work by Burke, a lot, but very discreet work. And a lot of work by a lot of other people than Tom Watson. Because IBM is run as sort of a ship that can run without a skipper, although the skipper is very important and all, but he likes to let the decisions filter up and circulate around. So even though, clearly, he in his own mind was interested in it, I don't think he was interested in it to the extent of putting in a plant that would fail; or that his people would think it was something that he did because he was friendly with Robert Kennedy and on this group. So I think it really had to make all the hurdles. But obviously it was pointed in the right direction. The hurdles were still there, but they. . . . And it had a lot of support. It took a lot of work. We went up to a number of meetings. I was at one where [Vincent T.] Vin Learson, the president, and then about six vice presidents from everything from logistics to sales, to personnel, to manufacturing, and others all sat around and talked. It sounded impossible with the problems they raised. But three months later, they'd worked through them all and decided to go with it, and I gather are happy they've done it.

HACKMAN: I guess that's enough for tonight.

JOHNSTON: Okay.