

**Earl Graves Oral History Interview- RFK #5, 10/23/1969**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Earl Graves

**Interviewer:** Roberta W. Greene

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**Biographical Note**

Graves, Earl; administrative Assistant to Senator Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], New York (1965 - 1968). Graves discusses the volunteer work he was involved in before joining RFK's presidential campaign (1968), how his relationship with RFK formed and evolved, and his own experience campaigning for others who were seeking elected government positions, among other issues.

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of **EARL G. GRAVES**

Interviewed by: Roberta Greene

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Earl Graves- RFK #5

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Fifth Oral History Interview

with

EARL GRAVES

October 23, 1969  
New York, New York

By Roberta Greene

*For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project  
of the Kennedy Library*

GREENE: Why don't you begin with explaining how you got to the Senate Office and how you ended up with the duties that you did? I guess that actually goes back to how you met the Senator, because we've never discussed that on a tape.

GRAVES: Right. I guess in actually getting the job in the Senate Office, I guess, full measure must be given to Tom Johnston, who was the one that actually said to Senator Kennedy at some point in mid-1966 or the early part of 1966, "We should hire Earl Graves and actually make him an employee and put him on the staff." And Tom told me this was a conversation he had, and basically the Senator said the same thing. And the conv. It was not

only just a conversation that, <sup>"</sup> we should hire Earl Graves, <sup>"</sup> but the conversation was that no Senator in the United States actually has a black staff assistant. <sup>and</sup> you would be satisfying many things by bringing Earl Graves on, not hiring him as a black person, but hiring him as an assistant who happens to be black. So <sup>I would want,</sup> ~~that was one.~~ <sup>In</sup> the first <sup>instance,</sup> ~~place we could~~ give full credit to Tom Johnston for initiating this effort, which once it was presented to him <sup>and</sup> might have been in the Senator's mind in any event, <sup>to</sup> he brought <sup>to</sup> fruition by the Senator asking me himself personally to come on the staff in June of 1966 in his apartment at ~~870-United Nations.~~ <sup>849 United Nations Plaza Drive,</sup> excuse me. <sup>A</sup> I first met Senator Kennedy or had something to do with him in his campaign of 1964. I was working in the. . . . Well, I wasn't working; I was volunteering my time for the Democratic State Committee in the Presidential campaign in 1964 when <sup>[Lyndon B.]</sup> President Johnson and Vice-President <sup>[Hubert H.]</sup> Humphrey were running, <sup>and</sup> at the same time the Senatorial campaign of Senator Kennedy was going on. The

only time that the two actually crossed paths is when the major candidates, the national candidates either the President or the Vice President came together. Other than that, Senator Kennedy ran his own campaign, had his own advance men, his own staff and depended on no one within the state-wide organization. As a matter of fact, they operated a completely autonomous thing, in that they revolved out of the. . . . Oh, what's the hotel?

GREENE: Carlyle.

GRAVES: Carlyle Hotel as their main headquarters and the Democratic State Committee was operating out of the Statler-Hilton Hotel. During that period of time I met the Senator once or twice, and I should back up and say that I said I also had met him, I believe, once, or had some communication with him, when I was working as a federal narcotics agent back in 1960, but I had never seen him or talked to him again since that time, and I'm sure he would not have remembered me in any event. In 1964 we just really just met about three or four times and just shook hands. It was one of those things. He met me at a rally, he recognized

me again; he shook hands again. ¶ To actually think that he remembered my name at that point in conjuncture, 1964, meaning during the period of the campaign that he was running, I would think not. It was rather hectic for him, the idea of campaigning in his own right for elective office was new to him, and the whole issue of carpetbagging, and the whole trauma of his running for the Senate I think so preoccupied him that I'm sure Earl Graves, just for the sake of Earl Graves, was not particularly significant or in his mind in any way, other than the fact he might have recognized my face. ¶ In December, of 19... Right after the Senator won. . . . Let's see how did it happen? Why don't we just . . . [ Interruption ]

¶ In 1965--it's ironic now, we come back almost 360 degrees, come the full turn on the clock--because in 1965 Abraham Beame was running for mayor of New York and Senator Kennedy was supporting him, because Beame was the Democratic candidate, having won in a very close primary in New York city where Paul Screvane had ran, and there were two or three other candidates who had run against each other. Congressman

[William F.] Ryan had run and what it ended up <sup>with</sup> was that where they thought Screvane was going to win, he did not. Abraham Beame won and the Senator supported him. ¶ In the Beame campaign, the Democratic State Committee again asked me to come in and assist in advance work and in going around with the candidate, meaning Controller Beame. At the same time that Controller Beame was running, you had Frank O'Connor and Mario Procaccino running on the same ticket: O'Connor for the City Council Presidency and Mario Procaccino for the Controller.

