

**Thomas R. Jones Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 11/26/71**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Thomas R. Jones  
**Interviewer:** Roberta W. Greene  
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**Biographical Note**

Judge, Supreme Court, State of New York; founder, chairman, board of directors, Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, 1966 - 1972. In this interview, Jones discusses his relationship with Robert F. Kennedy and the Bedford-Stuyvesant restoration among other issues.

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Thomas R. Jones – RFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

THOMAS R. JONES

November 26, 1971  
Brooklyn, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert Kennedy Oral History Program of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: We can start with my asking you when and how you first met the Senator.

JONES: It was in his campaign for the United States Senate. I believe that was in 1963.

GREENE: Four.

JONES: It was in '63 for '64. Or was it in '64?

GREENE: Right. For '65.

JONES: For '65?

GREENE: Right.

JONES: Well, it was in a period when I was myself running for the civil court. I was, at that point, a New York State Assemblyman. I had built a political organization over the preceding three or four years and had won my office against the party machine, the Democratic Party machine, and also had won the district leadership of the Democratic Party in the area — an unheard of development because it was reform politics. And I'd served those two preceding years in the New York State Assembly and had, by that time, run

out of gas and run out of money — primarily out of money — so I was compelled by the circumstances to become a judge. It paid more, quite candidly. At that point, the Senator was running for political office, and I was campaigning as well. So we shared the political platforms in campaigning as well. So we shared the political platforms in Bedford-Stuyvesant and in other places where he campaigned.

One of the experiences that I'm reminded of was, when he came to Bedford-Stuyvesant, there was an enormous crowd of people at Nostrand Avenue and Fulton Street who had come to greet him. Many of them were people who were my adherents and supporters, and I knew them and they knew me. But they hadn't come to see me; they'd come to see him — [inaudible] — candidate

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for state office. And he arrived in an automobile and then proceeded to climb through the crowd to the top of a limousine, which didn't have any kind of handholds at all. It was simply the top of a big limousine; it seemed like an enormous limousine. But it was a very slippery perch to be on. And naturally the local candidates, including myself, had to be with the head of the ticket. I didn't know then, and cared less, about who the candidates were, since I was running for myself. Although I had heard about Robert Kennedy and liked him and liked his brother, who was somewhat of an idol to us, at least to the young of my community and the oppressed of my community.

When he got up on the top of the car, we shook hands and we were introduced in a very hectic situation. And we drove from Fulton and Bedford up to the corner of Nostrand and Fulton in the midst of a sea of people, all of whom were highly excited and charged with enthusiasm. We talked in a desultory way, and I observed then that he wasn't given much to small talk. And since I wasn't either it didn't matter. So we chatted about some things that don't come to mind, but they weren't very important apparently.

When we reached the corner of Nostrand and Fulton, the crush of people began to shake the car. And there was nothing to hold on to so we held onto each other and other people who were on the car. The whole business swayed like a rocking boat in a heavy storm; the car top would vibrate and the movement would push us back and forth. At one point I turned to him and said, "It won't be very long before we'll all go down off the top of this car." And he looked at me without a smile and said, "How far can you fall? The people will catch you." I was very embarrassed, because after all I was in the midst of my own people and he was a stranger, so to speak. I never said anything more about that, but about five or ten minutes later he actually leaned over, and they caught him. And he looked back at me as though to make the point, "What are you afraid of?" I never forgot that experience because it was true that if I trusted the people somehow they would support me. And when the support and confidence was missing, forget it; you're lost, or you'll have trouble to deal with on your own account to look out for yourself.

Well, that was the first time I met him. I met him on several occasions after that, in campaigning around the area, but hardly more than my making a speech and his making a speech. And obviously he was able to capture the imagination of the crowd, and I felt a little unhappy about the fact that in my own area among my own people, they were listening to him and not to me. But I say this very fondly because it didn't disturb me, as I began more and more to regard this man as having a style and the commitment, perhaps, which might provide some of

the answers that an impoverished ghetto community couldn't provide for itself. Then later on this incident that Jack Newfield writes of took place.

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GREENE: And there was nothing of significance in between?

JONES: No, I never saw him after that, and we never had any contact at all. I would meet him at various events and functions. As a politician, as a, you know, politician in the past, I would go to all the Democratic dinners and affairs and we would shake hands and say hello. But other than that there was no personal contact between us.

GREENE: It's interesting, because Newfield paints you as being very angry, and not angry so much in a general way but angry also at Robert Kennedy and what he represented. And, since you do say you had a respect and an affection at that point that.... Is he inaccurate, do you think, on how you felt?

JONES: Well, Newfield is right. What I was reflecting in what I say then and I say now is that the poor community of Bedford-Stuyvesant had been visited by so many people and been made so many promises which were not kept — and sometimes I wonder if they were ever intended to be kept — that I was cynical about anybody who came to look again, including this man whom I respected. It's like a child who had been promised so often that he will receive some dessert or at least some food to eat and no one ever produces that food. That's different from saying that you don't have respect for Senator Robert Kennedy — or anybody else. I grew up in a kind of religious household, although I don't profess to be a dedicated subscriber, unfortunately. But even Jesus Christ, when he came, you know, was a good man and the people hailed him. But after all, they didn't trust him either.

But my attitude, if you ask it, about Robert Kennedy was not based upon any idolatry or any assumptions that he represents a Second Coming, but a respect for his demonstrated integrity and commitment, and I wasn't sure whether it extended all the way to me and mine. This is about the size of it.

GREENE: Yes. What do you remember specifically about that meeting — and not only your own reaction but the reaction within the rest of the community — and how he handled it?

JONES: The meeting took place at the Bedford Avenue YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] which is located on Bedford Avenue and the corner of Madison Street. The Bedford Avenue YMCA, prior to that time — at least five years prior — was an all-white institution. The YMCA had, up to that time, maintained a fine structure, primarily for the benefit of white youth. Life being what it is, there was formerly an institution, called the Carlton Avenue YMCA, for blacks on Carlton Avenue and Fulton Street. But by reason of

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the shifting population, the Bedford Avenue YMCA found itself inundated by a sea of blacks. The change was then taking place, and the YMCA had begun to shift and give it over to blacks. And we were beginning to meet there, the black community began to meet there. And the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, to which I was one of the advisers purported to bring together the leaders of the community and the leaders of the community organizations in a concentrated effort to speak with one voice to issues affecting the community.

As I say, as one of the advisers to that structure or organizations, from time to time, I was asked to attend and, in a sense, help to preside over important affairs that they were holding. So, although I was on the civil court bench then, and had been for about a year — I think that was about the lapse of time between — I got off the bench and came to the meeting. I was told at about lunchtime that the Senator was coming and that he would tour the community. And I said to my associates that every other week somebody's touring and I just can't afford this kind of waste of time for somebody to look at a community that everybody knows exists and consists of four to five hundred thousand souls. And it's just amazing to me that somebody should want to study that which is obvious, again and again. So I wanted to point out to you, Mrs. Greene, that there is.... We're not dealing with a little village in Tumbutku, we're dealing with the largest black community in the world perhaps, a community which has been documented by census statistics and government statistics of all kind, which has a crime rate that make it notorious, and then it had a crime rate that made it notorious. So, my attitude, to explain the background, was that, who on earth would really have to study this community all over again — since we're not living in the equatorial rain forest.

So you have to forgive me if I were a little puzzled about why anybody would come to look at it again when it is so well-known for all of its deficiencies and problems. So I want to explain that it wasn't an animus toward the Senator or anybody else. It was simply my intellectual puzzlement over why this must be, if it were serious. And so, you see that when I learned that if he was going out, I had to wait for an hour and a half. By that time, not only my misgivings but my apprehension on how much time I could spare had come to full flower.

Moreover, all of the other people in the room expressed some difficulty in opening the discussion. And some of my colleagues and associates asked me if I would open, when the Senator came back from his tour, and start them off. I suppose it's because they didn't think I had any sense to do otherwise and expected that I would say what was on my mind of my own irritation and lack of confidence.

So, when he returned from his visit, from his tour, and the meeting opened, it was already after 2:30, and I was off

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the bench since 11:00, waiting for some....

When the meeting opened, he asked, either individually or directly, if various representatives of community organizations would tell him how they looked upon the things which he had just seen. And so, I opened the whole discussion, as Newfield seems to have captured, with a statement that, "We're tired of being studied." And I said that, "Your late brother whom we revered, John Kennedy, had already said years ago that a black child born — he said, 'A Negro child born this day, anywhere in the United States, has a seven year less life expectancy, has less chance of graduating from high school than a white child born anywhere in

the same country.” And I said to Senator Kennedy, “But all these things your brother knew years ago, and everybody in American who would listen heard him say it.” And there didn’t seem to be to me any need for further study. And that’s what I told him, maybe in some heat, but without any personal animus. It was speaking to the issue and not to the man, I thought.

GREENE: Right. Do you remember how he responded, not only to your feelings, but to those expressed by other people that day?

JONES: He said, in effect, that he understood the impatience of the people, because what he had seen shocked and appalled him; that he wouldn’t blame anybody for protesting, as we were protesting, the failure of government and government officials to attack these problems without further inquiry. And he said, in effect, that he intended to attempt something soon to deal with it.

GREENE: How did this leave the group? What was their response to this?

JONES: Because of the concerted, inconsolable attitude of the people, at that point, there was a sense of disquiet. I might have contributed to it. I did intend to, frankly, I did intend to contribute to anything which would put an end to what I thought was an over-study of a situation that was obvious and not to attack the Senator, who, as far as I knew, hadn’t contributed to it in any way but had indicated or stated his desire to change it. But they were not.... They left with a sense of impatience and wait-and-see.

GREENE: And at what point did you start to meet with him on planning a specific project for the area?

