

**Benno C. Schmidt Oral History Interview—RFK #1, 7/17/1969**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Benno C. Schmidt  
**Interviewer:** Roberta Greene  
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**Biographical Note**

Benno C. Schmidt (1913-1999) was the former chairman and board of directors of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Development and Services Corporation from 1969 to 1984; he was also a managing partner at J.H. Whitney & Co. from 1946 to 1992. This interview focuses on Schmidt's role within the Bedford-Stuyvesant Development and Services Corporation, his relationship with Senator Robert F. Kennedy (RFK), and RFK's 1968 presidential campaign, among other topics.

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By Benno C. Schmidt

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Benno C. Schmidt—RFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

BENNO C. SCHMIDT

July 17, 1969  
New York City, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert Kennedy Oral History Program of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: Would you begin by explaining how you met Senator [Robert F.] Kennedy and how your association with him developed.

SCHMIDT: In December of 1966, I arrived at my office and found a note on my desk that Senator Kennedy would like me to call him in Washington. I had never met Senator Kennedy. I had no connection with him. I had never been a part in any way of any of the activities of the Kennedy administration when Jack Kennedy was President. So I hadn't the slightest idea what Senator Robert Kennedy could possibly want with me. I returned the call and he came on the phone and he said he'd liked to see me. Not knowing him, and having heard a lot of things about him that didn't give me a particularly warm feeling toward him at the outset, I said, "Fine, Senator, when would you

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like to see me?" He said, "Well, I'd like to see you today if possible." And I said, I'll be in my office all day. So if you'd like to see me, I'd be delighted to see you," thinking that he probably expected me to come to Washington to see him and not seeing any reason why I should do that until I knew more fully what he wanted. But rather to my surprise he replied, "That's very nice of you. I have a vote at three o'clock which I should make. This would enable me to catch the four o'clock shuttle, which would put me in your office by about a quarter of six. Would that be too

late for you?" "No," I replied, "if you're willing to make the trip to New York, I am certainly prepared to stay late, and, subject to a dinner at eight thirty, I'll be prepared to give you as much time at a quarter of six, or six o'clock, as you need." So he said, "Fine, I'll see you at around quarter of six or six o'clock." He arrived at the office and he had with him Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C.], whom I met for the first time, and Eli Jacobs, whom I had known before, and, after brief initial amenities, he got right on to the subject, which was that he would

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like for me to serve as a director of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Development & Services Corporation. He explained that, in his opinion, the most important domestic problem confronting the country today was the urban problem and the racial problems that were a part of the urban problem. He was very dissatisfied with the progress that had been made, with the programs that were in effect, particularly with the federal programs, and he felt that this was a problem to which we had to find some better solution or it would destroy this nation. He also felt that the solution had to be found at the local level. He proposed to try to set up in Bedford-Stuyvesant a model operation where we could by trial and error learn some of the answers, and where we could, perhaps, if we could find some of the answers, by example provide a format which could be used in other cities. He went on to say that he felt there was no federal solution to this problem. It was not possible for the Congress, even if it had the will and desire, to initiate at the federal level programs which would succeed in New York, Chicago, Watts, Houston, Atlanta, and in all the major cities and centers of population where these problems came most

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fully into focus. Each community had its own problems, the problems were very different, and he felt that the only hope of solution was an attack on the problems at the community level with each community bringing to bear on its problems all the resources of the federal government, the state government, the city government, and particularly the private sector, both the business sector and the philanthropic private sector. And what he wanted to do was to work in Bedford-Stuyvesant with a local Bedford-Stuyvesant organization which would have a board of directors made up of the leaders in Bedford-Stuyvesant — religious, educational, political, business, militant, whatever, but the people who had some kind of leadership role in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Such an organization (later called Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation) would be the operating entity to determine what Bedford-Stuyvesant wanted, how it could be best achieved, and how the programs once they were devised could be carried out. To assist this locally-controlled corporation, he thought that there should be a second corporation, representing the New York community as a whole, and made up of leaders in the broader New York community. The

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purpose of this corporation would be to supply the muscle — the resources, the know-how, counsel, and support — to inspire the confidence and perhaps assist in the formulation of programs, but not to tell the people of Bedford-Stuyvesant what they needed or what they

wanted. Its purpose would rather be to help take their ideas of what they needed and what they wanted, and reformulate them if necessary, but get them into practical, accomplishable form, and then help with their accomplishments by providing material know-how, technological know-how, banking know-how, resources, manpower, or whatever was needed. He said that he had already gotten commitments from Douglas Dillon, David Lilienthan, André Meyer, Roswell Gilpatric, William S. Paley, George Moore, James F. Oates, Jr., and Tom Watson [Thomas J., Jr.] to serve on this board. He was asking me to join this group and he was also prepared to serve if that seemed desirable, and in that event he would also try to get Senator [Jacob K.] Javits to serve with him. I asked him how broad an undertaking he had in mind, whether he had in mind that the local corporation, with the help of the D & S [Development and Services]

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Corporation, would attack specific problems like employment, manpower training, or whether it would attack the broad range of problems. And he said, "No," it was his idea that it would attack the broad range of problems. It would attack the problems, all the problems, of Bedford-Stuyvesant where and in the manner that the community corporation thought they should be attacked. He had in mind that the corporation might deal with as broad an agenda as one that included housing, health problems, sanitation, police and other services, parks, streets, recreational facilities, education, employment, manpower training, and economic opportunity, both in the sense of the individual, the opportunity of the individual to get a job and go to work and have upward mobility, and in the sense of the opportunity of a prospective and promising black Bedford-Stuyvesant entrepreneur to find a chance to get start in business. So he had in mind the broadest kind of charter, but he, of course, knew that there was no way that any organization could accomplish all the things that needed to be accomplished in all these fields in any short period of time. What he wanted to do was to direct as much fire power as possible on

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one community, Bedford-Stuyvesant, with the help of the broader community of which it was a part, New York, to see what could be done in one area. And if we could do it and do enough in Bedford-Stuyvesant to make progress, then similar groups could do the same thing in Harlem, Atlanta, South Chicago, Watts, Houston, wherever. He also felt that it was necessary to divide the objectives into what he described as short-term, visible objectives, and long-term, fundamental objectives. Because if we went to work only on the long-term, fundamental objectives, there was already such discouragement and such depression that before we'd begin to get anything out of the other end of the production line, people would feel this is just another project that was planning and getting nowhere. So he felt it was necessary to intersperse with the long-term objectives some visible short-term things that could be accomplished in three months, in six months, in a year. And what those would be would be up to the two corporations together to devise and implement.

