

John F. English Oral History Interview – RFK#4, 2/3/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: John F. English
Interviewer: Roberta Greene
Date of Interview: February 3, 1970
Place of Interview: Mineola, New York
Length: 28 pages

Biographical Note

English, New York political figure; political aide to Robert F. Kennedy, discusses RFK's presidential campaign in New York and political leaders during the campaign, among other issues.

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Suggested Citation

John F. English, recorded interview by Roberta Greene, February 3, 1970, (page number), Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library.

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John F. English – RFK #4

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Fourth Oral History Interview

with

JOHN F. ENGLISH

February 3, 1970
Mineola, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

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

GREENE: I think it would be best to begin with a description of what you were doing in the campaign.

ENGLISH: Shall we take it from the day of the announcement?

GREENE: Yes, that's fine.

ENGLISH: Well, of course, the first thing to do was to put together slates of delegates in the forty-one congressional districts of the state of New York, which really meant going through district by district and seeing who the various leaders in the district had in mind for delegates and whether those delegates that they had in mind were sympathetic to Senator Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]; if they were hostile, to try to get other delegates; to ascertain their preferences. In addition to that, we had to try to work out, as much as possible, an accommodation with the McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] people, most of which was futile.

GREENE: Who would you be working with in the district itself?

ENGLISH: It would depend on the county. In the metropolitan area, if you start like in the 1st Congressional District, which would be out in Suffolk County, we worked there basically with the county leader, who was Dominic Baranello – the 1st and 2nd Congressional Districts. In the 3rd, 4th, and 5th it was myself. Then, when we got into Queens, that was a much more difficult situation because they had announced that they were for Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], so we had to set up our own slates in there. There were, therefore, a Johnson slate to begin with, a Kennedy slate that we were setting up, plus a McCarthy slate. Now, that was very difficult because we had to create....The organization there had their Johnson delegates who were basically the regular leaders; the McCarthy people had a lot of new people; we had to go in and do an entirely separate thing. There came a stage later where we compromised. We worked out what then became a Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] slate with the Kennedy slate, and merged them.

GREENE: This was after Johnson dropped out?

ENGLISH: Yes, it was.

GREENE: With Weinstein [Moses M. Weinstein]?

ENGLISH: Yes, it was after Johnson dropped out. And I just jumped my story. So, in Brooklyn we basically worked with the leadership there. Brooklyn was very difficult because there were a lot of people in the Brooklyn organization who were hostile to Senator Kennedy. I remember one of the first calls I made where actually the response was abusive, which was very early....I remember making a call from Steve Smith's [Stephen E. Smith] office; I think it was before the announcement, we started.

GREENE: What was the basis of the hostility? Was this something that went back?

ENGLISH: Yeah, and I think they were conservatives. They didn't like Kennedy. They thought he

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was brash and he shouldn't be running against the President. That was some people, now; I'm not saying that was across the board.

GREENE: Who specifically?

ENGLISH: Well, they were some district leaders there who had been there for a while; they weren't any great powers. The hostility, I think, was enough across the board in Brooklyn where the leadership never did say they were for Kennedy there. They held out and they said, "If you don't say anything

about it, our delegates will be for Kennedy,” which is a very nice game to play, to find out after they’re elected that you don’t have a chance to run anybody against them. But we played the game.

GREENE: You just put your hopes in the fact that they would go along at the Democratic National Convention?

ENGLISH: Right.

GREENE: Were there other places like that?

ENGLISH: Not as – Brooklyn was a place that caused a lot of problems because we just never could....It was the only place that didn’t take a position. Usually the other delegates....in Manhattan, which is very splintered anyways about anything, we had a lot of difficulty, of course. Like the 17th Congressional District, the so-called silk-stocking district, or Lindsay’s [John V. Lindsay] district, and McCarthy was so strong there it was difficult for us to put a slate together. We didn’t see too much hope there to begin with, and there was a Humphrey slate which was rather strong, I suppose.

Then in the 19th, there were two slates, really, committed to Kennedy which we couldn’t work out – one which was sort of a regular slate, the so-called Farbstein [Leonard Farbstein] slate, and the other was a reform

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slate. We were always a little suspect of some of the people on the regular slate.

Then we had to work out in Harlem, in the 18th Congressional District, which worked out all right because there wasn’t really too much – there was no opposition, really, to Kennedy up there. It would be awfully hard to put together a McCarthy slate, but there were individual leaders that you had to be careful you should put them on. And, yet, you constantly had substitutions of delegates.

The Bronx; we had to work with the leadership and with the reformers both because, for instance, Herman Badillo was for Kennedy. We had two slates in there, both of which were for Kennedy; again, we couldn’t work that out.

Then up in Westchester we worked directly with Bill Luddy [William F. Luddy], the leader there. As we went further up the river, like to Rockland, Dow’s [John Goodchild Dow] district, it was a little more difficult because we had....That was the one place where we were finally able to make an arrangement between the McCarthy people – at the last minute on the last day, to substitute – and the Kennedy people. And that ended up to be the only merged slate in the state.