JONES: Six months passed. Six months passed after that meeting, and I didn’t know during that interim that he had been meeting with the leadership of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating ....

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GREENE: I wondered. You did not meet with him and you weren’t even aware of those meetings?

JONES: The leadership of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council had been called by him, and he met with them and their leaders on a number of occasions, I understood later, as he and his staff began to implement his promises. So much so that when I was called by him six or seven months later, I didn’t know that a rehabilitation-restoration corporation had been founded, at his instigation and with his inspiration and assistance, and that the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council leadership had put together a group of people whom they represent to the Senator and his staff would be able to carry out his purposes and to attempt to rehabilitate Bedford-Stuyvesant. I didn’t know that, because I wasn’t privy to it; his staff and his office didn’t tell me, and the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, or their own reasons, didn’t tell me either.



GREENE: I was just going to say, the reasons must have been deliberate.

JONES: Yes, I think that they were. In retrospect, I think that the people who were reached by the Senator, and whose names you probably have in some of your documents — Mrs. Richardson [Elsie Richardson], Mrs. Rose Drawls, Mrs. Ruth Goring, Mrs. Stupan Dupane (?) and others, a number of them whom I've known all my life virtually — didn't undertake to inform me and others about what was happening. And this is a pure political reality, for which I have no quarrel. I'm not quarreling about it; people will do what they want to do, and I think they have every right to their own preferences. Obviously, I wasn't included in those preferences, and therefore I have no reason to believe that they had to invite me or inform me.

When the Senator called me one day at my court, he asked me if I would come see him. And I asked him, "Well, would you mind telling me what it's about?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you all about it when you come over to my apartment, if you will, but it has to do with my activities in Bedford-Stuyvesant." I said, "What activities are you talking about?" He says, "Well, you don't know?" I said, "No, I don't know what you're talking about, Senator. But, all right, I'll come and see." The following day by appointment I went up to his apartment at the United Nations Plaza. And, he was there with Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C. Johnston], I think Carter Burden may have been present, Angie Cabrera [Angelina Cabrera] was present, and someone else was present. And then he sent them all out of the room, before we began to talk. Some preliminary discussions took place during which he said, "My staff has been working on the Bedford-Stuyvesant situation. And I want to know what you think of it." And I said, "I don't know

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anything about what your staff had been doing, and I haven't been privy to anything at all. I don't know what you're doing at all." And he says, "Well, I'm quite surprised. But, at any rate, we've been doing a lot of work there, and I'd like to have your advice."

GREENE: Why would you think that his staff would have avoided you that way, particularly if he wasn't even aware of it and obviously hadn't given the order?

JONES: It might have been because of my statement to him at the Bedford YMCA; it might have been because they didn't want to start off with a difficult person, understandably, who couldn't be predicted for his statements or activities and who was known as a reformed type of fellow and a rebel anyhow, as my history has been, and was — it didn't characterize me as a tractable fellow. I didn't expect anybody to like that particularly. That could be. And also because they thought they were dealing with a representative group of people, which didn't necessarily include me, and needn't have. So, whether it was purposeful or whether it was accidental, I don't know. But he seemed surprised, or expressed surprise.

When the preliminaries were over, his staff withdrew and he then turned to me and said, "I intend to follow up on my promises in Bedford-Stuyvesant and try to do some of the things you intend to change if you can. And I remember what you said. I think you're justified in saying what you said. Now, can you work with me?" I said, "I'm a judge, you know; I'm not a free

agent, as I used to be.” He says, “Yes, I know all about your being a judge. There are judges and judges.” Then he laughed. And I said, “Yeah, I suppose. But I happen to subscribe to the images of judges and am careful about how I act as a cutting edge.” So we laughed about that too, and he said, “Yes, I know all about that. But I mean can you work with me on some things?” And I said, “Well, whatever time I have, I’ll surely put something together.” And he said, “No, I don’t mean that. What do you.... How do you use your spare time?” So I reeled off the organizations that I was active in, NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], Urban League, this, that, legal organizations. And he said, “How much time do those organizations take after you leave the bench?” And I said, “About three days, sometimes four days a week in the evening.” And he said, “How much time do you have left?” I said, “Well, you know, sometimes I don’t....” And he said, “Well, you give me half of the rest of the time.” I said, “Well, since you’re the Senator from the state of New York.... What do you intend to do?” And he says, “Well, I’ll tell you. I have been working with these people in Bedford-Stuyvesant for six months, and I can’t get on track.” He says, “Nobody’ll take charge and nobody will do what has to be done and get doing.” And he says, “I can’t waste anymore time — I don’t have anymore time — to get something started.

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It’s exhausting, the kind of time and emphasis I want to place on this thing. And if you will take hold and commit yourself, from what I hear, you’ll be able to do it, because you’re tough enough to try to do it.” I said, “Thank you very much.” I said, “Remember, being a judge inhibits my general meanness, but we’ll see within that framework.” He said, “I’m sure you can manage.”

He then turned me over to his staff, with instructions that they brief me on everything that had gone before and that they should place at my disposal the office and the people who were working on the project, until it could get off the ground and start flying. But he told them that, “I have the Judge’s commitment that he will do whatever is necessary to get this things afloat. And that’s enough for me; let’s go.”

With that, I turned to Carter Burden and Tom Johnston and some of the others who were there, and we began to function. And the first thing we did was to have them get in touch with the leadership of the CBCC — Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council — who were then informed that the Senator had expressed a desire that the Judge be involved and that there be a meeting with the Judge and that group to discuss some of the outstanding proposals and plans with respect to his office and his input, including the special impact program, which he then had already brought to fruition, although I didn’t know it. The staff informed me that the SIP [Special Impact Program] program which had been made as an amendment to the OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] Act of 1964, was then a reality. [Interruption]

GREENE: You were saying that at this time the OEO Act of ‘64 was....

JONES: The Senator had already, in earnest of his commitment and his intention as expressed...

GREENE: That day?

JONES: ... sometime before — with which I wasn't familiar — taken these measures and intended, I perceive now in retrospect, to bring the benefits of that pilot type of project to bear in Bedford-Stuyvesant. You have to understand that I wasn't privy to this...

GREENE: I do.

JONES: ... and, with a certain amount of cynicism, wasn't prepared to accept anybody's promises.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: But in retrospect I see that he had done this and then proceeded to implement it by working with the

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people who were head of CBCC, assuming — I would give him credit for it — that I was part of it, since I was spokesman for this group sometime before.

GREENE: That's right.

JONES: So on his side I don't perceive any lack of good faith. It was just a lack of communication which he repaired — to some degree at least, I thought, being a little personal about it — by calling on me to keep my commitments. Because the way he put it to me was to say, "Well, you spoke up and you said in no uncertain terms what you didn't like; and if I intend to do something about it, what about your commitment?" Well, that's a pretty tough order for anybody who has pride in himself and, you know, has a certain kind of nerve and vigor. So when he said to me, "How much time are you prepared to give" I had to say, "I'll give as much as I have." He didn't have to press me on the terms of my commitment because I didn't feel I could let anybody, you know, just make a fool of me or call me a liar — not over that anyhow; you know, if it were something like that, which I'd think is a matter of life and death to the community to meet. Either my communities change or I'm dead anyhow; I can't survive. And it was easy, therefore, to be virtuous in that area.

GREENE: Yeah. How much did he explain at that time about what he had in mind and how much he had already done, and how he perceived your role in it?

JONES: He didn't boast about himself at all. As a matter of fact he never did. He had a way of understating his strength and clout, and he expressed his self-assurance without boasting. I gathered after a time that he adopted a principle that if you have power you don't have to flaunt it. Once he said to me, in another incident that took place, which I'll come to later, hopefully — that all men are equal but some of us get over it or some are more equal than others, worlds to that effect. There was no question that he was pretty damn sure of himself, and had enormous courage and self-assurance. So, we discussed that once,

although other instances happened when called to my attention that I had made a commitment through which to force me back, to do something else which he had in mind. He was shrewd.

But he didn't discuss with me what he had done except to say that the SIP program was intended for areas just like Bedford-Stuyvesant and we could avail ourselves of it and other things that he had in mind. But I must confess I wasn't aware of how those structures operated in the Senate, and how certain power organizations functioned, and had no reason to believe that any of it was valid. But he made the commitment, so "I'll see," I said. He did tell me very clearly — and this

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I also was to learn — that he had instructed his staff and intended to see to it that every commitment they made to me would be kept. I had to learn this too, for I have no reason to know whether Senator Robert Kennedy kept his commitments; his saying so didn't make it true.

GREENE: That's right.

JONES: At any rate, he did say that, and so we began to function, on these premises: my having to trust him and his staff and he having to trust me and my commitment and my influence and ability to get things done. He did say that he had learned that I had functioned effectively as a politician. I had been able to win against odds and I didn't quit. He said, "You're not known to quit." I said, "But I'm broke. I don't have any money." He says, "Well...."

So we went on from there. I left his apartment, went to his office on East 45th Street in the Post Office Building. And I was briefed by Tom Johnston and Carter Burden — primarily Tom Johnston. Later on, Adam Walinsky and Peter Edelman came up from Washington. They participated in the briefing, to some degree, in that back room, upstairs. The Senator would come in occasionally, when he was in town to find out how things were going and each time to ask me if I'm satisfied. I said, "Well, I'm satisfied as I can be. It's slow and hard work." At first, however, I undertook to work closely at the existing leadership of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, because I didn't think that I would be unable to work with them. So I told him and his staff that I would begin by following through the process of talking to them and seeking their support, provided I was elected chairman of this effort and received a kind of a mandate so I could function. Without that, I said, I couldn't barge in, that the rehabilitation-restoration corporation would have to designate me as the chief officer, or the policy-making head, for me to function. Otherwise I just couldn't do it — not and try cases.