I asked, "Why have you asked me to join this group that you've just described?" He said, "Well, I have reason to believe, on the basis of the

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investigation that I have made, that if I could get you to join, failing to do so would be a mistake from the standpoint of our project. And I'm here to ask you to do this for the same reason I've asked these other people to do it. I believe you can help to supply the resources, the muscle, the thinking, and support that this project needs, and we need all the help we can get." I said, "Well, I have two problems. The first is time. I'm already — like everybody else you've named — over-committed as far as my own time is concerned. But I agree with you that this is the foremost problem in importance that confronts our nation today. I agree with your estimate that unless something is done about this problem it's not an overstatement to say that it could destroy this nation and, therefore, I guess I should somehow find the time. My second problem is that I have friends in politics who are just as interested in this problem as you are, people that I've supported, people that in some cases I've encouraged to run — Governor [Nelson D.] Rockefeller, Mayor [John V.] Lindsay, Senator Javits — and if I have anything to contribute to this problem, maybe I

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should contribute it under their auspices and not under yours." He replied, "Well, I have not asked, and I have no idea whether you voted for me or for President Kennedy?" And I said, "Well, just so there's no misunderstanding on either of those points, I voted for Richard Nixon in 1960, although I came to be a great admirer of President Kennedy before his death. And, when you ran for the Senate in 1964, I voted for my old friend, Kenneth Keating. So I've never been a political supporter of the Kennedy ticket." And Bob said, "Well, that doesn't make the slightest difference. I am extremely anxious that this not be a Robert Kennedy project. I hope to elicit, and I hope to have, the support of both Senator Javits and Mayor Lindsay. I hope Governor Rockefeller will help us in every way that he can help us. It would be my hope that Senator Javits would join me in the sponsorship of this project because I want this project to be, as this problem is, totally nonpartisan, or bipartisan. This is everybody's problem, not mine, and the worst thing that could happen to this project would be if it became known as Bob Kennedy's project, and if everybody who wasn't for Bob Kennedy looked

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out the window. So, the fact is that you can probably be more help to us because of your association and friendship with Governor Rockefeller, Mayor Lindsay and Senator Javits than you could be if you were a friend and supporter of mine." And he added, "I promise you that this is not, in any sense of my mind, a political project or a partisan project. I further promise you that I will never do anything in connection with this project that you will feel is inconsistent with my assurance to you that this think is non-political and nonpartisan and is an effort on my part merely to take the initiative in putting something together which I hope can make some progress in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and set the kind of example which will be useful in assisting other areas like Bedford-Stuyvesant, to cope with similar problems in those communities." So I said, "Well, give me a couple of days. Let me talk to Jack Javits and John Lindsay, and I'll call you back." So, I believe this was probably a Friday — Thursday or Friday — and I did talk to both Jack Javits and John Lindsay. They both urged me to do it. Lindsay not only urged me to do it, he said



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he thought I had to do it. And on Tuesday, I called Bob back and told him that I would be happy to serve on the board of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Development & Services Corporation. This was the beginning of the association. And it was largely through that association that all my other contacts and connections with Bob over the next, over the remainder of his life, took place.

GREENE: Jack Newfield mentions in his book that Senator Kennedy was originally put in contact with you through a mutual friend. Do you know who this is?

SCHMIDT: No, I can only speculate about that. It's possible that it was one of the board members of D & S whom I have mentioned, because several of them are good friends of mine and were good friends of mine prior to the D & S association — Bill Paley and Tom Watson and several of the others. So it might have been one of them. I think it's more likely that Tom Johnston, in working on this project for the Senator, had worked closely with Eli Jacobs and that Eli had suggested my name. Eli had been in law school

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with my son and I had gotten to know him there, and then when he got out of law school he had talked with me about a job, and had talked with me also about his future and what he should do independently of J.H. Whitney & Co. So I had gotten to know Eli fairly well — with full regard to our age differences, and so forth — and if I were making a guess, the guess would be that Eli suggested me to Tom Johnston and that Tom Johnston relayed that suggestion to the Senator. Maybe the Senator checked it out with Bill Paley or Tom Watson, or André Meyer, or one of the other directors of D & S.

GREENE: How accurate is Jack Newfield's account of that conversation?

SCHMIDT: Well, I think generally it's accurate. There are two things in his book that I don't recall saying and that I feel reasonably certain I didn't say, because they just aren't the kinds of things that I feel or would say. One, in describing the Senator's request to me to go on the D & S board, he quotes me to the effect that.... "It sounded like a dare to me, and I accepted the challenge." Well, I'm reasonably certain

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that I didn't regard it as a dare, and that certainly wouldn't have been the kind of thing that would have influenced me or persuaded me to take the job. Also, I think in an effort to make me sound a little more Republican than perhaps I am, he quoted me as saying, "It took those New Dealers thirty years to find out the facts of life," or something to that effect. I don't recall saying that and I think it's very unlikely that I did because I haven't given much thought one way or the other to the New Dealers in the last several years. Also, as a matter of fact, I supported Franklin Roosevelt in all but one of his races for the Presidency, and was very sympathetic with a great many things that the New Deal did. But apart from that, it's an accurate reflection of my attitude

toward the Bedford-Stuyvesant project and particularly toward the relationship between the Restoration board and the D & S board. I regard D & S as being there to help, not to lead, and to assist the community group, the Restoration Corporation, in carrying out its mission, rather than to either define or carry out the mission ourselves.

GREENE: You mentioned in the beginning that your previous

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impression of Robert Kennedy was not exactly favorable. What was your thinking along these lines and how did other business leaders feel towards him in general?

SCHMIDT: Well, it may be a little hard for me to recall now exactly how I felt about Bob before I knew him, because, as I knew him, I became so fond of him that it perhaps blurred my recollection of what I thought before I knew him. Also, it made it impossible for me to understand the attitude that I continuously ran into on the part of various associates in the business world about Bob, among people who didn't know him. But I think it's no secret, and it was not unique to me, that there was a large body of thought to the effect that Bob was arrogant, that he was unduly ambitious, that he was vindictive. I think that arose — at least in the business community — in part out of the belief that, at the time of the disagreement between President Kennedy and the steel companies about the steel price increase, Bob had put the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and the antitrust division, and everybody else that had any leverage, to work. I subsequently understood

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that that was not the case, and knowing Bob, I now would believe that it was not the case. But it was generally reported at that time to be the case, and I think that report was generally accepted through large segments of the business community. Also, I think a lot of people had felt that Bob had in a sense done whatever dirty work had to be done — politically — for the Kennedy administration at the time his brother was President, and that he had had to be the tough guy to enable the President to avoid being the tough guy at times, and some of this had rubbed off. So that I think there was a general feeling in the business community that perhaps had rubbed off in part on me before I knew Bob to the effect that this was a fellow who was unfriendly toward the private sector, unfriendly toward business, and willing to use the resources of government in ways that they weren't meant to be used to achieve his ends and to inflict his penalties on people who did not go along with what he wanted to do. Now the truth of the matter was, as I got to know him, that he was not unfriendly toward the private sector: he was a very dedicated

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believer in the fact that things could be done in the private sector got done better in this country if they were done in the private sector. And he was not anti-business. He realized the importance of the business community in our scheme of things and in our life. And I would have total faith now that Bob would be scrupulous in not misusing the tools of government to inflict

unwarranted penalties, or to make life miserable for somebody with whom he didn't agree. I don't mean to imply by that that he wasn't a fighter. He was. But I think he was a fair fighter and I think he would have used any tool, whether the tool of government or any other, only in the matter that if it was meant to be used and could properly be used.

GREENE: Did you discuss with him at all business' attitude towards him, the fact that it persisted?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yes. We talked about this a number of times. In fact, Bob had a very good sense of humor about it. He often laughed and made a joke of his standing with the business community. And we talked about it on a number of occasions in a variety of different contexts. I don't think it worried him a great deal.