GREENE: What about the 27th, the West Side? Wasn’t that a coalition of some kind?

ENGLISH: Well, the 27th is the Rockland County district.

GREENE: I mean, the 19th; I'm sorry.

ENGLISH: The 19th is the one I referred to before. The 19th we had a lot of difficulty in because we had those two slates that I talked about, the regular slate who said they were for Kennedy, and the reform slate also who said they were for Kennedy. Oh, that was a mixed slate in the 19th; the reform one was a mixed slate. There were...

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GREENE: Two McCarthy and one Robert Kennedy.

ENGLISH: ...two McCarthy and one Kennedy, right.

GREENE: But you don't really put that in the classification of a coalition? I mean, it wasn't something that was....

ENGLISH: Well, it was a coalition slate. It was difficult for us because, on the other hand, all three of the regular people said they would be for Kennedy, but we had great reservations whether they could win in the primary. So it was a very difficult thing. Again, they would not say formally that they were for Kennedy. And we always had hopes in the 19th that, after California, after Kennedy had won some of these primaries, those would become all-Kennedy slates.

GREENE: How much help could you get from Kennedy's reform friends in Manhattan?

ENGLISH: Well, like Ronnie Eldridge was involved in the 19th.

GREENE: And Feldman [Justin Newton Feldman]. Could they swing much weight at that point?

ENGLISH: Well, they were having troubles themselves because the McCarthy people were taking them on. As a matter of fact, Ronnie lost as a state committeewoman; she lost her leadership. So, they were having troubles, too, but they did persuade us not to run a full slate of Kennedy people over there against a full slate of McCarthy people. They tried.

GREENE: Just to back up a little bit, when you first started calling, how much support do you think Kennedy lost in the interim, when he did not come out after McCarthy announced? Do you think he lost a lot of support, or that a lot

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of what wasn't there would have been there if he'd come out earlier?

ENGLISH: Oh, no, he lost a lot of support. All those districts had....After all, we're assuming there would be no assassination. But if McCarthy wasn't in – I don't know what would have happened after the assassination – we would have taken that mail, and probably would have Senator Edward Kennedy, or somebody of that strength....No, but he would have taken it, yeah. So, there would not have been any McCarthy slates.

For instance, in Nassau and Suffolk, or any of the districts, all the peace people would have been for Kennedy. They just had gotten tooled up and gone too far. They had a viable political organization; and you went through a period there where they would hear nothing wrong about McCarthy, even if things in his voting record were pointed out. They were themselves involved to the point where the candidate wasn't that important – as important.

GREENE: What about – I was thinking particularly in the upstate area, how did you go about choosing delegates if you weren't that familiar with the area? Did you have someone in each district that you could rely on to choose the kind of people you wanted?

ENGLISH: Well, I was familiar with all the leaders upstate and districts. It becomes much more difficult. If you have a congressional district that's running across seven counties and you only have three delegates and three alternatives, it becomes difficult; everybody wants a piece of the action.

GREENE: What kind of criteria did you work from?

ENGLISH: Well, you take it really from where the vote is, and if you have a large county the delegate....You might have one or two delegates from there. I think it was actually easier to work the thing out in upstate.

It's slower

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because they don't move as fast; they don't spend full time at it, but they don't bicker that much. If you got between two leaders and say, "You'll just have to take the delegate, and you have the alternate," they would acquiesce pretty fast. In the city, or in a metropolitan area, that was much more difficult to work out. It all gets down to personalities and a lot of things.

One of the difficulties, we were trying to....What happens is people in New York....I suppose it's the only place in the country accustomed to non-contested presidential primaries in which every leader is automatically a delegate and you have a delegation composed of leaders. We did not want that. We wanted people who had credentials in the community, that were distinct from their party credentials. We wanted names who would win because, in addition to the fact that they were for Kennedy, they also would bring something in their own

right. Now, we were partially successful in doing that.

GREENE: Where did you have no one to work with, no one in the party leadership? Were there places like that?

ENGLISH: Rochester was the place, the 36th and 37th Congressional Districts, where the organization was first for Johnson and then heavily for Humphrey. That was difficult to go up because we had to go up and try to work something out with the McCarthy people, which was very strong.

GREENE: You almost did, didn't you, in Rochester?

ENGLISH: Almost did, almost did. We came very close to it several times.

GREENE: What happened?

ENGLISH: I think there became a division with the McCarthy people themselves. We conferred

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up there one day for a long period of time and we thought we had it worked out. Then, when we came down, they themselves had upset it up there. So, well we failed, but I would say we came closer than anywhere else because when you don't have anything at all – and we didn't have anything – to go up and set up your own is very difficult. That's what happened in the end.

GREENE: Was there any other place like that?

ENGLISH: We even suggested that they take the 36th, and we'd take the 37th because we were stronger in the one than the other – one had more black population – and try to even work it out that way, in which we would concede delegates and they would concede to us, but they wouldn't do that.

GREENE: Did they indicate, "Come back after the..." I don't remember in Rochester what the date would have been. Could you have come back like after Indiana? Were they willing to wait that long and see what happened or were they just...