GREENE: Is that what he had in mind anyway, do you think?

JONES: His might have. He might have; he probably did have, but.... I suppose, he.... Since you say it, he probably did have in mind that I should become the head of it — that I should organize it, get a mandate from it, so that he could then deal with somebody solid and stable in the community, and not wonder from day to day whether it's going to work. In retrospect, perhaps that's what he did have in mind. Since I can only give it to you from my own vantage point, I would say that this is how it worked out. And this was certainly

my demand. Otherwise I couldn't, as an experienced organizer — organizer in politics and other things like that — somebody has to give you a mandate and leave you with it long enough to do your will or work your woe. The

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people in the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council begrudgingly gave me the mandate.

GREENE: Did that automatically set you up in their eyes as Robert Kennedy's man?

JONES: That's right. It did that. It also indicated to them that their way of doing business was not satisfactory to him. And they were extremely angry and looked upon it — and said it — that this was another example of high-handed tactics from the outside — people choosing the issues, rather than having leadership emerge from the will of the group. That wasn't as simple as it seemed, because I was not a Johnny-come-lately, and I was already a leader in the group and I was already one of the elected officials who had won every time I ran. I won going away each time and I was the only one in the group who had put his feet to the fire and been elected, so it wasn't possible to say that Robert Kennedy had designated me; I had won myself, and had a mandate from the people to do something if not this. So they weren't able to say that Robert Kennedy selected me— although, in a sense, he elected to work with me. That's absolutely true. They were furious however, and justifiably so.

GREENE: Did you anticipate that?

JONES: No. I must confess to say no. No, I didn't anticipate the anger that would be visited on me, especially by some of the women, with whom I had good relations; I don't mean in any intimate way, but I always made it my business to show respect, and deference to women and not in any insinuating way toward them — that's out of a sense of my own pride as well as my own dignity. I think to force myself on somebody would be anathema. So I was always easy and perhaps a little ahead of my time. Blame my father for that; he's that himself. He was kind of a gracious old gentleman who always was very proper. But I had no difficulty with them and didn't anticipate how angry they would be. Moreover, since I was "democratic," in the sense that I said I would have come to them; as an executive committee and day-to-day responsibility would be expressed, and I sought some secretarial individual who would function with them all, I felt I could do it that way. Well, you can't run a railroad that way at all, with anybody, and I didn't realize then that it would be impossible, for them or anybody else, to try that so-called democratic technique.

It wasn't long before everything I did was cancelled out. They were fighting like real tigers — effectively, too. I can laugh in retrospect but they really worked me over and almost made it fail, because they wouldn't let me turn without cancelling, nullifying, doing anything they could to frustrate the policy. Well, I may be talking too long on these things....

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GREENE: Oh, no. Oh, no.

JONES: These are the background things that the Senator got to know....

GREENE: Did you keep him or at least Tom Johnston, posted about these developments?

JONES: I kept Tom Johnston involved and informed. And Earl Graves was then somehow in the wings.

GREENE: Yeah. Yeah. He was meeting even earlier with that group, yeah.

JONES: He had something to do with the selection of the group, I think. I knew Earl Graves as a real estate broker in Bedford-Stuyvesant. And our initial relationships might not have been so good, because he might have regarded my attitude as reflecting some disdain about what he was doing as contrasted to my being a lawyer, a legislator, and a judge. So it was more than that; it was simply that I had an enormous dislike for real estate brokers, and every damn thing they did — the predators who would rob the black community and have robbed them ever since — of that ilk. Not to say that Earl Graves was doing that, but it is that type of non-productive citizen that I'd regard as a predator. And I might have said it at various meetings, you know. So it was that kind of separation between myself and Earl Graves that might have led to his drifting or seeking other solutions that didn't include me. And I can understand that too; if I were Earl Graves, I wouldn't have selected me either. And he's a likeable fellow, except for that quarrel with him. I don't think real estate brokers are going to save the world, frankly but neither do lawyers.

But, so it was done. And then when I tried to make it work, on the basis that I had selected — Senator Kennedy didn't tell me how to do it; he says, "Whatever way you want to do it, you do it. I regard you as a man who is able to pull it together. Anything reasonable, I will do."

GREENE: And what about Tom Johnston who, in some sense, was in the middle of this? Because he had been working with the original group, and now also was going to work with you. Did he....

JONES: Tom Johnston gave me more trouble and caused me more anguish than anybody on that side. He was the most difficult, headstrong, self-opinionated man I've ever seen. And I can say this now, that he had assumptions and chauvinist impressions about the black community which made my

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life all the more difficult.

GREENE: Be specific.

JONES: He would not give me the kind of information I needed promptly. He never fully briefed me on what the Senator had in mind, or the extent to which the SIP program was intended to be concentrated in Bedford-Stuyvesant. He never told

me the full extent of his meetings and activities with the people with whom I had to deal. He would push Earl Graves upon me and force me through Earl Graves before I got to him. He took advantage of my attitude with regard to not second-guessing staff and letting a man do his things. He took advantage of the fact that I refused to become an informant to his boss about his shortcomings. And he just behaved shabbily, in every possible way I can think of, while being suave and urbane and cooperative. And fundamentally he was an elitist about the power of the elite, in my view. He gave me the impression, and Earl Graves shared it, of having the clout of the boss, and using the big stick of the boss, with the knowledge that the boss would never permit anybody to tell him anything about his staff. And that was the style of Robert Kennedy. He wasn't going to listen, generally, to any complaints about his stuff or the people who worked for him; he was going to go with them and work things out with them. I learned that later.

But Tom Johnston made the job more difficult. For instance, I would have to leave the bench on many occasions, at awkward times and spend whole afternoons when I couldn't afford it, to keep my commitment, and to have... [Interruption]

... a complaint because I had never said this to anybody.

GREENE: No, and I think it's very important to put it on the record.

JONES: And I'm not saying it now to assuage my feelings, because I don't even think Tom Johnston knows what I feel. The Senator never knew. And no one else knew, except perhaps my wife and my children as to how many subtle and overt insults I had to put up with.

GREENE: Do you think this is a matter of perhaps poor organization and lack of judgement on Tom.... You know, he was so inexperienced in this type of program.

JONES: Well, Carter Burden, on the other hand, and Adam Walinsky and even Peter Edeleman, and Dolan — all of these people on the Senator's staff had a far sharper sensitivity and a more sensible

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attitude toward the so-called lesser breeds, and were not intolerant and engaged in half-truths — the way I think Tom Johnston was — with me and with other people in this group. But we got over it because I suppose he was universally the same with everybody else. Well, that's passed.

GREENE: Do you think he was.... Was he suspect with this whole group, the community group?

JONES: I don't know whether he liked the whole idea in the first place. But he was in charge of the New York office and this was one of his assignments. And he was a very able and bright fellow. He's got a first-class mind. Quick, quick as any man I've seen — well, not any man I've seen but certainly he's quick — knowledgeable, sophisticated. And his wife is smarter than he is. She's a very able woman. She's a French woman.

GREENE: Yes.

JONES: But — and what I'm saying now is not designed to alienate him, although one day I suppose I'll have a talk with him about a lot of it. It doesn't matter now, since I perceived that it was a job that had to be done, a job which could only cost me if I failed. Being a judge already there was nothing I could get, in any immediate sense, to see then what the future held or the perspectives of various people might have been. I didn't guess, I didn't know. So idealistically, perhaps, I was interested in recreating Bedford-Stuyvesant. Anybody who would help me, I would go with. Perhaps that's a simplistic approach which you have to believe; I have no other to account for my behavior. Although, it wasn't exactly a bad thing to be known by the Senator. I suppose it has its fringe benefits. But I knew other senators, and you know.... Okay. It doesn't matter.

So, when the difficulties became clear.... Oh, incidentally, I had been functioning on my own funds, doing things without any money at all. The Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council had been funded by the City of New York. They had two or three people on staff, whom they used to float these projects. When I came aboard to try to do this, I had no staff and no facilities, except the use of their offices on Bedford Avenue, opposite the YMCA. So, for a couple of months, it didn't occur to me that somebody has to provide some money, and that I had to get some kind of money to hire a taxi, to hire a secretary, because it was still not clear what the purpose was and how far-reaching it was. In retrospect, it seems to me that those who understood how far they intended to go would have made these facilities available. But it didn't occur to me since I wasn't privy to their internal discussions and plans. As I said, Tom Johnson never told me, nobody else

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told me, and the Senator didn't have time, or didn't elect to do so.

GREENE: Let me ask you: At this point, what was your concept of what they were trying to do? Was it still very vague, or....

JONES: Still very vague. By then, by that time I knew that there was an SIP program. By that time I knew that the Senator was prepared to put together a structure which would anchor on Bedford-Stuyvesant, and begin the process of rehabilitating it. I knew some of the broad outlines of the SIP — special impact package. But nobody had spelled out, and nobody could spell out, how it was to be done. SIP was a concept in a law.

GREENE: There was no discussion of the two corporations and....

JONES: No, that came later. Then I had to.... This I had to evolve, because after.... Meetings would take place almost every evening, every day, telephone calls, and you can imagine the enormous amount of activity and discussions and meetings with the whole group in trying to hammer out a structure. We had no idea, and it had to be created from the ground up. Do you understand? Nobody knew this wasn't ever done before. And they'd attempted it in terms of that group, without the second group, without the D & S



[Distribution and Services] Corporation. That hadn't come into being yet; SIP didn't have that. This was my view, this was my concept. And it came about in an interesting way.

The Senator spoke to me one day at his apartment, about a month after I had agreed to work. He had called me and asked me to come up. And he says, "I understand you're having some difficulties." I said, "Yes." And I said, "I still haven't got it straight yet in my head.."