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He thought business was wrong about him. I think in many ways he was perplexed about some of these things and how the views had become as widespread as they were. And I think, in a way, he wanted to do something about it. I don't mean by that that he wanted to knuckle under or coddle up to business, but he wanted business to understand him better, and I think he wanted to understand business better. And he talked to me often about the business point of view, to the extent there is any such thing. As you know, you get about as many business points of view as you've got businessmen expressing them. But he did talk to me about the predominant attitude on various things, and he did express to me on one occasion, after he announced for the Presidency, a desire to address a representative, important business group — and he mentioned that he'd like the Economic Club in New York — on some of the important problem relating particularly to business and the relationship between business and government, and some of the problems in the international community that were of direct concern to business, such as the balance of payments problem and the controls on the export of capital, problems of that kind. I think Bob was

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anxious to have the business community understand his views on these subjects, and he was anxious to understand the views of the business community on these subjects.

GREENE: Were you able to set up a meeting of this kind for him?

SCHMIDT: No. At the time he was killed there was an effort in the mill to set up such an engagement, but I was not primarily responsible, although I had volunteered to help in any way I could to bring it about. There was an effort in the mill to get him a date to speak formally at the Economic Club of New York. And, in fact, there was also in the mill a speech in preparation by his speech writers which it was thought he might use as at least a starting document from which to prepare his talk for the Economic Club. I was sent an early draft of that speech at Bob's request. I had gone over it and had made a number of notes which I planned to discuss with him before he gave the speech, although the speech was in no

sense, at that stage in the game, his own, or in anything like final form. But I think he would have

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tried and probably succeeded, in getting an opportunity to address the Economic Club of New York because I think it was quite clear by the time he was killed that his candidacy had become a very serious candidacy. And I think — my own view is — that it would have become increasingly so as the months went by, and I think the Economic Club of New York should and would be prepared to hear any serious candidate for the Presidency. And I think it would have been an excellent thing because I think it was inevitable, if Bob had lived, that business would have gotten to know him better and he would have gotten to know business better, and that as the occurred the gap between them would have closed to some extent. I don't say that Bob would have ever been "business candidate for President," but they would have found out that Bob's ideas were a lot easier ideas for businessmen to live with than the ideas that were attributed to him.

GREENE: Were there other occasions like this where he would ask you to make contacts for him within the business community?

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SCHMIDT: Bob didn't ask very many favors of me. We worked closely on Bedford-Stuyvesant. He met with me often, both in formal meetings in the board and executive committee of Bedford-Stuyvesant and in informal meetings in my office about the problems of Bedford-Stuyvesant, and how different things were going and frequently trying to build a fire under something that was lagging or see how I felt we could move faster and more aggressively in different areas of the Bedford-Stuyvesant project. But our relationship was very arms length on other matters. I don't think he ever felt for sure that I was in his corner politically enough that it wouldn't embarrass him to ask me for a political favor. So when it got to straight political things, things that were designed to further his own political prospects in any way, he was meticulously proper, as far as I was concerned. That may go back to that original conversation where he assured me that Bedford-Stuyvesant would not involve me in anything that I would ever regard as partisan. Or it may just have been his way. Bob was quite shy and, although very determined, at the same time quite

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reticent. And I don't think he would ever put himself in a position of asking something that there was any chance of his being refused, if it were on a personal basis. I think the fact is that he could have asked me for a lot more, without being refused, than he did. But he chose not to. And most of what he asked me for, in the way of trying to galvanize me into action, related directly to Bedford-Stuyvesant. Now, on several occasions Bob would suggest that we have dinner or lunch together, as we did fairly frequently when he was in new York, and those occasions would very often combine business and pleasure. I had lunch with him in his office, in the Senate office

building, several times when I was in Washington, and visits with him on other occasions. And sometimes, on those occasions, we'd talk about things other than Bedford-Stuyvesant. But it was more likely to be casual and friendly conversation rather than any effort on his part to get me to do anything. Some of the things we talked about were things that I brought up where they were not related to Bedford-Stuyvesant. Bob was unique among the politicians that I have known in being

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a man with whom you could disagree freely without the disagreement impinging on your personal relationship. My experience has been, even with politicians who are my good personal friends, that none of them enjoy, or seem to enjoy, disagreement very much, although some will accept it. But you have to sort of ration out your disagreement, because otherwise you find that the friendship and the friendly relationship tend to become dissipated. I didn't find that with Bob at all. Bob seemed to relish disagreement that he respected. And, once you indicated a disagreement, he would pursue it himself until he was certain that he knew why you disagreed and what point you were trying to make. He wanted to be sure that he had your point if you thought he was wrong. And once he had your point, he might acknowledge you had a good point, or he might acknowledge that you had a point but he didn't think a very good one. Or he might think you were wrong, in which case he'd tell you so. He harboured a great many facts that never surfaced till you called him on something. And then I was amazed at the amount of just pure factual

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and often times detailed, statistical information that he would have in support of something he'd said that you might have thought from the newspaper accounts or from hearing it was sort of casual and wrong. Often he could support it in such a way that he'd just back you completely away from your criticism. Fairly early in our relationship at Bedford-Stuyvesant, Bob's position on the Vietnam War began to bother me. And we had a number of discussions about Vietnam. And in those early days, we were in very substantial disagreement about Vietnam. And we could pursue these disagreements in the most friendly way and then go right on about our Bedford-Stuyvesant business where we usually did see eye-to-eye without the slightest rub off of any problems. And I don't think that our friendship was less for these disagreements; I'm inclined to think, if anything, it was more. And I will say that many of the things that I have argued with Bob about in those early days I have come to now, and in many cases long before now, to feel that he was right about them and I was wrong about them. And I think he was out in front of most of us about Vietnam and he was out in front when it was very unpopular to be out there. I give Bob a lot of the credit for the crystallization of the American view that has

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finally come to be the prevalent view. I think on Vietnam that a lot of us lost sight of some of the practicalities because of the rightness of what we were trying to do. Our motivation in Vietnam was, and I think always has been, a very high-minded, unselfish, fine motivation. [Dwight D.]

Eisenhower started the very limited support that he gave the situation in an effort to help the South Vietnamese preserve their own freedom and self-determination. Jack Kennedy stepped up that support with the same high motivation. And [Lyndon Baines] Johnson accelerated it and step-by-step built it up, still trying to accomplish those really right purposes. I don't think we've ever had any selfish political or economic aim in South Vietnam or Southeast Asia. We started out to help preserve freedom in that portion of that area where freedom existed. And I think a great many of us continued for a long time to be deceived by our motivation into thinking that what we were doing there was right and proper and practical. I think Bob saw earlier than almost any major American figure that, however right our motivations were, we weren't accomplishing what we set out to accomplish.