ENGLISH: I would say that the people in...I think they were interesting people. They were mostly academic people in Rochester we were talking to, and I found them reasonable. I think they would have, yes. Tom Fink [Thomas A. Fink], who really headed it up there, really wanted to work it out at all times. But a lot of people who had never been involved in it before were just gung-ho about the whole thing, and never really wanted to sit down and discuss whether we wanted a dove

candidate or a hawk candidate; that was not part of it.

GREENE: I know in the 27th...

ENGLISH: They also thought, of course, that we had a hell of a nerve when we went up there, because the organization had chosen all of

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its delegates. Besides the presidential thing there was also like a reform movement going on there against the leadership, which was pretty strong. The McCarthy people had begun and had set something up in opposition to that. We had nothing. Nothing would have happened in Rochester itself; there wasn't anything that was self-starting up there, so we had to go up and start it. And they resented that, you know, some people from the big city coming in.

GREENE: Did you find that a problem elsewhere, too, the fact that you were a Long Islander coming up and trying to work in their areas?

ENGLISH: I guess, somewhat. I mean, I wouldn't be as aware of it as they would. They would probably tell you, "Yes."

But, other than Rochester, we were working pretty much with people that we knew. When you get up to some of those other rural areas, even though they might be Humphrey people on both sides, we knew enough people that they would come up with their own slates.

GREENE: How much did you depend on Bruno's [Gerald J. Bruno] contacts in the upstate areas?

ENGLISH: Heavily, very heavily.

GREENE: Did you have pretty close contact with him throughout?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes, on a regular daily basis almost, except when he was out of town. When we got to Indiana or wherever, he was gone during those periods of time – but yeah when he was in New York. And he would come back whenever I called to come up and talk to some leader if we could not do it. And I talked to him on the phone frequently from other states, but he was traveling a lot.

GREENE: Who besides Chairman Burns [John J. Burns] was

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working on the slates with you?

ENGLISH: Well, different people in different areas. Like Ronnie Eldridge was working with us with the reform people, trying to do things with the McCarthy people. Upstate there were various people in different areas. Billy McKeon [William H. McKeon] worked some of the districts for us. We had a lot of people.

GREENE: What about in the black areas? Was Graves [Earl G. Graves] any help?

ENGLISH: Yes, he did work in the 12th and the 18th, particularly in the 12th. I think more in the 12th. We had problems. Eventually we ended up doing it ourselves because that...The 12th became sticky because, although it is supposed to be a black congressional district, in a primary if you put up whites, the whites would win because they have a higher registration. And we had the Chisholm-Thompson [Shirley Anita Chisholm, William C. Thompson] fight which reflected – that was for Congress. And below that were district leadership fights. So, there were two slates and we had to, again, work out two black slates on how it was for Kennedy. And we really worked that out with a white leader who supported the black slate that we wanted.

GREENE: How early did you decide to try to work out coalitions where possible? Was this a fairly obvious thing, or were there people opposed to doing this in the Kennedy group?

ENGLISH: Oh, well, yes, everybody had different ideas, now. I should say that I worked with Steve Smith – we completely forgot about him. He was involved in this from the very beginning. Again, as it got to be full time in California he was pretty remote, but he used to check back because people would call out there and would complain about some of the operations here, also. Peter Fishbein worked, too, when he was around us.

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No, we started on coalition slates from the beginning. We started on that before the announcement really, and thought that that was the thing that we had to do. I mean, there were a lot of people who said, “You’re wasting your time with those folks,” or something like that, you know, who just wanted to give it up. And there were others who wanted to be heavy-handed about it and intimidate them, which was never part of the action. They were just too far involved in it. What we should have been doing is trying to be peaceful, to make a friendship with them or to show that we were reasonable people, so that if the time did come where Kennedy beat McCarthy in the major primaries that they would have come to us. Now, we knew that the dates were problems because the last dates to decline came before the California primary, obviously. It became more and more difficult all the time.

GREENE: Was that an assumption you were operating under, that it was more than likely McCarthy would drop out? Was that kind of in your mind all the time in trying to form the coalitions?

ENGLISH: Well, that was the Senator's strategy, yes. You know, we talked about that all the time. He would say, when he would meet with the delegates in New York when we would set them up, "If you will just bear with me until I can demonstrate in other states that I am the candidate and that I can win, then I think I can come back to this state and show you that I am the best candidate here. Otherwise, I'm not going to ask you." He used to say to them, "I'm not going to ask you to be for me if I get beaten all over this country and I'm not the candidate. Then you will sit back and say what you want to do at that point." That was his position, which he said over and over again when we had recalcitrant delegates, or we had people who were hostile or undecided or....