GREENE: Speak up a little bit, Judge, because the mic isn't picking it up when you....

JONES: ... "I still haven't gotten it straight, Senator, as to how I'm going to do this, and I'm having a great deal of difficulty, especially with the women." Now let me say parenthetically, my statement about the women has cost me so much — and it's contrary to my personality and my outlook; it really is. But it just shows, you know, you might get shot, as it happens, for a chance statement. And all of your virtues don't matter, if you make the wrong statement at the wrong time. But I wanted you to know why it came about, because they were especially vigorous in opposing me. And they had a couple of men who would do pretty much what they pleased; I think the women really ran the men. And that isn't

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anything against women; it happens, you know. And they dominated the three or four men who would come to meetings: Mr. Hood, a very little fellow who was for all the world like a typical Caspar Milquetoast; Donald Benjamin [Donald F. Benjamin], who was then a candidate for the executive of restoration, who was a ladies' man, and loved to do whatever the ladies wanted, and they loved him dearly because he did whatever — I suppose — they liked — gracious and very much the ladies' man; and one or two other whose names I needn't mention.

So the Senator said to me, he says, "Judge, you know, I have never been dealt with as rudely and as abruptly, by anybody — even my worst adversaries — than I have been dealt with by some of the women of Bedford-Stuyvesant." And he says, "They take particular delight in abusing me, in accusing me, in harassing me." And he says, "I... I... I don't know what to do, but I just can't stand it." And he flushed and his face got red. I didn't understand what he was talking about because I wasn't present when he told me, how embarrassed he was.

GREENE: Do you know anything about the specific occasions he had in mind?

JONES: Some things may come to mind, but one of the things that struck me was something that Elsie Richardson said, and Ruth Goring said, to him about, "You men, especially you white men, don't have any respect for us. And, we don't believe that you're going to do anything anyhow unless you can have your way with us...."

GREENE: And this was after the program was functioning

JONES: That's when he was working with them. And as we began, when he expressed some difficulty or some problems.... Well, as they were negotiating. They had come to his office and just took him off right in his office and abused him. And he was upset that he couldn't do anything about it and couldn't say anything about it and couldn't deal with them

on the basis of the merits of the situation, that he felt strapped to respond. He's not accustomed to being strapped in responding and fighting back when he feels he's being abused. But he felt cornered in a

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situation where they had unjustifiably, as he said, accused him, and wouldn't accept any kind of approaches which would permit his views to be heard or to be accepted. And he says, "You know, power doesn't work that way. You can't really do everything everybody wants; you've got to take into account what the facts of life are." And he says, "I can't do that and I realize what you're up against." And he said, "But remember, you said you'd go with them, and I didn't force you. But I say to you now, whatever way you decide to go, I'll go with you. But, you go ahead your own way."

GREENE: Well, really, your problems with the group were somewhat parallel.

JONES: Yeah. They were attacking me then, because... [Interruption] I want to point out that there's a phenomenon about the women I'm talking about, which is, perhaps, unique in America... [Interruption] The problems which have been defeating the black community for several generations now at least express themselves in joblessness among the men, in opportunities often times for black women to work when man cannot, in the developing matriarchal character of many black families where men are missing, because of joblessness and other factors. Inability to support families leads to flight and, you know, embarrassment, and where women have been compelled to take over responsibility for these men who are unemployed and missing. Welfare — social welfare programs of the city and of the states — have reinforced this, because the welfare plans drove the men out of the household.

These and other factors led to the increasingly important and strong role of the women as makers of the family and maintainers of the family and organizers of most of the families. They could get jobs, as I said, even though the jobs were not as well-paid as others. And then, there was also a strong suggestion of other types of social relationships which the society encouraged, which included black women, and the excluded black men. I won't elaborate on that; it's sufficient to say that the color of the population might reflect on the realities of that point of view. I'm not decrying human relations, but they exist. All of these, of course, have led to a larger and larger role being played by black women. And as they had responsibilities of this kind, they began to act like leaders in the area, understandably so.

However the white society — the dominant society — doesn't have that kind of orientation; it operates on the basis of the leadership of men; the corporations, the legislature, the large organizations, the opinion-makers, the editorial writers — all of these structures in the leadership of America are led by men, by white men. So when white men from power bases come to black communities and are confronted by black women who assay a role of authority, they don't know how to

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deal with them, because they've never had to deal with their own women that way. Part of that was expressed by the Senator. And I understood him at once.

My difficulties began when, for the first time, I had to oppose these women. Up to then, I had not had occasion to oppose them. They were my staunchest supporters; I was tractable and respectful to them. And, without boasting, I was careful about my personal relations with them — not out of any mid-Victorian attitude, but out of the needs of the situation: I can't survive and foul my own nest. So put it down to that and not to any virtue. It was simply a matter of fact that you can't have it both ways and succeed in society where any mistake is fatal. Especially as a black leader and a judge, I can't afford that mistake because that would be fatal to me where it might not be fatal to other people. Please understand it as not being pontifical, but practical.

So when these women dealt with the Senator that way, and then began to fight me, as they could — and well they fought; they were very sophisticated — it ultimately led me into an unfortunate statement, which cost me heavily, that "Some of my adversaries who were women cried like women and fought like men." They really did, and very well — very effective fighters, in-fighters, and understood what the levers were. And I don't blame them for any of their struggles or any of their opposition, mind you; you use what you have in a struggle, and there's nothing unfair about using what they used.

So when the Senator spoke to me, I'd already sensed the difficulty. And I didn't know what difficulties he was having and had had but our points of view coincided. I had to then search for a different formula, a different approach. I struggled along with the problem for another two months after that — this has already been four months maybe, even five — and I finally had to arrange an appointment with him and tell him, "I can't do it this way. I'm sorry. I have to figure out another way — at least find a way of getting any freedom of action. I have no money from anybody." Whereupon he directed his staff to place fifteen hundred dollars at my disposal so that I could hire and do some things and pay some of these lunches and expenses that I couldn't afford. I obviously didn't have any funds to do anything with.

Well, my mistake was to announce to my colleagues in CBCC that I had received fifteen hundred dollars, and that I was proceeding to use it — this time honesty didn't pay — and hire people, et cetera. I wanted to tell them about it so that they would know that in a short time I would give an accounting of this money which was placed at the disposal of the effort which we were making, but had been given to me, and not to the organization. I was compelled to promptly put the money in the CBCC treasury, and that lost it to me effectively. I got paid off for my virtue and honesty, but I submit that's the only way I could have done it. Anybody having mentioned fifteen hundred dollars would have embarrassed me terribly. So it was

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of necessity that I had to announce it. It went back in the treasury, and it became a burden rather than a hel, because every nickel I spent I had to voucher — by the dollar, by the nickel. But because this is also the fighting that went on to prevent me from emerging and developing the process and the organization. This might be boring for you....

GREENE: No, it's not at all. Don't be concerned with that.

JONES: The most difficult experience, apart from the Battle of the Bulge, that I've ever had in my life.

GREENE: [Laughter] That's an interesting comparison: different battle of the bulge.

JONES: Oh, man, we suffered in that area.

GREENE: Battle of the different bulge.

JONES: Wow, it was something, because it was really, astute people, the trouble.

GREENE: Now, I assume that we're still talking about the period before the whole selection of Frank Thomas [Franklin A. Thomas] and the whole thing that developed because of that.

JONES: Yes. Frank Thomas came into the picture just before the change — just before it was necessary for me to abandon the R & R [Renewal and Rehabilitation] Corporation. I had been struggling to locate an executive for five solid days — not in sequence. But for five solid days, I met various people in the Hotel Commodore, who came from all over the country — blacks primarily — who were brought to New York by the Senator's staff and others, or some of whom were in New York, and who had the credentials — which we had discussed previously — to be the executive of this new structure. The Senator's staff and I had sat down, and we had delineated the credentials and the capacities of the individual who could lead such an organization which we had in mind. He had to be an intellectual and he had to have proven his administrative ability, he had to be tough, he had to be honest. He had to be black. Preferably he had to come from the black community, locally, and to know it. There were some of the lineaments of the individual we sought. And we interviewed — and the records are still out somewhere; Earl Graves had some of them. We must have interviewed about thirty men. I figured they'd never know how much I spent in court during those weeks. But it took time and I had to be there because it was my judgment which finally had to be satisfied as to the man who could do it. And we heard about Frank Thomas. I never knew Frank Thomas. And I read his curriculum

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vitae, and I said, "He looks like a good one, Thomas."

GREENE: Was his name first presented by Lindsay [John V. Lindsay]?

JONES: I think it was presented by Lindsay, but I'm not sure. I know he came to me, along with a group of other names which the Senator's staff had accumulated. So I'm not sure that Lindsay presented his name, so I can't say. But I know I say his name and I met him. And he was a big fellow — he is a big fellow — and he had the educational background. And he appeared to me to be tough enough — I don't mean tough in a surly sense, but you don't knock him over or push him over or he doesn't run when he's frightened, and he

gave me the impression of a guy who would stand still and see before he ran, if he ran. What I'm saying is that he had, in my view — among other people whom I'd interviewed and who records I say — the capacity which is necessary to cope with a community in ferment, with a community that was cynical, angry — a civil rights activities in full cry, and who had some commitment, nevertheless, to this community in flux; who also was able, hopefully, to deal with the other community which had its own frame of reference and its own preferences. It's a very difficult kind of citizen you're looking for, to have all of those credentials and abilities.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: But he seemed to have them both. And so he emerged as one of the three or four men whom I said I would go with, of the ones I could see.