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We never would be able to accomplish it by military means and we were, in effect, trying to prop up a government that couldn't be propped up, and that we were in there contrary to the wishes of most of the people that we were trying to help, and that we were in a hopelessly impractical kind of a posture that the sooner we got out of the better. And I think he felt that if we used more flexibility and more imagination and had a little bit more open approach to the problem, we could find an honorable way to disengage ourselves without the tremendous costs in lives, suffering, and misery, both for the South Vietnamese and for our own American troops. At first I felt that unless he could define specifically exactly what he would do, and how he would do it, that he ought to shut up about it, that it was no good criticizing what we were doing unless he had a specific alternative plan. And I kept pressing him to try to get him to produce his alternative plan, one, two, three, four, what would you do? Step one, step two, step three, step four. And when he couldn't quite produce the alternative that way, I felt that failing the ability to produce a viable

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alternative, he ought to quit criticizing the Administration and support it. But I think as time went on, it became increasingly apparent to more and more people that the course we were on was not viable, and, therefore, that you were justified in taking the position that the course we were on was not viable and that we had to change it even though you couldn't produce that viable alternative that we were all seeking. And I think Bob just saw that and felt that and articulated that before most other people. But discussion after discussion on this subject with me produced absolutely no resentment on his part to make clear to me why he felt as he did. In this connection, as in many others, he was loaded with facts, figures, data, arguments, things that he knew about because of the information sources he had that I didn't know about, that lent tremendous support to the views he was taking and yet which he could never fully articulate publicly when he was urging those conclusions.

GREENE: Do you think that he agreed with you on the fact that the motivation was correct and it was simply

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the process that was wrong, or that our goal couldn't be reached? Did you argue on that point, too?

SCHMIDT: Yes, we did. And this is something that worried me because Bob referred to the war on several occasions as an immoral war. It's always worried me to hear Bob or anybody else refer to this as an immoral war because I think that carries the connotation, or seems publicly to carry the connotation, that we're in there out of some kind of immoral motivation. And I don't believe that. I don't think there's any evidence to support that. I can't even conceive what material or improper gain is involved for us, or could be involved for us. And I don't think that's what Bob meant, but I don't think he ever made clear enough what he did mean. And one of the things that I said to him on several occasions is, "You must not refer to this as an immoral war. However wrong you think it is, it's not immoral because this thing did not stem in its inception from immoral purposes and it is not being continued out of any immoral objectives." I think what Bob meant is that — and this is just my

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opinion based on conversations; I don't think he ever said this exactly this way to me — but I think what he meant is that when you are pursuing military means and you reach the conclusion or you should reach the conclusion, that military means will not be effective, then to continue the pursuit of military means is immoral however right you were to try to do it that way in the first place. Because if you can't accomplish the ends you set out to accomplish, then there's no point in continuing the horrors of war in what should be regarded as circumstances that make it either obvious or highly probable that you're not going to achieve the things you're in there to achieve. Now, if that's what he meant, I felt that's what he ought to say. And I felt that calling it an immoral war without further elaboration on what he meant created the impression that we had some ulterior motivation that I knew he didn't think we had, because I talked to him too much about it and he never professed to feel that we had any ulterior motivation. He just professed to feel that we were blindly now continuing something that it should have long since become apparent to us was not going to work. And we were taking the easy

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alternatives and kidding ourselves that another fifty thousand men or another hundred thousand men would do the job because it was so much easier to believe that, and act on that belief, than it was to admit that we embarked on the wrong course and that some drastically different program had to be followed.

GREENE: Before we get back to the subject of Bedford-Stuyvesant, were you aware at all of the whole period of debate about his candidacy? Did he consult you or ask your opinion?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We talked about that a number of times. I know to my own satisfaction, although there are those who, I'm sure would never accept this to be true, but I feel that I know to my own satisfaction that Bob did not want to run for

president and did not intend to run for president. I know there are people who say that he was running all the time, and that Vietnam was part of a plan to run for president. And I know that there were people close to President Johnson, and perhaps President Johnson himself, who felt that Bob was running for president from the day that Johnson was

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elected in 1964. I am completely satisfied that that is not the case. I feel certain that Bob did not want to run in 1968, that he did not intend to run in 1968, and that he intended, just as he started out saying he intended, to support the renomination of re-election of President Johnson. This got harder and harder as time went by and as Bob got more and more convinced himself about Vietnam, and as the Administration got more and more adamant about pursuing Vietnam, and as the urban problem became more and more acute, and as Vietnam seemed to be taking all the Administration's attention and the urban problem receiving very little of it, very little of the Administration's attention, Bob found himself increasingly in the position of being committed not to run, of being committed to support Johnson, of not wanting to run, and yet of finding himself out of sympathy with the two most important things going on in the United States. And this caused him real anguish. There's no question about that. And we talked about this a number of times. He was quite open about this. I remember one evening that we were having dinner together at the Lafayette restaurant. He'd been out

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to Long Island that day making a speech to some college group. And he said to me — again with that wonderful sense of humor, kind of with half a laugh — he said to me, “How would you answer this question if you were in my place, Benno?” He said, “I completed my address today at Long Island University” — or wherever it was — and he said, “A nice looking young fellow in the back of the room stood up and said, “Senator Kennedy, this auditorium today is packed with people, young people, who are here because they admire you and who have admired you principally because they thought that you were a man of courage, and a man of integrity. You tell us that you are in total disagreement with what the Administration is doing in Vietnam, and that you feel that a great deal more important commitment should be made and a great deal more important effort extended toward the resolution of the urban problem, and yet you tell us in the next breath that it's your intention to support the incumbent President for renomination and re-election. Whatever happened to the courage and the integrity?” And I said, “Well, that's a tough one.” And Bob said, “I'll say it is.”

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And I knew that this was his own question coming back to him. I don't know whether the student asked the question exactly that way, but it was certainly the way Bob would have asked the question if he'd been asking it, and this was the dilemma which haunted him, and continued to haunt him. I continued to feel that all things considered, he shouldn't run, and so advised him and urged him. Among other things, I didn't think he could get the nomination. When he asked me, “What do you think I ought to do?” I asked him point blank, “Do you have the votes? Are



there enough delegates to the convention who carry over from the time when you knew them that you can be nominated?" And he said, "No. The President has the votes." And I said, "Well, can you get the votes between now and convention time?" And he said, "I don't think so. I don't think you can get the nomination away from an incumbent president." This was perhaps a month or six weeks before he finally decided to announce. So I said, "Well, isn't that the answer? What are you going to do, get out and tear the Democratic Party apart, lose the nomination, and probably lose the election for Johnson? How much better are you going to like Nixon than you do

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Johnson? And where's that going to leave you as far as your future in the Democratic Party is concerned?" And he said, "Well, that's the problem and that's why I have felt, and still feel, that I must not get into the presidential contest this year, and must support the Democratic incumbent, the Democratic nominee." About a week or ten days before he announced, Mrs. Schmidt and I were having dinner with Bob and Ethel [Mrs. Robert Kennedy], and Arthur and Marian Schlesinger at La Caravelle, and we were having a very open discussion of the question of whether or not Bob should run. As a matter of fact, conversation practically stopped at all the adjoining tables and everybody had their ear out to see what Senator Kennedy was saying and he was talking as freely and frankly as if he'd been in his own dining room. And this was one of the amazing traits about him; he never seemed to be bothered about who heard what he thought or said on any subject. But at that dinner Ethel thought he should run, and Arthur Schlesinger was articulating all the arguments in favor of Bob's running, as only Arthur can do. Nobody is more articulate or can marshal