GREENE: I know in the 27th you worked out an agreement in the coalition that if McCarthy

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dropped out, his people would support Kennedy and vice versa. Was this something you were trying to get in every place that you were working on coalitions?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes, definitely. We just had some of those agreements. Now, like in Nassau County alone in the three congressional districts, we had a number of meetings with the McCarthy people in which we tried to get joint slates. Well, some of them wanted too much, like they wanted two of the congressional districts, it would be six out of the nine delegates plus – in the end, of course, they carried on alone – or two in each district and whatever. Although it would have made sense if, on a convertible basis, those delegates would all vote for the surviving candidate, the problem was that it would be very embarrassing for the Senator in his own state to be giving away too much at that time. So, it was a very difficult thing, too, symbolically.

GREENE: Who were the hardliners among the McCarthy people?

ENGLISH: Well, the people who did the negotiating for them on a statewide basis, now, were Izzie Sipser [I. Philip Sipser], who was associated with Paul O'Dwyer [Peter Paul O'Dwyer] in his law firm, Sarah Kovner, Harold Ickes, Ellie French [Eleanor Clark French].

GREENE: Costikyan [Edward N. Costikyan]?

ENGLISH: Not really, no. Not at that stage. No, he was never in the hard negotiations when we were trying to work things out. At the beginning of it he wasn't there at all; at the end I think he was.

GREENE: Was Mrs. Kovner kind of the big wheel? That's the impression you get in the press.

ENGLISH: On a day-to-day basis she was there all the

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time. She worked eighteen hours a day seven days a week. Not only that, I had a relationship with her which went back to '66, so I could always talk to her. We had a very unfortunate meeting. The first time we ever met....

Clarence Jones was also a part of this, the only black man we had for McCarthy. We had a meeting which was in the Hilton. This is how early that was; before he announced we got just a suite up in the New York Hilton. Steve was still here at that time, and we were getting people together. And we met for the first time with the McCarthy people. It was vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] and I, and they had Sipser, Kovner, Ickes, French, and someone else; I forget who else. Well, vanden Heuvel took a very hard line and they were uptight. They're very tough negotiators; they're all very tough. They were in the catbird seat at the time; they had put all this effort in it and they weren't about to capitulate at that time. It got into law suits about who can use the discotheque, and it was a very bad meeting.

GREENE: How was vanden Heuvel generally in dealing with reformers and the McCarthy people?

ENGLISH: Well, as a result of that meeting, for one thing, they were having some further difficulties. I mean, he was persona non grata with them and they would not meet with him after that. They used to say, "If we're going to meet, bring somebody else."

GREENE: Why did he go along with you in that case if he was already not particularly highly regarded?

ENGLISH: Well, it was our headquarters; it was in our place. And I didn't know – nobody knew he would take that position.

GREENE: How was he generally in the campaign?

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ENGLISH: Well, after....Then he went to Oregon, and the things that he did – like if he handled entertainers and things like that – he was very good. He was very good with the affluent groups and how to bring in these special committees; he was excellent on those things. When it got to head to head about who's going to be delegates in certain districts, that procedure was not very highly desirable.

GREENE: Let me ask you something which occurred to me and might be helpful when we start preparing for Bruno. Who were Bruno's people in these upstate areas? What level and type were they? Business leaders, civic leaders, or political leaders?

ENGLISH: Oh, he had a combination of them. Like in Utica, of course, this would be Mayor Assaro [Dominick Assaro]. In Syracuse he had a real combination of business leaders, political leaders, and the people in Syracuse University. That was true all around upstate.

GREENE: And these were contacts he'd been building up through his tenure in the Senate office?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. He had worked full-time since the Senator was elected up in that New York post making these upstate contacts, which he still has. The people are very loyal. I mean, there was a real Kennedy organization built upstate by Bruno which really didn't exist anywhere else, but they were really very, very loyal.

GREENE: What about Nassau itself? How much did you work with the McCarthy people down here?

ENGLISH: Well, of course, I was living in the city at the time, so after Kennedy announced I didn't have too much time to come out here, but I would just come out and meet with them. We had regular meetings; we used to say, "We'll meet after

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the Nebraska...." We met after every primary. There was always the thought, "Well, we're going to win that one. Whoever wins it, that's it." It never came to pass.

GREENE: Did you lose a lot of momentum on Oregon?

ENGLISH: Yes, I think a lot of it.

GREENE: What about the trouble in...

ENGLISH: Of course, in all fairness, Oregon was too late. We could never work out – the last day to decline had gone by, by the time of Oregon. Well, our problem, too, was we discussed how we could do it. You can't say, "We're on the ballot;" there was no way of getting off the ballot. We had discussions about how one side would tell the votes to vote for our slate or their slate. Well, that's very difficult. I don't think anybody would have known. And you couldn't add the votes

together, even if they said they were for Kennedy. We were at the point where we were still splitting the vote; the vote would be split.

GREENE: Well, I know you must have kept a running count. What was your opening figure, in terms of when he first announced? What did you have, and how did it increase in the months that followed after the primaries? Were there a lot of fence-sitters who you could go back to after each one of these things?

ENGLISH: Well, we're now talking, Roberta, about guessing we would have won the primary, for which we thought we were going to have a candidate who was alive at the time of the primary. As to our estimates, out of 123 delegates who were elected in the districts, I don't know. I would suppose we talked about 90 or something like that. I'm not sure my recollection is correct about that. We knew where the tough districts were, which were in suburbs and the 17th and the 19th. Those were the districts we knew we would have trouble with, even had he survived.