The women and the men — and are now — had been pushing Donald Benjamin and two or three others of their friends. And they were acting, from time to time, on these recommendations that I had been distilling, because I had to agree then to present to them some of these people — although I didn't tell them that I had been meeting in the Commodore and interviewing and reviewing these people. But I told them that we were looking for an individual who could head this operation. And they had Donald Benjamin, among the first of the group that they wanted to advance. Well, I knew Donald Benjamin, and he had just about wrecked me on two or three occasions.

GREENE: Okay. Your honor.

JONES: The Thomas situation was interesting because Thomas didn't want to come. When I spoke to him in the police department, I related to him what we had to do, and I had seen him before and tentatively — but he wasn't interested at all. But, by the time I saw him, I realized that we have the same kinds of tradition and he had somewhat the

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same cultural orientation. His mother and father come from the West Indies and so do mine, from the little island of Barbados. I didn't know that then. But, it was something he said about my attitude. And I responded, I said, "What about my attitude?" You know, we were just talking. And he said, "Well, you know, I know how you feel." And I said, "How do you know how I feel? We've never met before." He said, "Well, I bet you something." So he bet me and he told me, he says, "Well, I bet your people come from the West Indies." And I said, "Yeah. How do you know?" And he says, "Something about your tone." And this is something that I'd discussed in the past. Anyhow, to make a long story short, he had that attitude of self-assurance — which got some people killed in the wrong time and place — which I felt was the only way we could manage it. And he had what I thought was a pride which wouldn't permit him to do a little job or to fail. I wanted that because I had put everything I had on the line: I had won my way, got elected, been a lawyer, had a good reputation, and I'd somehow managed to scrape through without going to jail or whatever you do when you have to struggle all your life, or being cursed because of whatever pecculations and improprieties that the flesh is heir to. And I didn't want to

lose that with Senator Kennedy or anybody else. So I wanted a man who had something to lose. That's what I wanted, a man who had nerve. I knew I'd have difficulty with such a man; the same attitudes and point of view and characteristics that I wanted would make trouble for me.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: But I knew I couldn't have it both ways. I would rather have trouble and have a good man.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: So I chose that direction and I think life demonstrates that you can't really make progress with a fool. So, I told the Senator that I'd come to this decision and I wanted Thomas and I wanted him to find ways and means of persuading Thomas and whatever moved him to come aboard. Then I met with Thomas and said, "Now look. Don't you say no to me because if you say no to me and those women know and I get Donald Benjamin. . . . So even if you're not going to come, don't you let me have Donald Benjamin because I'll haunt you the rest of your life. I'll come and do something nasty to you." And he says, "Oh, boy. . . ." you know. I mean I was trying to make it emphatic; I'd look for him and give him trouble if he didn't stand still, even if he wasn't coming. So, for him to have dropped out meant that I had to take Donald Benjamin — number two — and the votes were against me. By now the votes were against me in the selection process which infallibly resisted with the women's committee. You

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get the picture?

GREENE: Yes.

JONES: Horrible. So, we almost failed. I went to the women, and they had to. . . . Well, I got two of the people on my board, who weren't coming to meetings, to attend: Councilman Bill Thompson [William C. Thompson] and Reverend William Hall. I almost hand-carried those two men to the meeting, and just squeaked through with a vote for Thomas.

GREENE: What. . . . was their objection not so much to Thomas but the fact that they wanted one of their own?

JONES: Yes. Besides which they didn't even know him. Well, he was a famous basketball player out of Bedford-Stuyvesant — he's an All Ivy League center out of Columbia [Columbia University], all that. But they didn't know him because he was younger than them; they didn't want a younger man either. And they were asking, "What the devil are you doing with a young man?" you know. "We need somebody who's with us." I said,

“Not that old.” So I’m always for young people anyhow. The younger the better. Let them go because they’ll make sure of success when we fall down.

So I squeaked through, I think, by one vote and the interview with Thomas was set. I persuaded Thomas to come even though he said no, and they didn’t know he had said no. Maybe I’m going on too long.

GREENE: No, You’re not. Not, I think this is very important and interesting.

JONES: So, he agreed to come — mind you, he’s deputy commissioner in charge of legal affairs; he’s now about thirty-two or maybe thirty-one....

GREENE: Is that so now, or you mean then?

JONES: Oh, no, he’s about thirty-six now.

GREENE: Oh. Oh, I was going to say....

JONES: Maybe thirty-seven — I don’t know; I never got the age straight.

GREENE: Yeah. But he’s a very young man.

JONES: But he’s a very young man. And he’d flown in the Navy, he’d done all kind of things, you know, quite an interesting background.

At the meeting, finally agreed, number one, Benjamin

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number two. Now I’m really up a tree. Got to play it out, though. I arranged for Thomas to be interviewed, and they packed the interview committee. I had to leave because they arranged the meeting at odd hours so that I wouldn’t come, because they knew I was trying cases. You know, I was trying two cases a day; I had to try to.... Anyhow, I make it. And Thomas comes. And they keep him cooling his heels for an hour and a half. And then when they interview him, they open by saying, “What makes you think you have the right to be chairman of the corporation?” And they worked that poor man over. And when he came out he was trembling with rage. So, I mean, but they had done him in; he didn’t want the job nohow. He says, “If I ever thought of taking it, Judge, I’ll never take the job — not with that kind of structure.”

GREENE: When he went in, if I understand it correctly, he went in thinking he would not take it....

JONES: Saying he would not take it. He was going in....

GREENE: Yeah. Right. He was doing it as a perfunctory thing to work for your sake.

JONES: Well, I was working on another angle, you know. I told him, “Don’t say no.”

GREENE: Right.

JONES: Meanwhile, I was talking to the Senator.

GREENE: And hoping that he would persuade him.

JONES: That's right. And it happened he did.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: I'm coming to that here.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: I'm coming to that here.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: I can't go forward on all, together on all sides.

GREENE: Okay. I wanted to make sure I had it straight.

JONES: But you're right, you're right. He said, "No. No. Nothing doing." He was making then \$22,500 as a second deputy, as a deputy commissioner in charge of legal affairs. I said, "Look. At least we'll pay you \$30,000."

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I said, "That's all I get." I was getting thirty then — maybe twenty-eight then — as a civil court judge. And I said, "Gee, you get more than I get. And, whatever you want, I'll give you, Frank. You know, I don't care how much somebody gets. I mean, I like black guys to make a lot of money if they're smart," you know. I talked to him this way. "I don't like everybody to make money. But certainly you and I could get along, because if I can't make it, well, you should make it, if you're doing the job." I mean I told him a judge couldn't accept any kind of money at all, and he understood. So he said no anyhow. And when the women got through with them, he says, "If ever I had any idea at all, well, that's the end of that." Because we rode back together to the court. He had a...

GREENE: Was this also the one where they warned him that if he did take it, they would select all his people, or was that subsequently?

JONES: Yes.

GREENE: This was at this....



JONES: Yes. They told him at that meeting, that you know, if he took it, he's not going to make it anyhow, in effect. You know, "We're going to run this, because we're in charge; we're the executive committee." And then he said to me, in effect, "You know, you told me, and one of the things we discussed in connection with my consideration of this thing, that you'd give me carte blanche — that I would run it; that you wouldn't let these people run it, and you wouldn't try to run it yourself."

GREENE: Yes.

JONES: I said, "Yes, that's right." Furthermore, I told you — and I told everyone else — I told him, "that you'd have top salary, that I wouldn't second-guess you, that even if you're wrong I'd go with you until something could be done about it. And I'd never damn sure embarrass you. But if we fight..." I said, "Look, I'm not very tractable, and when I think I'm right, well, I'll fight you. But you won't get in a public place and find me embarrassing you."

GREENE: Right.

JONES: I said, "Frank, like a man to another man, to respect his adversary, let me put it that way." So he bought that because he could see to do business — and he'd checked me out and found out a lot of things, I guess. Anyhow, so he left, and that was the end of that. And I had to call the Senator. I said, "Look. Get him. I think we can do business." He said, "Okay." So he went after him.

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Because then, Frank had meetings with Kennedy, and he had meetings with Benno Schmidt. And the time is not exactly... It's not exactly coincidental. I may be missing... At any rate, we hadn't yet formed the D & S group; things hadn't yet gelled altogether. But anyhow, the Senator called me up one day, and he says, "I have Frank Thomas here with me. You told me, Judge, that" — so and so and so and so — "you told me that you would give this man full cooperation and support, that you would assemble and give him the strength he needs and not second-guess him; is that right? I said, "Yes, Senator, of course I said that." And he says, "I told him that's what you said, because you told me that." He says, "Judge, will you tell him that on the telephone now so we can have done with that?" I can always tell when he was angry and annoyed....

GREENE: Well, why was he.... Why was Thomas doubting that?

JONES: Well, Thomas couldn't take that from me because I didn't have the authority.

GREENE: Yeah. He wanted the Senator to....

JONES: He wanted the Senator to give him assurances because, you know, in a sense, who's Tom Jones? What would I have to offer him? He's a realist too; he knew where certain power would come from. Right?

GREENE: Right.

JONES: So, it was only natural to assume that he would want those persons who were going to assist in the organization and the development of the thing, to give him assurances.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: What other assurances he got, I don't know. I'm sure there were others, you know — which I never inquired about. I have some suspicions and....

GREENE: What kinds of things would they be?

JONES: Well, you know, that Thomas has become a member of the board of the First National City Bank, he's become a member of the board of the Lincoln Center [Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts]. He's got a lot of fringe benefits.

GREENE: Yeah. I didn't know that.

JONES: Yeah, that's.... And, you know, chauffeur-driven

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car. There were other things that he got. A doctorate at Yale. You know, a lot of things that are fringe benefits, which aren't bad for a guy who's just a few years out of the police commissioner's office. And, you know, he's done.... So I attended as many meetings, you know. And he's paid well — all of which I'm not quarreling about. But he's witty enough and practical enough to demand whatever he can get.