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the arguments more persuasively, more compellingly, than Arthur. And Arthur was telling Bob he had to run, telling him that if he got out and won two or three primaries the delegates would have to come to him. Marian was not saying very much, but what she said was on the side of his running. Ethel was urging him to run. My wife, Nancy, was keeping quiet, and I still thought it was the wrong thing for him to do, and I was doing the best job I could do to marshal the arguments against his running. And at this point Bob was still agreeing with me, although it was clear that he was having more and more trouble with the problem. At one stage in the evening, Bob said, "I agree with you, Benno. I think if I run it will go a long way toward proving everything that everybody who doesn't like me has said about me." And Ethel said, "Now, Bob, you've got to get that idea out of your head; you're always talking as though people don't like you. People do like you and you've got to realize that." And Bob said, with that wonderful smile, "I don't know, Ethel, sometimes in moments of depression, I get the idea that there are those around who don't like me." But in the

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course of that evening, Bob said, "If I run people are going to think that, one, I've been intending to run all the time, that Vietnam has been the issue that I've been building up, that I never

accepted Lyndon Johnson as President, that I'm just a selfish, ambitious, little s.o.b. that can't wait to get his hands on the White House, and that everything that everybody has said is true." And I said, "Well, Bob, it goes back partly at least to what I asked you a couple or three weeks ago, and that is, "Have you got the delegates? Or can you get them? Now you don't have to take anybody's advice on that because you know more about that than anybody around you or anybody in the country. You can go down a list of names and you will pretty nearly know who you have and who you don't, and who you have a chance to get and who you haven't a chance to get. And if you haven't a chance to get them, why, then it seems to me the object of the exercise is largely lost." And Bob said, "Well, I think the answer is the one I gave you. I certainly do not have them today, and I have a very serious questions whether I could get them between now and convention time

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even if I tried. I just think, at this stage, I think it would be a mistake for me to try." And we drove them back to the United Nations Plaza building where he and Ethel lived, and when he got out, when we shook hands and said goodnight, he said, "I think you're right." He said, "I was glad we were able tonight to discuss the whole thing over again but I'm convinced that what you say is right." And the next day he made a statement that came out in the *New York Times* in which he reaffirmed his intention not to run and his intention to support the President. And I guess it was a couple or three weeks later that he announced. I didn't see him in the days immediately before his announcement. I guess he was busy in Washington. In any case, our paths didn't cross. I watched the announcement on television. I had heard it was coming. I heard from several people here who were close to him that the problem had gotten more and more difficult and that certain things had arisen, which I later read about in the paper, which had caused him to feel that he just had to change his mind. He made his announcement in Washington on St. Patrick's Day morning, or the

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day of the St. Patrick's Day parade. Then he came to New York and marched in the St. Patrick's Day parade here and then went on to Boston, marched in the St. Patrick's Day parade there. And somewhere in the course of that busy day, long about five-thirty or six o'clock in the afternoon, my telephone rang, and I picked up the telephone and to my surprise it was Bob Kennedy. It wasn't a secretary or anybody on the phone. He said, "Benno?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "This is Bob. I didn't want this day to get by without my calling you." He said, "I just want you to know that the fact that I was not able to take your advice doesn't mean that I don't appreciate it and didn't appreciate it just as much as I always have. And I still think that you may have been right and you may still be right. But I think you'll understand when I have a chance to tell you the whole story, that I really had no alternative and I had to run. And I hope that you'll continue to be as generous in your advice and counsel as you've always been." And I said, "Well, Bob, you know that. As far as I'm concerned, you're my friend and I'll do anything for you I can, any way, any

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time. And if you felt you had to run, you had to run. And that's a decision that nobody could make for you. I did my best to marshal what I thought were the relevant arguments. But having done that, if you decided that the weight of the controlling arguments was on the other side, why, nobody could ask you to do differently than as your conscience dictated. And he said, "Well, I greatly appreciate that, and I want to continue to have your help and support and counsel." And I said, "Well, you know you have that." I said, "Of course, politically, I have been and will be supporting Nelson Rockefeller for the Republican nomination. And if he succeeds in getting the Republican nomination, I will support him for the presidency. But you certainly have my best wishes and my continued friendship, and I want you to feel free to call on me anytime about anything, and meanwhile we'll stay at work together on Bedford-Stuyvesant, and I hope I'll see you often. When I told him about Nelson Rockefeller, he said, "Oh, I understand that. That doesn't matter to me." He said, "As long as I have your friendship, Nelson Rockefeller can have your support." But that's the last discussion

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I had with him about politics, and I only saw him one time after that. He was on the campaign trail from then on and I only saw him very briefly one evening when he was back in New York for a weekend. I saw him for just a couple of minutes and we just exchanged pleasantries and talked a little bit about Bedford-Stuyvesant. And I didn't have any further chance to get into politics with him at all.

GREENE: Why don't we back up a little bit and get back onto Bedford-Stuyvesant. To what extent was your commitment to Robert Kennedy to help in Bedford-Stuyvesant a personal commitment? Did it in any way involve your corporation or other associates?

SCHMIDT: No, it was totally personal. I have made certain people in my firm available from time to time to help with one thing or another. But the commitment was strictly a personal commitment and the Bedford-Stuyvesant activity had been regarded by me as strictly a personal and extra-curricular activity.

GREENE: At this point what were some of the earlier activities that you got involved with in regard to the project?

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Who were some of the people you were seeing and contacts you were making?

SCHMIDT: Well, all the members of the board, of course. In the early days I suppose André Meyer, Tom Watson, Doug Dillon, Bill Paley and Roswell Gilpatrick were the most active, but also, from time to time, Jim Oates, George Moore and David Lilienthal. Our first and most important problem was to get the right leadership in Bedford-Stuyvesant. We started largely with Judge [Thomas] Jones, and then with his help put together the group that seemed to comprise the best leadership in the community. I didn't

personally have too much to do with that. Bob did a lot of that himself. And I think with Tom Johnston's help he really put together the community group. Then our problem was to find the best man to be the executive head of the company, the president and chief executive officer. And in the early days of our operations, Frank Thomas attended some of our earlier sessions at a time when he was Deputy Police Commissioner of the City of New York, in charge of the Legal Division. He made an enormous impression on me and on others and several of us decided that he was our man if we

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could get him. So we went to work on him and got him to come in as president. He's still president and has done an outstanding job. I did have a part in persuading Frank to take the job and I've worked very closely with him since he's been in the job. That has also helped us with the Mayor because Frank was very close to the Mayor, and once the Mayor consented to having Frank take over the Bedford-Stuyvesant job that made his commitment to Bedford-Stuyvesant even stronger. And the Mayor has been very cooperative with the project, although he has personally taken more responsibility for the Urban Coalition than he has for Bedford-Stuyvesant. He's always helped us when we've called on him for help. Then, as far as the D & S Corporation was concerned, we didn't have anybody to run that on a day to day basis, and Eli Jacobs, who's a partner in White, Weld & Co., agreed to do that until we could get somebody, and we finally, as you know, wound up getting John Doar, who came up from the Civil Rights Division to head up the Bedford-Stuyvesant D & S. And he's still there and doing a fine job. I think Bob, Bob with the help of

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Burke Marshall, probably had more to do with getting John Doar than anybody else.