GREENE: Chairman Burns said that at the end he had counted between 150 and even possibly 170 of the 190 delegates. Does that seem optimistic to you?

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ENGLISH: Well, that assumes that the state committee....Now, I'm counting out of 123 which were elected in the districts. We're talking now about delegates who were chosen by the state committee, and obviously he's talking about choosing different delegates than we did because after the assassination he had more to do with the....Because I became a McCarthy delegate and got a much smaller....I didn't get anything except the county. All the other statewide people put on were then all Humphrey people. So, if you assume that the state committee would have chosen all Kennedy people, that figure might be a reasonable figure, but I think it's very speculative. We have to....No one has really sat down and said, "Well, Kennedy won the California primary. Now, what was the condition of the McCarthy people in each separate district?" because it varied. You know, someone in Rochester, and so forth – I don't know – were much more flexible than, say, they were here. And in the 17th I know McCarthy would have won had Kennedy survived. McCarthy delegates would have won that district; they wouldn't have gotten out.

But I mean that's a highly speculative thing. What we said along the way is one thing. I don't think after the assassination you could ever – you know, it's too hard to put things together.

I think, now, I want to agree with his figure. That figure was talked about prior to the assassination. One hundred and fifty; that took into consideration the people chosen by the state committee, which was....out of 190 votes only 123 were chosen directly and the rest of them were really....There was no question that the McCarthy people controlled the state committee. We were contested for it; but not only did we know we were going to win it,

they didn't even have enough contest that they ever could have taken it away. And assuming we would have taken a hard line and taken them all, which we could have done, that figure is very reasonable.

GREENE: Did you ever discuss with the Senator, or Steve Smith, or Bruno what they felt they had to have in New York for it to be significant enough to impress the Convention?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes, we discussed that more in terms of it negatively – that New York was very important, that he not show a deficiency or weakness or something like that.

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GREENE: Well, what would you have considered as a deficiency?

ENGLISH: Well, I think under 150 might have been a deficiency.

GREENE: What other political leaders were you working with besides the actual party chairmen? Working with O'Connor [Frank D. O'Connor] or Wagner [Robert Ferdinand Wagner, Jr.] or Levitt [Arthur Levitt], people like that? Did you have much contact with them?

ENGLISH: Well, O'Connor was immediately for Johnson, then for Humphrey.

GREENE: There was no hope in winning him over?

ENGLISH: There was no hope for winning him over, no. Wagner, there really wasn't really too much hope. Who was the third one you mentioned? Levitt.

GREENE: Levitt.

ENGLISH: Levitt played it very cleverly. Yeah, we had hopes on Levitt, yes.

GREENE: What about Procaccino [Mario A. Procaccino]?

ENGLISH: Procaccino would have been for Kennedy. He actually set up a thing with Kennedy. This was up at the U.N. Plaza place. They went into the bedroom, and Kennedy waved me out; so I knew he had it. Norman Mailer that was in the other room at the time. [Laughter]

GREENE: What was he doing there?

ENGLISH: Mailer wrote about that in the thing he did for Esquire on the....

GREENE: I don't think I've seen that.

ENGLISH: He wrote a very good piece for Esquire about Kennedy. This is the first time they had met. It was a thing that was set up. When Kennedy saw the schedule, all the delegates he was going to meet, and all the Procaccino types, he said, "My God, can't you give me something to break it up?" So, we got Norman Mailer to come in.

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Bill Walton [William Walton] got him. I think we also had Plimpton [George Plimpton] in that day, too. It was a little bit broken up. But I remember when he was in the bedroom with Procaccino, Mailer was in the front room looking around. It was nice to entertain, you know, keeping Procaccino busy while he was talking to Mailer. [Laughter] It was kind of funny.

Then we had like the Brooklyn delegation up there. It got all fouled up – you know, people coming up too early and overstaying with him – so, we ended up with the Brooklyn delegation in one room and the Queens in the other and Mailer coming up. It was really kind of playing musical chairs kind of thing.

GREENE: You know the black books – I don't know if you ever saw them – that were kept in the boiler room with the delegate counts and just the general information from each particular state; in the New York book I noticed there are whole lists of individuals that are to be contacted, either by you and the chairmen, or by the Senator and Smith, or Senator Ted Kennedy. How much of a problem did you have in getting these people to act on your information, to see the people you thought ought to be contacted, or to at least telephone them?

ENGLISH: Well, I think it worked out pretty good. The Senator was very good about it and a lot of it was his at various stages. Every time he came back, that's really what he came back for. And, you know, once in a while you'd get him out somewhere and say, "Would you please call some particular person?" and he'd do it.

GREENE: Yeah, it was no problem?

ENGLISH: No, and before – I don't know whether I skipped that part – there was a point when... This is again when we were still in the Hilton. Did I describe the Queens defection? Did we do that last time?

GREENE: Weinstein. Well, you did some of it this morning, and Chairman Burns put quite a bit of detail on that.