GREENE: Yeah.

JONES: Who can give it to him? Me? I? You know. I hope I don't sound too cynical about it but...

GREENE: No, you don't at all.

JONES: ... this is the way it is. He sought these assurances and asked for them. And, there are certain other things which I don't think it's important to discuss. So the Senator gave him assurances, whatever those were — and they worked out over the years as you'd see if you examined the record — and I gave him assurances that I would back him up on my end, by holding on, taking the flak, you know, structuring the situation, hold

the line, no criticism. I would take it, I would absorb it. He could do whatever he damn well pleased to get it going. It took that much. This is one call. I had another call, I had — you. Finally he came over. But I told him, “Don’t say a word.” After he’d said yes, then I couldn’t report it to these people because now I had to carry out my promises, see, and I had then come to the conclusion — this is now five or six months later — that I had to go from scratch again.

GREENE: You couldn’t go to them.

JONES: To get a Thomas, and get something going, I couldn’t do it that way because he would only last ten minutes. He would last.... The first day they would countersign a check or tell him no to some, so he hires a secretary whom he pleases or fires somebody.... I mean he would never be able to function. And there goes Swifty, as they say in Boson. What the heck do you do with him? I would imagine somebody telling me, you know, that I got to do something, and I can’t run a court that way; I’d die. I’m not going to die for some bitchy women. Just this call I had, I’m talking to a man who tells me that what I’ve got to do; either do it one way or do it another way, and, well, you know, we’ll see. I’m going to do it the way I think is just, but you can’t second-guess me. Nor was I interested in second-guessing an executive whom I expect to do a professional job.

To make a long story short, then I have to swing around, and I have to have several meetings with Thomas, Tom Johnston,

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the Senator, in which we thrashed out, finally, the structures which were already quite apparent — had to be. I said that we couldn’t function with these top businessmen whom the Senator had said he would be ready to bring to bear and organize and to help if, on the first contact they had with my people, there was an explosion, vituperation, abuse, they would spend only ten minutes with us and go away and never return.

GREENE: That would be it.

JONES: So my job had to be to hold these men, prevent them from being offended and dispersed, by what my community justifiably is angry about. Those were the days of rhetoric and spitting in people’s faces and calling people “pig.” It was at the height. And I couldn’t tell — any day, any hour — when someone would tell Mr. Douglas Dillon or Mr. Benno Schmidt, or the Senator himself, you know, something about the validity of his parents, or some other, you know, insulting statement which would destroy the whole structure. And that wasn’t.... It wasn’t possible to do anything that way.

So I had to figure out how to put together a structure which would survive, command the respect of the community, hold its respect, hold these businessmen and permit.... The Senator had his friends to do their will — to help us as they promised. Nothing was apparent yet; we had nothing to show for it, so everybody was going on faith with me too. They could have come in and lost their reputations, had all kinds of explosions. Everybody was walking on eggshells. Nobody knew — it’s like fashioning an ark — with less assurance that it would be built that the

ark, I supposed. So, I told them that I think we should create two separate organizations — this was heresy.

GREENE: This was the first time that it came up, that late in... I didn't realize that.

JONES: It came up in the midst of Thomas' acceptance and before he really was installed.

GREENE: Before the whole shake-up, in other words.

JONES: And I had to agree that it was the only way to do it. I said, "How could we do it? You can't have one organization. These men, such as we talked about, Senator, are not coming to these meetings" — the kind of meetings and the number of meetings I have to have to be credible with a community. I have a meeting once a week, or more. They're not going to tolerate sitting around when their expertise is in a completely different direction; their levels, their interests are different. Not that they shouldn't learn, but I don't think this is a sociology class. So I'm not

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interested in a sociology structure; I'm interested in building and fashioning an instrument which will produce the change. So he said, "So am I." So we're feeling our way, you understand, and we evolve this concept of two corporations, operating on one problem — the businessmen as backup and advice, money raising, you know, using their expertise and so forth, operating in an area that we don't know anything about, although we would not be happy to admit it. You know, there are some things that we didn't know about business, and perhaps still don't, in many respects. On the other hand, the community must set the priorities and make the decisions with respect to its own updating. And if that works, and they ultimately become the sole repository of whatever powers are going to be transferred — and they will be transferred — that's the way you built it. Nobody knew where this would lead. I don't think Thomas liked it too much either, because it implied that we couldn't do anything without white people. But we had a number of talks, in which I told him that the realities of America were not lost on me... If you don't have access to bank money, congressional appropriations, friends in high places, some of the powers that we need, then I can't see how we could do it. I don't want to be a poverty program. I said, "If this becomes a poverty program, Frank, I'm out. Because I'm not going to administrate any damn poverty program which undermines the spirit and the strength of the people who work here for me. No."

GREENE: Will you speak a little louder, please.

JONES: I said, "No welfare for me, and I perceive it shouldn't be for you either. We'll go this way and we'll see. I don't have any interest that's contrary to yours." Well, there have been problems, because John Doar was placed in charge of the D & S Corporation, and this offered some offense to Thomas.

GREENE: Why?

JONES: Because he didn't feel himself able to go straight through to the top businessmen himself, and he should have, to administer a program for Bedford-Stuyvesant.

GREENE: Was it because it was John Doar or was it because there was...

JONES: No, any white man.

GREENE: ... now a parallel person in the D & S.

JONES: Right. Who had authority equal to his.

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GREENE: Right.

JONES: And I said, "If they wanted you as the chairman or the president of their corporations, Frank, it's all right with me." And I had no difficulty with him.  
[Interruption]

BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE I

GREENE: Go ahead.

JONES: At any rate, we had to start the corporation with the two structures.

GREENE: No, was this decision made prior to the whole shake-up and your going off so that....

JONES: At or about the same time. It came about the same time when we launched the new structure. Then a series of meetings took place.

GREENE: Should we cover that part first where you have the meetings?

JONES: I can't remember that well enough. You'll have to give me something to refresh my recollection, because all of that is in the archives of my board, and my notes and the meeting notes and all of that....

GREENE: Well, as I understand it, what happened is that you just got to a permanent stalemate and there was nothing else to be done, and so you concluded that the only thing to do was to set up this meeting where you would....

JONES: I told them at a meeting.... What I did, in order to draw a line, I sought, as a last measure, their agreement that I would be given carte blanche to organize this structure and for a period of three months nobody would say anything to me or

bother me. I would just go ahead and do it, and I would give them a complete accounting of every nickel I spent and everything I did and come to them for approval.

GREENE: "Them" now being...

JONES: That's the old group.

GREENE: ... the old group. Okay.

JONES: I lost by one vote. I told them that I was really throwing down the gauntlet — to them. I told them if

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I didn't get this vote of confidence, I would resign.

GREENE: Well, now how....

JONES: And, I would.... You know, I didn't tell them what I would do but I already had arrangements.

GREENE: Right. Well, how.... What I'm interested in is the planning that took place to make that kind of statement with confidence possible.

JONES: I had talked to the Senator and his staff, had related to them what they already knew — the insoluble problems: trying to get Thomas and all of these things are going around at once...

GREENE: Yes. Right. Right.

JONES: ... and it indicated that unless I changed course now, that I couldn't succeed and they would have to make some other arrangements. They asked me what I thought should be done. I said, "I'll make one last effort. If I can get them to give me my authority to go ahead and to organize this thing, I'll still go with them, " because I would have at least the freedom that I needed to get strong enough to do what I had to do. I'd only meant to roll it over. But if I couldn't, then we'd have to be prepared for a denouement, which was, what are they going to do now? And, the Senator and other people said they would get from Lindsay and get from Javits [Jacob J. Javits], and he would send me himself a letter to the effect that if I once informed him that I couldn't go with them or didn't get the kind of assurances I needed, that they would send me a letter, telegram to the effect — from all three — saying that they're prepared to support any organization which I put together — in respect to SIP programs.

GREENE: And there was no conflict on this among you....

JONES: Me?

GREENE: No, with you and the Senator's people — Tom Johnston.

JONES: No, no. No, no. They said.... They knew then all of the details I'm reciting to you and then some. They knew of all the meetings I had held and all the efforts I had made and all of the frustrations we'd experienced. And they knew it was Frank Thomas or Donald Benjamin, and they knew Don Benjamin — I had run that out and they agreed with me. In any event I would have to work with him. If I said, "I wouldn't work for this guy riding or

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walking in the dark or the light" — because I'd told them, "This guy is absolutely untrustworthy, and completely under the domination of these people, and without a mind of his own, and he's kind of a ladies' man." He thinks he's cute anyhow, you know, which is horrible, if that's his style of operation. If he had special excellence.... And that was a side issue, I'd have said fine; let a man play and have all the fun he wants, because half the men prefer the women, and that doesn't bother me. I'm not interested in his personal peccadilloes, I'm interested in his capacity to perform. But he had that as his emphasis. You know, that was the main thing that he put forward in operating in the community. But very few men would follow him or trust him that I knew in the black community. And this was another sign that he was completely a ladies' man and that's how he operated and this was suspicious — too suspicious for me to tolerate. Plus what he had done to me in another organization out here, which he was head of and on which board I served. Well, he operated in such a way as to embarrass me with the government people and many of my colleagues on the bench. The whole unfortunate business had shown him more irresponsible than solid.

And I said frankly to the ladies and I said to him, "You could work with somebody else. I'm not angry with you; I'm not going to cost you your job, but stay away from me." I told him that, you know. So he knew that I wasn't his — we have a phrase like boon companion, but not boon companion. You may not have heard it. Have you heard it?

GREENE: No.

JONES: I won't bother then. I won't put it on the tape.