GREENE: Had he had any prior involvement in the Corporation, or project, John Doar?

SCHMIDT: No, no, I think his original connection with Bob was in the Justice Department. He was in the Civil Rights Division when Bob was Attorney General and Burke Marshall was head of the Civil Rights Division. They'd all known one another there and John had made an outstanding record there, and so when we began to think in terms of getting an outside man full time to come in and do this job, Bob or Burke Marshall thought of John Doar and the two of them talked to him and he came. And, of course, a number of others of us talked to him after they got him interested.

GREENE: How often, and on what kinds of things did you usually deal with Robert Kennedy personally in regard to the Corporation?

SCHMIDT: I dealt with him extensively in connection with, first, the organization, the way the two boards were set up, the way they functioned, the way the management of the two companies was set up, the kind of personnel

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that was needed, getting the actual people and getting them in place. Secondly, the financing. He and I worked together on getting the original Ford grant, we talked to several other foundations together. We worked closely together in connection with getting the original \$6 million grant from the Labor Department, and then in formulating projects and programs, and the kinds of things we ought to do and how we ought to do them. All those things that the Corporation was undertaking to do in getting organized, getting financed, and in the initial programs, Bob and I at one time or other reviewed and re-reviewed and then we'd discuss them from time to time in terms of how they were going and what we could do to make them go better and faster, and so forth.

GREENE: Would you and other members of the board, the D & S Board, ever make contacts on your own or were they always discussed and done in conjunction with Senator Kennedy? Were you active separately?

SCHMIDT: Oh, no, no. We worked on our own quite a lot. In fact, as time went on, more and more. And in the final months when he was occupied with the campaign.... by this time the thing had become organized to

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the point where it didn't require and didn't receive very much of his personal time.

GREENE: What types of people would you approach? Were they usually business leaders or leaders in other fields? How would you determine this?

SCHMIDT: Well, it would depend on what we were approaching them about. If we were trying to get foundation help, it would be the heads of the foundations. When we were trying to get the government money it was primarily the top people in the Labor Department. When we were trying to get contributions from the business community, we would talk to key people in the business community. If we were working on a particular project like the mortgage pool, we would work with the various banks. George Moore, a member of our board, and chairman of the First National City Bank, carried the ball and did a great job on that, but we all worked on it from time to time. It depended on the project. But there was quite a lot of contact. At one time or another, one way or another, with various leaders in the business community.

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GREENE: Who would you deal with on Robert Kennedy's staff besides Tom Johnston, or was he normally your contact?

SCHMIDT: Well, mostly Tom because Tom was head of the staff in New York and the man principally responsible for Bedford-Stuyvesant. But from time to time Adam Walinsky would get into it. Adam I think had something to do with the working out of the original concept and the original format before I got into it. And then after I got into it, once or twice Adam came up and met with us on different things, but it was mainly Tom Johnston.

GREENE: How did you feel about Walinsky's and Johnston's grasp of business matters and the problems that the business people you were approaching would have in projects like this?

SCHMIDT: Well, they're both very bright, very able. Neither of them is experienced in business. Tom has — I would say that Tom has more affinity for business and business people and business thinking than Adam does. Adam is more oriented toward the government side, the government view. And Adam is generally

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speaking more oriented toward more rather than less government participation, and most businessmen are oriented toward less rather than more government participation. So in general, I think Tom is likely to be a better emissary to the average businessman than Adam is.

GREENE: What would the members of the board do to avoid duplication of effort, to see that you weren't covering the same ground as someone else? Was there any kind of formal process of dividing up the tasks?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yes, we would normally; one or more of us would take responsibility in the board meetings for a particular area. For example, I took the responsibility for maintaining touch with and directing the preparation of the application for the original grant from the Labor Department. I worked also on the obtaining of the Ford Foundation grant and other grants. Mr. André Meyer took primary responsibility for the Sheffield Farms project, for the restoration and rebuilding of that building. And he and members of his staff carried the whole, pretty much the whole, load on that with Restoration. Paley worked very closely with the people who were interested in and working on education. And

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he also worked with the people who were trying to develop a television program for Bedford-Stuyvesant and those who were considering possibilities of CATV in Bedford-Stuyvesant. George Moore took the responsibility for and carried the ball on the creation of the mortgage pool. In general that's the way it worked. Ros Gilpatric did almost all of the work in connection with the setting up of the Restoration Corporation, and all the corporate work involved in the charter and by-laws of the two corporations, the formalization, tax exemption, all that. So there has been a pretty effective division of labor and all these people are used to taking responsibility, so when one of these fellows takes responsibility for a given area

he doesn't usually need anybody else to look over his shoulder or help him. Tom Watson has helped with a number of things, but I guess the most important single thing Tom did was to work with us in the establishment in Bedford-Stuyvesant of a manufacturing plant for IBM [International Business Machines]. This gave the program a very fine boost and a very big lift. And we need more of those.

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GREENE: What is your impression of the relationship of these board members with Robert Kennedy?

SCHMIDT: I thought that everybody on the board developed increasing respect and friendship for Bob. I never saw any friction between him and any individuals on the board. And I suspect that if you were to pick eight businessmen to talk to about Bob Kennedy, you'd find these eight about as enthusiastic about him, and as high on his ability and integrity as anybody you'd find. So I think that illustrates what I said earlier, that I think if business people had gotten to know Bob better, or as they got to know him better, I have no question that a lot of the friction between Bob and the business community would have disappeared.

GREENE: What kind of a reception did you normally get when you approached business leaders, or foundation heads, either for money or for support in other ways?

SCHMIDT: Oh, we've had very good reception on Bedford-Stuyvesant. I think there is a very strong and

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and almost universal feeling in business that the urban problem, the urban ghetto problem and the racial problem, are top priority problems to which we have not made an adequate commitment in this country and which must receive greater attention than they have received in the past, and I think most businesses and most businessmen are looking for ways to help. Now whenever you approach business generally for money, you always run into a certain reluctance to make charitable contributions because a lot of corporate executives feel that it's not their job to give the stockholders' money away, that the stockholders can do that if they feel like it, and that it's not their job to pick up for the stockholders those charities that should be supported and those that should not. On the other hand, there are a lot of corporations that feel that the time has come when corporations must accept a certain amount of social responsibility, that this is an area which is of vital interest to every American, and is one that American corporate enterprise must support. So we have gotten, generally, I would say, a favorable response. We have never gotten as much financial support as we need, but I

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think that would be true no matter how much financial support we had. I think ultimately these kinds of projects will have to be supported much more extensively with federal tax dollars than they have been to date. I don't think you can meet the challenge of a problem of this magnitude without putting enormous resources into the picture, and the only way you can put enormous resources in on a continuous basis is through the federal dollar. But use of the federal dollar, the federal tax dollar, does not mean that you have to have federal bureaucracy administering these programs. And this was the point I think Bob was trying to prove — that these programs could be administered and developed on the local level and inspire sufficient confidence so that they should get financial support at the federal level.