ENGLISH: I'm thinking about earlier. That was when it first started, before he announced, in the Hilton – well, at the time he announced.

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It was simultaneous; we didn't have any place to go. Queens was the big problem at that time. This is a funny story; that's why I'm telling it. Queens was the only one we knew was going run off the reservation right away, and that had to be stopped because Moe immediately called a meeting of his executive committee, and we knew they were going to endorse Johnson. So, it was important to hold out some of the executive members and some important people in Queens. So, we got as many people as we could out in the Hilton. And the Senator did very well; in fact, it was enough so that it looked somewhat respectable that we had some support there. But during the course of the....

He was doing pretty well, and he had a little pitch that he gave. And this one fellow came in, which I thought was very important because he would have had a lot of other leaders with him. He was looking to be county chairman. At one point, Kennedy went through his little spiel which only took about sixty seconds. The guy interrupted him and said, "Look, you want to be President? What's in it for me?" And Kennedy said, "What?" He said, "Well, I'm from New York and I understand the problems more. Now you have a President from Texas. I would have a better feeling about..." "No, no, I mean, what's in it for me?"

Now Kennedy's face flushed, his muscles tightened, and I could just see him getting livid. So, I took the guy; I said, "Let's you and I go outside and talk." So, I'm getting this guy out, but I can see Kennedy's going to assault him. They had swinging doors in this particular suite. I got the guy out and I just got him through the door – because I wanted to hold him; I didn't want to lose him. And just as I breathed a sigh that I had saved the situation, that Kennedy would not assault – Kennedy grabbed me by the arm, swung me around, and said, "Don't you make any deals with him!"

GREENE: That was pretty exceptional, though, for a guy to be that blunt about it, isn't it?

ENGLISH: He didn't really mean it that way. He wanted to be the leader, and he didn't articulate very – he was an older fellow. But it was terrible; it was a disaster. We eventually got him, incidentally.

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GREENE: Oh, yeah. Did you run into much of that, people trying to get something out of it for themselves if they came over?

ENGLISH: Not too much.

GREENE: I know I wanted to ask you about March 31st and after the President's speech, how much you did and how much you were able to hold onto these – not "hold on to," but win over – before Humphrey came into the race. Did you do a lot of telephoning and talking in those next couple days?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes, we started right that night.

GREENE: Was there much movement?

ENGLISH: Not as much as we thought. We really thought it was going to break and tumble and crack.

GREENE: Do you think the Senator shared that feeling? There's been a lot written that he was a lot less optimistic after that than most of the people around him. Do you agree with that?

ENGLISH: That night we met him at the airport and went back to the apartment. He hadn't seen it, and we watched it on television again. He was very somber; he didn't say anything. He was very, very quiet, much more so than he ever was. When people would start to speak, for instance, when he was watching it, he'd glare at them. They would not let any drinks be served. There were reporters up there; Breslin [James Breslin] was up there and several other national reporters. He was obviously thinking, "Well, what does it mean?" The mind was going, but I think he probably had more reservations about it than other people. I mean, I thought myself, I remember, that night, "This is it."

GREENE: But you considered Humphrey a candidate immediately, didn't you?

ENGLISH: I did, but I never thought that could be turned around, because I thought the rug had been pulled out from all of these Johnson people who, like O'Connor and so forth, all had gone out on a limb and now would look really very bad. They were left holding the bag. I could not

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see how, after what had happened to those people, they would ever go back and support the Humphrey candidacy at that time. That was my feeling that night and for the next several days.

GREENE: Who were some of the people that you thought probably could be brought around that you couldn't? Were they people like O'Connor and Wagner?

ENGLISH: Yes, and the people who were Humphrey people. Even out here in the county they had started a rump movement which Petito [Michael N. Petito] was the head of. I just thought that they would have had it, but they didn't. I suppose, they felt they were estranged from Kennedy anyways, so they might as well go on.

GREENE: I wanted to ask you about Petito's accusations against you, that you were threatening all your county political aides that if they didn't go for Kennedy they would lose their jobs. Was this just political mudslinging, or was it more involved?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. No, it's just a typical political ploy that goes on. As a matter of fact, I hadn't been in the county at all. So, it was really highly impossible.

GREENE: Okay. What about labor people? I know you had some contact with David Livingston and the other labor leaders.

ENGLISH: Well, Dave Livingston was a delegate to the convention, and he was a McCarthy fellow. We put him on our slate, so he was on both the Kennedy and the McCarthy slates from the 3rd Congressional District. He tried to be a mediator between the groups, too. He was very helpful.

GREENE: Anyone else in labor that you could work closely with?

ENGLISH: Well, of course, Sipser had contacts there in labor. We talked to Ray Corbett [Raymond R. Corbett]. Yes, there were a lot of them. Corbett was very helpful; couldn't do it openly because

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of problems with the unions themselves, but we had help. The UAW [United Auto, Aerospace, & Agricultural Implements Workers of America] was helpful. In the various sections of the state, there are labor delegates in almost every section. They usually are. Like in Buffalo you always have a UAW guy; in Syracuse you always have one. We had the president of the Long Island Federation; he and the vice president were both delegates from Nassau County.