GREENE: If it's relevant, put it on the tape.

JONES: No, no, because it would embarrass me if somebody reads it.

GREENE: Okay.

JONES: But I wasn't.... At least I'm not going to spend my time, you know, jumping around. Anyhow, he knew that therefore, and he told them and the ladies knew that they had to beat me for him, because if they could have won with him, I'm out. You see, it's just that simple. By my own declarations about which they knew. So that I

correctly — I think correctly — appraised the situation, that he was their guy, not mine. Not that Frank Thomas was my guy.

GREENE: Right. I understand what you mean.

JONES: At least, he was my type of man. Now I've lost my....

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GREENE: Well, you say.... You were up to the point where you were just about ready to devise the ultimatum and go into a meeting with it.

JONES: So I had the telegrams the night of the meeting, because I had told everyone that I would either win — in which event I could go forward with the vote. I had asked for two-thirds vote, to make sure they were solid enough to support me, with a turnout — in which event I would have hired people and started the process and taken Thomas and given him his authority, and done it. Hold them to their vote and then increase the board to forty or something and go like hell. And I had my own ideas as to how I was going to do it. Once I turned, I would turn, be moving so fast that they couldn't keep up, especially if I had a board of talented executives. I wouldn't have to do all that work myself, which was keeping me from matching them; I couldn't match steps with them without someone who was a good executive, obviously. So, they gave them the telegrams, I lost the vote, and the next day I organized — I called up most of the people on my board, and said to them, "Come with me."

GREENE: You had actually announced what you were doing at the meeting?

JONES: At the meeting, I said, "This vote is decisive, folks. I am prepared, if I lose this vote, which I think is justified for me to win, which I need to go ahead with the things that you say and everybody says should be done, with accountability to you, knowing what my risks are, and my reputation and background are, and my temperament...." I told them, "Beware of my temperament." See, the ladies never thought that I would fight them, because I'd never given any evidence of it. I always fight all the people outside the community. They thought I only fought the "white enemy," you know, so to speak, because I would take on judges and politicians and anybody in the community. I avoided any fights inside, because that was the name of the game.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: They never thought I would do it and they were a little shocked at my sharpness and preciseness in that, especially when I told them that I would.... Anyhow, I lost by one vote, and I said, "Well, that's all. The meeting is no longer my meeting and I can retire, and I wish you well." And I walked out.

That same night I began to call half of the people on the board and say, "Come with me." And I called another dozen people, including Dr. Gardner Taylor, head of the Concord



Baptist Church [Concord Baptist Church of Christ], and a series of other leaders, and said, "Come with me. I want you to come because I think this is important. I know what we can do, you know who I am." I called the top leaders, youth leaders, militants — I called a whole bunch of people. Altogether, with the people on the R & R board that I just left, I called some of the women: Mrs. Rose. I called and I called a couple of others, Almira Coursey, and one other, Mattie King. Lucille Rose never came because she thought that they would win. She's now on our board, just recently, after five years.

GREENE: Oh really?

JONES: And she couldn't get on for a long time after we began to succeed. Well, she was too deeply committed with them and their plans to come over, so she didn't come over. But about nine of them came, I think over — ten, maybe. The names I could pick out.

GREENE: Here. This is the '68 list, and it probably has a lot of them.

JONES: The people who came over were Dr. Cave [Vernal G. Cave], Almira Coursey, William Hall, Mrs. King [Robert V., Jr.] — Robert King, Father Lawrie [Edward A. Lawrie], Bill Thompson, I think Charles Owens. The rest refused, because some of them....

GREENE: But you did invite all of them?

JONES: No, no, I didn't invite all of them.

GREENE: You only went to those that you thought....

JONES: I invited.... I left out Elsie Richardson, Ruth Goring....

GREENE: Rose.

JONES: Lucille Rose — no, I invited Lucille Rose.

GREENE: Oh, she was one of them.

JONES: I left out about five of them: Lionel Payne I left out, who was completely under their domination; I left out a woman who was — white woman — who was down here and who still lived in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a woman about seventy — I forget her name — who was completely, I felt, out of it. She was infirm, you know. She was a very, very good woman but she didn't represent Bedford-Stuyvesant, so I left her out of my calls. And, frankly, I was pretty arbitrary; I don't

deny that. But I felt that that arbitrariness was not fatal or even harmful because I was inviting people of substance, who didn't agree with me necessarily, but who had led organizations. And then I turned and invited four or five militants. Sonny Carson [Robert Carson] came aboard and others came aboard whom the other group would not have.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: So I pulled in Irving Joyner, who was a CORE [Congress on Racial Equality] leader, and Carson, who was then also CORE, but Joyner was doing something else. He got, I think.... And then I invited the Puerto Rican whom they didn't — Frank Ortiz, leading Puerto Rican lawyer. And I got others. You know, by the time I got through, I had a pretty representative group and I had promised to get fifty, you know to constitute this board. By that time I had twenty-six. And, the caliber — Don Otell wouldn't come, Lucille Rose wouldn't come, certain other people wouldn't come, you know, because they didn't know which way we were going to come down.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: I couldn't blame them. I didn't know whether this crazy thing would work. So we got our meetings going, and then the fight began; they fought back and pulled us down front — tried to organize community meetings, press conferences, attacks in the newspapers, telephones were buzzing like hell, the Senator's office came under attack — but basically me because I was a traitor. I was regarded as a traitor in the community that had sold out everybody. It was a rather rough period. And they had a big public meeting where they forced me to come — well, "they forced me"; in those days I was playing the same confrontation politics they were playing, because I knew so much about handling the whole community that.... Then they demanded that I get up on the platform and answer questions about what I was doing with Robert Kennedy. I proceeded to talk to them, but I said, "When I'm through, I want everybody to understand that I've got some questions. So I'm going to stand here until I've got some answers."

GREENE: Just talk a little louder.

JONES: Well, I told the chairman, I said, "Fine. I am prepared to answer every question you have. I will insist, however, that someone answer my questions when you're through, because I have a lot of questions to ask. I've lived here all my life. And I don't want anybody to leave here until they're answered because I think it's time for this community to come to know what's happening. So start. I'll

tell you everything you need to know and duck nothing." See?

So they continued for a while, you know. But candidly, I've been doing forensic work for a long time. The people had never heard disclosures; they'd never heard a candid statement of a situation. I began to, while answering, to swing and to discuss, how the people operated, how a lot of conferences were held, and that the representative groups in the CBCC [Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council] were never informed of what happens, you know, and I want to know. And I left the question hanging; I said, "I'm coming back to that."

By the time an hour was over some of them had gone, because I was just warming up to the attack. Well, I meant to have a complete shambles thereby the time they got through; I was really angry then — you know, the hypocrisies and all that and they're fighting behind shields and pretending to be virtuous, and I'm a bad fellow. They're not going to get away with that. I was going to make them pay for my sacrifices a little bit, and see what would happen anyhow. But it cost me because the result was that I had to pay a heavy political price. I could have been a congressman, I think, if I hadn't you know, taken that course which was in a sense divisive, and got me some enemies who were implacable — with justification.

GREENE: Right.

JONES: You can't have it both ways. Of course, whenever you play showdown, you know...

GREENE: You take risks.

JONES: ... you take risks. Then, it ended because they lost it; they lost the crowd. The militants who were there came to see me a few days later because the telephones were going like mad. Sonny Carson led a group of about eight militants who came to my house, black militants, after they'd called up and said they wanted to see me and I said, "Come on over." "Right now?" I said, "Yeah." "Can we come now?" I said, "Yeah. I'm all..." I said, "I live on Dean Street, you know." "We know where you live." The only judge they can get their hands on really. You know, they were quite surprised. But they weren't ready yet, so that, "Can we come over two days later?" I said, "Sure. I'll be home; I'll talk to you."

That was the funniest experience. They brought eight guys with big hair-dos and all kinds of costumes sitting around on my floor. They wouldn't accept a glass of water from my wife because she was white. I mean, you know, she said, "Can I get you some tea or some water?" "No, I don't..." They were rude — really outrageously behaved.

GREENE: And these were the fellows who had already been brought on and....

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JONES: No, no. This was a militant group who had not yet been brought....

GREENE: But you had them in mind.

JONES: Carson had been invited but he.... Everything hadn't happened, but I invited Carson, and I invited Joyner. And when Joyner and Carson went back to their

groups, in the meantime before they came aboard, these meetings were taking place, and there was furor and ferment, mind you. You get the picture?

GREENE: Oh, yeah.

JONES: And they have to be creditable with their militant groups, mind you.

GREENE: I'll bet that was the problem.

JONES: I assume that this is what happened; I don't know. I wasn't privy to all they were doing. But I knew I got these calls, and some of the more outrageous and militant — you know, fiery militants — were in that crowd of eight who came to see me the first time.

Well, they took two and a half hours and quizzed me and asked me every kind of impertinent question you can imagine, you know — all about everything you could imagine: which groups do your children belong to, you know; this is your wife; and, you know, the kind of thing designed to provoke — in the middle of my parlor. So I put up with it, you know, because I wanted to feel it out, and I figured that these women had indeed — and they should have, if they didn't — stimulated this business on the basis of a white man — Kennedy and his crowd — coming to take over blacks in Bedford-Stuyvesant and to destroy our womanhood and every damned — you know, anything they told them, of course, it all came out in the discussion.

Well, they said, at the end of that session, "We might have some other questions to ask. Do you mind if we come back on Saturday?" This is Thursday. I said, "Sure, if you want to." I had time if they had time. They had gone back to reassess what they'd heard — to appraise what they'd heard — and to come up with another series of questions. Well, sir, when they came back they started the same business again, and I said, "I thought we'd passed all of that. Let's go on to something else.

GREENE: A little louder.