GREENE: When you would approach these business people, would the fact that Robert Kennedy had more or less — was instrumental in the project ever be a factor; was it ever a question of having to convince them that he wasn't the terrible fiend that they had imagined?

SCHMIDT: Or that he was not using this thing for political advantage?

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GREENE: Yes.

SCHMIDT: Well, I think that's a hard question to answer because that's the kind of thing that would take place behind the scenes rather than on the surface, I think. Nobody told me, "I won't support Bedford-Stuyvesant because Bob Kennedy's connected with it." How many people said that in the councils of their own office, or in the councils of or the confines of their own mind ("that I would rather support something that won't indirectly help Bob") I have no way of knowing. But I think, in general, despite this animosity we've talked about, most business people I know, if they were given the opportunity, wanted to meet him, were curious to see him and meet him, and once they had met him, they were inclined to like him and feel differently about him than they had felt before. And so when you invited people to come to lunch with Bob, or come to dinner with Bob, or to come to a meeting with him in your office, rather than being a detraction, I can say almost certainly that he was an attraction. Now, when it came to giving money, and why people who gave, gave, and why those who didn't give, refused to give,

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that's conjecture. And how much of a part of Bob played on either side, I don't know. But I will say this, that net he was a tremendous asset to the project. He was an asset in so many ways, but to take the most evident ones, we had a standing in Bedford-Stuyvesant because of Bob that we could never have had without him. Bob's involvement meant to the people of Bedford-Stuyvesant that this thing was on the level, that this was a group that was really trying, and whatever mistakes they might make, however well or badly they might do, if this was Bob Kennedy's program they had faith in it. And so I'm sure that helped us enormously in the community and I think that goodwill carries forward to this day. And nobody, in my experience,



had the standing in the Negro community, in the ghetto community, and among the poor that Bob Kennedy had. And nobody inspired their confidence and nobody had their all-out following to the degree he had. Also, I think he was an attraction so far as the business and philanthropic community were concerned. And he was an enormous help in Washington because Bob had a way of moving things that he had something to do with. I know in the business of

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getting grants from the Labor Department and getting the support of other agencies in Washington, his connection with us was vastly beneficial.

GREENE: You mentioned before that although your commitment was strictly personal that other people within your own company did become more interested and involved. What was their initial reaction to your plan to cooperate with Senator Kennedy?

SCHMIDT: Oh, I don't think there was any reaction here other than a favorable one. Everybody here was anxious to meet him. Everybody here was always delighted when he came in the office. He always stopped to shake hands with everybody as he went up and down the hall, and particularly all the secretaries and others around the office were always delighted when they knew he was coming in. One thing that Bob had that I think is overlooked, he had a tremendous personality, had one of the most attractive personalities of anybody you ever had any contact with. And it was no accident that the crowds gathered wherever he went. And there are a lot of other people who are out saying the same words that don't have anything like the personal magnetism that he had. And this is at

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all levels. A lot of people think this is only applicable in the ghetto areas and with racial minorities and so forth. But Bob had this ability to charm and attract and delight people that was just as useful to him at higher levels as it was with the minority groups.

GREENE: How were the members of the D & S Corporation gathered? Was this a fixed number so that once you reached — or were you planning to expand, or...

SCHMIDT: No, I think Bob just picked out the group he wanted and went to them and asked them to serve. With only one exception, everybody he asked, I believe, agreed to serve. And all the original group are still on the board, so that we've never had a vacancy created by resignation and the only vacancy on the original board is a vacancy that was created by Bob's death and Ethel was elected to that. So the board is still the original board and there's never been any talk or thought of either expanding or contracting it. And its original size just flowed from the fact that those were the people that, for his own reasons, and in his own way, Bob decided he wanted on the board in the first place.

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GREENE: Was there any consideration that you know of at any time to seek black business leaders?

SCHMIDT: Well, of course, the Restoration board is a one hundred percent black board.

GREENE: I mean for the D & S.

SCHMIDT: No, there's never been any thought of having black leaders on the D & S board. We've got the black community represented fully on the Restoration board. The two boards meet jointly once each year. We'll have that joint meeting in Bedford-Stuyvesant this coming Monday. And Frank Thomas and Judge Jones, the Chairman and President of the Restoration Corporation, meet with the D & S board every time it meets, meet with the D & S executive committee every time it meets, and very frequently bring along other members of their board to those meetings which they're always welcome to do. So there's absolutely no feeling on their part that there's anything going on in those D & S board meetings that they're not privy to, and not a part of. In fact, all we're trying to do at the D & S board meeting is to do what they want us to do, so we want them there. But

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for convenience and in order to expedite getting the business done, it was set up as two corporations. And I think this has been efficient and a good way to expedite things. I don't think we could get nearly as much done if the boards met jointly all the time, or if the two were combined into one board and functioned as a single corporation.

GREENE: How realistic and practical do you think the Restoration Corporation has been in the kinds of ideas and projects...

SCHMIDT: Very. Very outstanding. I think the only thing wrong with the program has been that the amount of money we have to spend is a drop in the bucket compared to what is needed, and you can't make a great enough impact — remember we're dealing with four hundred and sixty-five thousand people. This is a small city. There aren't very many cities in the United States larger than four hundred sixty-five thousand people, the great majority of whom are from very low, to relatively low income levels. So you can imagine that the sum total of problems of a community that size would require millions, and hundreds of millions, of dollars to make a real impact on their solution. Well, we've had five

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or six million a year to spend. So, you can only do the most urgent things and certain symbolic things, and that's what we've had to do. But I think those few things which have been primarily conceived and developed by Restoration, have been realistic, sound, good, and well accepted by the community. I just wish we had five times as much next year and ten times as much the year after that, to devote to this thing. Then I think we could make a real impact.

GREENE: Were you in the project already when the fighting began within the Restoration Corporation when they had to expand the board and...

SCHMIDT: I was in it, I think, by commitment but I was not involved in that and it had all been — it was all over before I really heard about it. I think Tom Johnston is the source of the best information on that, or Judge Jones or Frank Thomas.

GREENE: From what you know, is it working out far better now with the expansion?

SCHMIDT: Well, it's working out, I think, pretty well now, and, of course, it didn't operate at all under the other setup so there's no comparison. But it has

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worked as it finally evolved.

GREENE: Is there still a certain amount of dissension within the membership?

SCHMIDT: I assume so. I think that's probably natural in any community organization of this kind. But it has not been of an order of magnitude that has kept us from being able to function effectively.

GREENE: Is there any problem with militant members or militants within the community who are serving on it?

SCHMIDT: Well, we have militants on the board and they say their piece and exercise their influence, but — and there's nothing wrong with that — very often the militants stand for the same thing we, the rest of us, stand for, they just want to get the job done. They have not been a destructive element in our meetings or in our projects. They've not exercised their militancy in a destructive way in our set up to my knowledge.

GREENE: Are there any mistakes that you can see now looking back, things that you would have done differently if you had to do them a second time?