GREENE: Was that an important factor in the selection of delegates, trying to achieve a balance of some kind between academics and labor and other types, other groups?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. We tried to do that. For instance, in Nassau we wouldn't allow any political leaders to be delegates, so there was always the president of the school board fellow, president of the college, and the president of the Federation of Labor. Our slates were all put together that way. In other upstate areas that's much more difficult. You ended up with more leaders upstate.

GREENE: Because you don't have the versatility in the population?

ENGLISH: Right.

GREENE: I know that the New York campaign was in pretty bad shape financially. Did that affect you seriously?

ENGLISH: Well, yeah, it was a problem because we didn't do anything. There was no Kennedy activity when we were talking about outlay because the whole Kennedy strategy was to do it one by one; they wouldn't spend money in one state until they had won the primary in another one, which happens to be good strategy. It's kind of silly to be spending your money if you're never going to get that far. There was no money spent in New York, but it was being tooled up for it, and it gave a lot of problems. People kept saying, "Well, there's Humphrey stuff all over the place." And McCarthy had spent fortunes; they had those ads in the Times [New York Times] like every week. McCarthy in particular spent a lot of money, and the Humphrey-Johnson thing had spent a heck of a lot of money. We didn't spend anything. We had the headquarters, but the rent wasn't paid. One time we came to work

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and the door was bolted and we couldn't get in; had to kick it down to get in.

GREENE: How much did you actually see of the Senator during the campaign?

ENGLISH: Well, I never saw him except when he came back to New York. I talked to him on the phone, but I never left the state to see him. Whenever he would come back – he would usually come back after a primary or something – that's the only time I saw him.

GREENE: Could you get much of a feeling of what his mood and outlook was at the different stages in the campaign?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes, because when he did come back, I spent a whole day with him, or two days, or however long he'd come back for.

GREENE: Was he very satisfied with the Indiana and Nebraska victories, or had he hoped for more?

ENGLISH: No, he was satisfied with them. I think he was dissatisfied with some of the newspaper coverage of them; I know he was.

GREENE: Had you spoken to him before the Oregon primary? Did he have a feeling that he was going to be defeated?

ENGLISH: I don't know if he had trepidation; a lot of people had a feel about that one. I don't think they knew, but they did not feel confident about it.

GREENE: Had he discussed with you at all what he hoped to get, what he felt he had to get in California to really remain a “viable candidate,” as he put it?

ENGLISH: He always talked about California from the very beginning, and I don’t remember....My recollection isn’t that good that I can remember what percentage it was, but he always talked about California. When we talked of the delegates – well, I mean, when he was talking of these delegates at the very beginning before those primaries, he always emphasized California. And I have to expect

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that he probably thought he would do better than he finally ended up doing.

GREENE: Did better than he thought?

ENGLISH: Yes, because those original polls, when he was deciding to run – you know, that original poll that just had shown....That was one of the big reasons that he ran, because it showed him so far ahead in California. So, I just have to believe he thought he would run better than he ended up doing.

GREENE: Oh, I’m sorry. I thought you said the other way around.

ENGLISH: Well, I may have, but I didn’t mean it that way.

GREENE: Yeah, because I had heard that he felt he had to get 50 percent to really make an impression.

ENGLISH: I don’t remember, but he thought he was going to do well in California.

GREENE: Did you have people in the state lined up, McCarthy people, who said they’d come over if he won in California?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes.

GREENE: Who? Any of their leaders?

ENGLISH: Yes, there were a lot of them. A lot of them said that at least they were going to sit down and discuss that. It would have been difficult, again, on how to do it because we had all those slates fielded. How we would have done that, we....It would have been very difficult just to have an individual McCarthy person say they’re now for Kennedy. We’re not so sure it would have been that helpful. I mean, it would have been difficult in the end, in some of these close districts, to demonstrate which slates were which because they weren’t marked to begin with.

GREENE: Did you have any contact with Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein] as far as what he'd do after California?

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ENGLISH: Well, I even talked to Steve about it. He called me from California the night of the California – just before the assassination, I guess. We talked about Lowenstein.

GREENE: And they expected him to come around?

ENGLISH: Yes. He was asking me what I could do about Lowenstein. You know, what was our situation here? We still had a primary against him. We couldn't have gotten out of it either.

GREENE: But you hadn't spoken to Lowenstein?

ENGLISH: I had not that night, no.

GREENE: I'm getting all these things out of order, but as it comes to me, did you have any part in – after the March 31st speech – getting these five previously uncommitted county leaders to come around; Crangle [Joseph F. Crangle], Savage [George P. Savage], Douglas [Arthur J. Douglas], Mahoney [John F. Mahoney, Jr.] and Conway [John O. Conway]? I guess some of them were at least leaning to Kennedy before then and just hadn't said so publically.

ENGLISH: Oh, sure. Crangle, I mean, was leaning heavily toward Kennedy; I don't even recall if... You mean Crangle hadn't been for Kennedy before?