JONES: I said, "Let's go on to something else."

GREENE: Yeah.

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JONES: "How do we know that you are going to serve the community?" And I said, "Well, you don't know." I said, "I lived here all my life." I said, "I don't know what you've been elected to but I've been elected three times, and I live right here." I said, "Where do you live?" And by this time I'm getting....

So, they ended. And toward the end, they said, "Well, we are satisfied that you've been misrepresented, that you're no Uncle Tom. We're going to take off the 'Uncle;' we'll just call you Tom." Mind you, I'm a judge, see. And they're being so damn patronizing to me I could have had a fit just out of aggravation, was my attitude — you know, not only toward them, but, you know, come on, already. And they said, "Well, we think we ought to tell you that there'll be another meeting next week, next Thursday." This was Saturday. "And we're going to take you

under our protection.” I said, “The hell you say! What did you say? What the god damn hell you talking about? Take me under what? What kind of protection.... What do you mean? I don’t need any protection from you — none of you.”

So Sonny Carson.... “Now look. I’m not a violent man; I don’t threaten anybody. You come to my house and you’ve taken up five or six hours of my time in the middle of my parlor and I think I’ve treated you courteously. But don’t mistake it.” I said, “I long since got over the idea that I’m going to be terrified every day that somebody might kill me.” I said, “I don’t operate that way. I don’t want to die — really I don’t — but let me tell you something; every one of you: Don’t you let me even get wounded, but make sure I’m dead; don’t you let any of my family get hurt, while I live, because if they do, I’m going to kill every one of you, even if you had nothing to do with it. Now you believe me. Now I’m looking at each one of you and I call you by name. Cut out the horse shit. Don’t you threaten me, and don’t you let anybody else connected with you threaten me, if they want to survive, because I’m not running any place. Now you can do as you please about me, or about the problem you’re raising, but that’s all there is to it. I’ve told you everything you need to know. Now if you don’t like what I do, don’t you take me under your protection because I’m no racketeer. So is that clear.” “Well, we didn’t mean this.” I said, “I don’t give a damn what you mean. Now that’s enough of that. Now you can go your own way and you can tell everybody in Bedford-Stuyvesant that Tom Jones is gonna live here and you’re gonna come and get him remember I said I know every one of you, and you’re going to pay for anything that happens to me, or any member of my family. Is that clear?” I said, “It may be unjust but that’s the way I’m gonna do it.” I said, “I’m a judge; I’m entitled to carry a gun. I don’t have one in the house and I won’t have one in the house, until the day somebody aims at me. And then, then, I’ll stay up all night every night all over this place until I get anybody whom I think had anything to do with it. So, bug off.”

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GREENE: Do you think that they, did they really mean it, in a political sense?

JONES: They were accustomed to intimidate.... It’s an intimidating process. But however it was, I had my son in the house and my wife in the house, and they attempted to intimidate me. And I took it to the end.

GREENE: That they really meant it.

JONES: And I have to assume they mean it because what am I going to do, just sit there?

GREENE: Right.

JONES: Now, I know I, very little I can do when somebody threatens you, I’m not going to go call the police. I’m not going to tell Senator Kennedy. Who am I to tell about it? And I can’t leave my wife exposed or my family exposed or my close friends exposed. And I’m not going to stop living in the Bedford-Stuyvesant community.

GREENE: But it seems to me, and I may not be understanding you correctly, that when they say they'll take you under protection, the implication is that somebody else would be the threat.

JONES: Now, what they meant is that I would be their man. And under those circumstances, I can continue to function there. The women aren't attacking me; the women were not strong-armed in their behaviour. There was nobody else in Bedford-Stuyvesant who used these tactics of confrontation except them. And in that context, it means that I'm their man — either/or. I reacted to it that way and there was no demurrer to my evaluation and interpretation of the implication, and whether it was or not, I thought it was time to say it.

GREENE: Yeah.

JONES: You know, "Don't bother me. Don't agree with me. Do it any way you like. I'll do my thing; I'll do what I can." You know. So, but this was a kind of confrontation which finally broke the back of the resistance, because from that point on, we only had skirmishes. The meetings.... The next meeting these people held, these men tore the meeting apart. These men asked questions, these men used the exchanges between us as a basis for inquiries and for statements which made it impossible for them to, you know whip up the community against me. And, in that respect, I had won the first round. The confrontation round I won, and I could begin to settle down then — you know, to doing the job —

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because the confrontation was designed to crush the effort.

GREENE: Do you think that Senator Kennedy or even Tom Johnston were at all aware of these problems which followed? You always get the feeling from reading that except for a latent hostility on the part of the old group, that once the new group was formed, that it just proceeded very nicely and I think it sounds, you know, quite the opposite.

JONES: Well, they knew better, both the Senator and Tom knew, but the press wasn't interested in these things. They were only interested in wherever Senator Kennedy moved and did things. That was press worthy, not these kinds of bitter struggles; not these kinds of difficult processes.

GREENE: But they were kept informed?

JONES: Yes, they were. They knew.

GREENE: And they had no quarrel with the way you were handling it or....

JONES: They couldn't be. It had to be.... You see, these men are aware that you have to fight things out. They were politicians; they knew what happens in politics.

They're not babes in the woods, that people don't use four-letter words or threaten other people or threaten to use information about who's got girlfriends or boyfriends or who, you know, had gotten a little money for something or may have sold a vote. I mean these are all pragmatists. It's just, you know, some people who don't know, who think that things come out — that the stork brings babies, you know.

So they weren't at all distressed. They just were hoping that I didn't lose my patience and run out of gas. It was tiresome, because I was trying cases all day, and I was up all night. I had to charge juries and was.... I'm not complaining, it simply was a very difficult period to me, to constantly have no rest and no time. But it was what was important. And there are a hundred other things that it would be interesting to have the full evaluation of the struggle to get a community to accept. For a long time, the board I did assemble wouldn't function. You know, they didn't take any responsibility. They were sort of on the balls of their feet — “Well, you do it, Tom; you do it, Judge. Whatever you do, you know. We'll come to meetings but, you know....”

GREENE: Was that because they were insecure about their own positions in the community?

JONES: Insecure about what would happen with this thing.

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They were still gun-shy about having to deal with the problems that they knew I was facing, and not sure either of how long our allies would stay with us, or where this thing was going, you know, or who the money would come from, or a number of things they didn't know. You see, if I knew little, they knew less. And here we were born in a storm. So for a long time, I had to carry things and report to them and sometimes they said, “Okay. You don't report so much. We don't really need to know everything.” You know how — “Please, Ma, don't tell me everything; I'm not apt to do something.” I'm not minimizing my board, and I'm not depreciating anybody, but it's simply that a lot of people just have their own things to do, whether you have somebody who's head of a church — Bill Hall's head of a Baptist church down in South Brooklyn; Father Lawrie's head of the St. Ambrose Roman Catholic Church; Farther Hucles [Henry B. Hucles] is head of an Episcopal church. You know, somebody is a secretary-treasurer of a trade union. He hasn't got time to fool with me. Now, if I'm busy doing the world's work and, you know, acting like the Second Coming of Christ or something, that's stupid stuff, you know, that makes you want to do that. “Well, we'll go along with you because you're for good things, but we don't have time from our daily lives to do that kind of thing.” Get it?

GREENE: Right.

JONES: And they don't. You see, there's lots more, which I hope it doesn't sound as though I'm alienated or angry about it, but simply...

GREENE: No it doesn't, and it's....

JONES: ... as I live through it again, it's....

GREENE: Well, I can see you're reliving the emotions on this, which I think is important. I think, you know, that's something that you, when people write about things like this, particularly the press, my feeling is that they tend to cleanse everything — maybe not deliberately but because they don't see everything that's happening, and it all comes out into a nice, neat package. And then you proceeded from here and everything was fine, but obviously there is an awful lot going on that the press didn't know about.

JONES: And by the time the community began to accept this, we had already to have shown performances. We had to have maintained a low profile and worked like hell, day in, day out, for months and months, and say nothing, respond to nothing, and just work. Because now you're suspect. And any more announcements of what you intend to do are sneered at. So you couldn't talk anymore. You simply had to go

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to work and build it. And until you built it, and you began to show...

GREENE: Some results.

JONES: ... some results.... And then by board began to reassemble, strengthen, and my board began to come back, and people began to fight for their places, you see, when you then built it.

GREENE: How did Frank Thomas fit into this whole thing? Was he involved in this early trouble at all?

JONES: He kept aside from it; he had to, because he didn't, first of all, want to get involved. And I had agreed, in a sense, to insulate him from this, to give him a chance to perform and to take the political responsibilities until it could go for itself, because it wouldn't be fair to — well, it may be "fair," but he said he wasn't a politician. Everybody's a politician to some degree, but I accepted that as an appraisal and an evaluation of his own position, and undertook that he should not have to face these problems.

GREENE: With this new board, and I guess especially in the militants, how did they regard Robert Kennedy in this? You know, were they suspicious of working with him, or were they by this time convinced that his effort was genuine?

JONES: No, they were halfway in and halfway out. They never knew. They didn't know and they weren't prepared to give up on it. Some of them said, "Well, if you stay, how can we get hurt?" You know, begrudgingly they'd say, "Well, you know, we know you're not making any money out of this, and it's not a hustle" — what they call a hustle, a little gimmick that you can make a few bucks and get some advantages. "You're obviously not getting anything out of it" —



they'd checked that out very carefully — “ and you're either crazy or there may be something to it. In any event, what can we lose?” So they stayed, and they would carp and criticize and snipe, and sometimes calm and sometimes not. It was a doubtful kind of business with them, but they didn't know what would be.

GREENE: I wish we could go on but I think that it is kind of late, and I have to go.

JONES: You better go ahead.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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