SCHMIDT: Well, there are some things that haven't come off as

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well as we would have hoped they would. For example, the school that we worked to try to bring about in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the college, is bogged down and I don't know what the outcome will finally be, whether that college will get built or not, and whether it will go into operation in Bedford-Stuyvesant or not. Now that may or may not have been due to mistakes — I can't point to any single mistake, or any group of mistakes, and say, if we'd done this and that instead of as we did, things would have been different. This may have been just one of those problems that was not capable of solution with the means with which we

were working. And this is an area where conflict within the community did create a situation where we couldn't move forward. It was not conflict within our own board, or conflict within our own organization. It was conflict within the community, conflict between the people dealing with the college situation. So, that's simply one of perhaps several things that haven't come off as we would have hoped that would come off. But taking projects of Restoration, there is nothing that I look back on and say, "I wish we had done that differently." Now, in our economic development

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program, I'm sure, we've invested money in things that won't succeed. But that's true in any economic development program. J.H. Whitney & Co. invests money in things that don't succeed. And by hindsight you say, "I wish we hadn't done that." But it's part of an overall program enough of which does succeed so that you say the program as a whole was satisfactory. And I think that will be true of the economic development program in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The rest of the project, Sheffield Farms, the mortgage pool, the exterior renovation program, the IBM plant, the manpower training program, the employment program, the local centers, the superblock program, the rest of the program, I think, has been a good expenditure of effort and a good expenditure of money, and has made as much of a contribution to the quality of life in Bedford-Stuyvesant as could have been made with the relatively very little amount of money we've had to spend on a very big problem.

GREENE: Would you expand a bit on the conflict within the university project and...

SCHMIDT: I would be glad to if I were competent to. But I'm not familiar enough with that to do that. Judge Jones knows that story intimately. But from a

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participant's viewpoint, so it might not be considered by everybody to be entirely objective. I think others, Frank Thomas, perhaps John Doar, maybe Bill Paley, know more about that than I do. So it probably is not a very good question for me to try to answer in any detail.

GREENE: Do you remember Robert Kennedy talking to you at all about the two bills which he was interested in?

SCHMIDT: Yes, he sent me drafts of both of them. And I commented on both of them. I thought, in general, both of them represented a useful and sound approach, and I still do. I'm sure if they existed today they'd be described, along with a lot of other things that had a useful purpose, they'd be described as tax loopholes, so we'd probably be in the process of eliminating them rather than implementing them. But I think under the free enterprise system, certain tax incentives are a pretty good and pretty inexpensive way of getting things done, often a lot better way of getting things done than trying to do them with public money after collecting the taxes. But we're in a wave of "close the loopholes" right now, so nobody bothers to look at what the objectives and purposes

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were that caused the granting of tax incentives in the first place, they just say “eliminate the tax loopholes” and we’re in the process of getting rid of them in Washington right now. Some of them ought to be gotten rid of, but more thoughtful consideration would be in order. I felt these particular measures proposed by Bob Kennedy were sound.

GREENE: Do you know anything about how Senator Kennedy felt about the treatment that the bills received when he introduced them?

SCHMIDT: Well, I think he was disappointed, but not surprised. I don’t think he really expected them to be warmly embraced and promptly passed. I think he knew they would both be opposed by the Internal Revenue people in the Treasury and without that support they probably didn’t have much chance of getting by. But he thought they were worth putting in and worth at least starting that ball rolling, and maybe ultimately something along those lines would be passed. And I think ultimately something along those lines will be passed. I’d be very surprised if the Nixon administration doesn’t finally come up with some tax incentive proposals

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which are not dissimilar in purpose from those Senator Kennedy proposed.

GREENE: I had a question before that I didn’t get a chance to ask. When you were considering people to approach either foundations or business people, were there any which you automatically struck off your list because you felt they would be hostile to or simply...

SCHMIDT: No.

GREENE: You felt almost anyone was worth approaching?

SCHMIDT: Right. I have never thought the hostility to Bob Kennedy was fundamental. It’s a superficial kind of thing that you can transcend with a good cause or a good proposition. And I was prepared to undertake the burden of proving to anyone that this project deserved whatever particular support we were asking for. And if anybody wanted to say that Bob Kennedy was a reason for not supporting it, I was perfectly prepared to undertake to demonstrate to them that Bob Kennedy, on the contrary, was a reason for supporting it.

GREENE: How has the project proceeded since the Senator’s

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death? Had it built up enough momentum...

SCHMIDT: Yes, it had momentum. It had good management. A lot of people felt that because of Bob's death that we had to, if anything, work with more dedication and energy so that it has moved along. Ultimately, there's bound to be some loss in the community because there is no Bob Kennedy. And however well the community may feel toward any of us — and on the whole, I think the acceptance in the community of most people connected with Bedford-Stuyvesant has been very friendly and very fine. I never am treated nicer than when I'm out there at some gathering, social or business. But there is no one to take Bob Kennedy's place so far as standing within the community is concerned, and ultimately that is bound to erode to some extent our goodwill and acceptance. Of course, the main thing, in my mind, is to hang on, keep the organization together, do everything we can with the resources we have, and work for the day when the country will recognize the importance of making the kind of unambiguous commitment to this problem that it's essential we make. And then hopefully, we will have sources of funding which will

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enable this organization to be put to really constructive use.

GREENE: Did you ever have any feeling that the Restoration Corporation might not be receptive to an idea? Was there any question of its being an intrusion on their authority? Anything you hesitated to suggest for this reason?

SCHMIDT: No, because we didn't generally originate ideas. They originated them for the most part, and almost entirely. And, if we could refine them or improve them, they're very receptive to that. And if they want to rebuild a dilapidated area, and they suggest a certain program and you can suggest refinements and variations in the program that's better, they're receptive to that. But you're still rebuilding that area and you don't say, "Well, that's not the area to rebuild. Let's go rebuild some other area." Or if they're trying to get a better way of picking up the garbage and the trash in Bedford-Stuyvesant so as to clean it up, you don't say, "Well, let's don't bother with the garbage and the trash. Let's build parks instead." In other words, as long as you stick within the framework of what they think is important, and

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all you're doing is trying to improve what you do and how you do it, they don't feel that you're doing anything but giving them the kind of help which they want and need.

GREENE: One more question. Jack Newfield, again, says that you're spending about twenty-five percent of your time on this project. Would you say that's accurate?

SCHMIDT: Well, it was in the first year, it certainly was at least that and that may be an understatement. As the organizations themselves have gotten better, the board, the people at the board level, are called on for less operating type participation. For example, in preparing this year's application to OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] and the Labor Department, all the spade work, all the creative work, all the composition was done at the

company level. John Doar and Frank Thomas did that, this time. Whereas it was all done in my office two years ago. So instead of spending virtually full time on it for several days, I just saw the draft after it was prepared, went over it, made whatever suggestions I had to make, which is much less time consuming than doing the work. So there's been that change, and as a result of that, I

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have spent somewhat less time and spent the time which I did spend somewhat differently. So I would not — I would think twenty-five is high now, although I am spending all the time on Bedford-Stuyvesant that is sought by either the D & S or Restoration. And it still has a very high priority with me so far as my extra-curricular activities are concerned, in what gets an allocation of my time.

GREENE: Do you have anything else that I might not have covered?

SCHMIDT: I don't think of anything. We could go on indefinitely about various aspects of this, but I think that hits the main points and I think it hits the main points of my relations with Senator Kennedy, which is the main thing you're interested in.

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