GREENE: Not publically, no. You know, the Times announced these five as a group. Had you worked with any of the others?

ENGLISH: Oh, yeah, with all of them. Now, Savage, of course, was Syracuse, and Jerry was working on that. We were working around, but in Syracuse you had to work on everybody to bring pressure on the leader. Mahoney we had. Yes, who were the other two?

GREENE: Conway and Douglas.

ENGLISH: Conway and Douglas, yes, both – all of them, yeah.

GREENE: But none of them were really big coups; they

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were all people you had anticipated?

ENGLISH: No, I think we sort of expected that.

GREENE: Well, I have nothing else on the campaign unless you have some recollections of conversations with the Senator or Smith or others, in terms of how they felt the New York situation looked. Or were they simply going on what you and the chairman were saying?

ENGLISH: They pretty much had to go on it because they weren't here. They knew anyway; I mean, there were so many people from New York who were working in those primaries. And that's one of the things; there was nobody in New York. All of the politicians in New York were out in the hustings somewhere. There really weren't... We were just working with a lot of volunteers to keep things going. So, therefore, people would leave New York State and go to Nebraska, Oregon, or something like that, and report how bad things were back in New York. And we'd say, "Bring money."

GREENE: Had you had any plans for going out of the state at all?

ENGLISH: No, I never would have gone out of the state under any circumstances. There was nobody here.

GREENE: Well, is there anything else that I haven't raised?

ENGLISH: I would have gone out of the state after the New York primary.

GREENE: That's actually what I meant. You would have left at that point?

ENGLISH: Oh, after the New York primary, yeah, I would have gone out of the state providing there weren't any uncommitted people left here.

GREENE: You once said to me that you had very little knowledge – I know you mean in depth political knowledge – of the country outside of New York, but this was the situation you knew best. How much could a person like you do outside of New York?

ENGLISH: You know, I have a – I don't know. I suppose

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there are certain people that you could talk to, people I had met in the course of the years. But, I mean, I could not ever operate like Kenny

O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], who knows everybody in every state, or else somebody who didn't know any....Jerry McDougal [Jerome R. McDougal, Jr.], who for instance worked very closely with me in all the campaigns, was sent out to handle Missouri and Kansas. So, you can learn it, given a month or two. For instance, I know it now. Just in the last two years, national committeemen, I mean, I know almost – really traveling with the George S. McGovern committee. I know the internal situation pretty much in most of the states now, but I didn't know it then.

GREENE: But it really wasn't much of a handicap than for a New Yorker with a limited knowledge of the leaders outside to go out to the field? He could pick it up fairly easily?

ENGLISH: Oh, I think he could pick it up easily, if you keep your mouth shut in the beginning and you don't volunteer how stupid you are before you get there, if you go out and listen for a while.

GREENE: Is there anything else on the campaign that I haven't touched on, that I haven't raised, that you think ought to be covered?

ENGLISH: I can't think of anything pertinent. I can't remember the first interview, for instance, and well....

GREENE: Well, in the first interview we only covered up to the announcement, and I think we did it fairly thoroughly.

ENGLISH: I tend, I think you know, to bounce back and forth, but I think we just really covered it.

GREENE: Okay, good. Now, the other thing is, is there anything we haven't covered that I wouldn't know about that you think we ought to put on the tape in general? We covered the very early period, '60 to '64 and through the New York campaign, and touched on the mayoral – well, no so much mayoral,

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but gubernatorial race. Was there anything else that we ought to discuss? I can turn this off if you want to think.

ENGLISH: No, I just – I don't really – I don't think so. I mean, you have all the hard stuff. There are anecdotes and so forth, but I don't recall them that fast; it's only one thing always reminds you of another.

GREENE: Is there a big – this is probably a poorly worded question. What's the difference in the New York political scene now that Robert Kennedy is gone? Is there...?

ENGLISH: Well, I'll be very practical about it. The thing that I was thinking about last night, when I had to deal with the chairmen, there is no money here at all. While Kennedy lived, there was a retirement of a big New York State Democratic debt. It was going on on a regular basis and you could see it disappearing. He was the backbone of the party as far as resources went.

GREENE: Was he reducing this by speaking?

ENGLISH: The way he did it, really, was they had – beside this state dinner which they had once a year – this dinner in the Plaza, which he'd bring all the celebrities in and so forth; and that was a \$500-a-plate dinner. That was pretty good. Steve actually ran that thing. That really took a big belt every year out of the deficit. I'm sure it would have been gone by now. Instead, it's gone the other way. There's no rallying point for the party. I don't think that – there's no place for young people to go. It's noticeable they want someplace to go. There is not a place to coalesce about; there are no community projects. All those things have been failures. After the assassination, all the good Kennedy people say, "We have to do this and that." But without the figure, a father figure to do it, it just doesn't go on. I mean, the legacy is there, and that isn't to say that....People are working in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and so forth, but the huge numbers of people that he could attract and keep going, disappear and do different things. They're probably all doing the right thing, but they're not doing it together.

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