¶ In addition to going around with Beame and doing advance work, the Senator paid me the great compliment of asking me to go around with Mario Procaccino, which is quite an education in itself. And now that I see him running for mayor, I can really reflect on all the fine days that I spent with the his honor the controller, who did ultimately win. It's ironic now that four years later <sup>John Lindsay is</sup> fighting for his life as mayor of New York. Mario Procaccino, who won for Controller on the Democratic ticket is running against him for mayor, and Abraham Beame who lost for mayor is now running again for the

same office which he had at the time he ran for  
mayor <sup>^</sup> controller. <sup>9</sup> In '65 I spent about almost  
one full month working for the Democratic State  
Committee as a volunteer, almost full time,  
having left my real estate business and just taken  
some time off to do it. Beame lost, as . . .  
which is a part of history now, obviously. And I  
got to meet the Senator several times during that  
Beame campaign where he actually was campaigning  
for Beame, and I would be at a rally or a coffee  
stop or somewhere where I <sup>had</sup> either helped set it up  
or was participating in doing the advance work prior  
to the Senator getting there. And early . . .  
~~The latter part--excuse me--of December, 19. . . .~~  
<sup>9</sup> The latter part of 1965, in early December, 1965,  
right after Beame lost, Senator Kennedy's office  
called me and asked me would I come over and join  
in some discussions regarding having Christmas . . .  
the Christmas parties that he had given the year  
before. He had given Christmas parties in the five <sup>^</sup> . . .  
well, in three of the poverty areas of the city, that  
being Manhattan, Queens. . . . In fact, he had given

them in ~~all~~ four of the five boroughs the year before and wanted to do it again that year. And there were things that had been operated rather smoothly, and there were things that had not. And the ~~five~~ areas, four areas they had picked were Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn, being Bedford-Stuyvesant. And in Manhattan there were two locations, both poverty areas, and in Queens there was one in South Jamaica. And in the Bronx there was the east Bronx. And going to an organizational meeting ~~at the Senator's office~~ or in the Senator's office on Forty-fifth Street in Manhattan, We had some discussion regarding who was going to do what for the various parties, and hearing that the party that they were talking about for Brooklyn was going to be in Bedford-Stuyvesant and actually it was only around the corner from my house, It just seemed the logical thing to do rather than to take on some logistical support position within the planning. And I agreed to run the parties that were going to be held in Brooklyn. And it turned out of the four parties, four sites for parties that year that were held, the party that was the best organized

and the best run was ~~.....~~ just happened to be the one that I ran, for any number of reasons. There were ~~.....~~ <sup>At</sup> One party there was a demonstration; Another party was a fight with some of the kids. The other party, the Senator arrived there very late or very early, and it wasn't well organized. When they got to Brooklyn, everything just seemed to work <sup>right</sup> and Jackie Kennedy had come to the party in Brooklyn, <sup>[Jacqueline B.]</sup> and Ethel <sup>[Skakel Kennedy]</sup> had come, and the kids had come. It seemed like hundreds of kids, but I don't <sup>think</sup> there was more than about ten kids <sup>between them.</sup> ~~.....~~ <sup>[John F. Kennedy, Jr.]</sup> John-John came, and Caroline Kennedy came, and about six of the Senator's kids. ~~And it was a.....~~ He was very pleased with it. <sup>SA</sup> And <sup>S</sup> in the early 1966 he started asking me to do various things in the Senate office or through Tom Johnston and Pauline Feingold. <sup>And</sup> who, again, I must give credit to <sup>her,</sup> also, for having me to do some work in the Senate Office. Paul <sup>ine</sup> Feingold was a staff assistant in Senator Kennedy's office prior to my coming to the office. <sup>q1</sup> In early 1966 Orin Lehman decided to run for John Lindsay's seat. John Lindsay by this time had become mayor of New York. <sup>Over in the 17th, silk stocking</sup>

district,  
^ Senator Kennedy got Ronnie Eldridge to start heading up the effort for Orin Lehman and John E. Hyman and [Philip J., Jr.] Phil Ryan, who was still working for him at that time and running his New York office.

And they called me over and asked me would I run the advance. By this time, now, I'd been doing advance, I'd been doing advance, I guess, for about a year and a half for the Senate office, and I guess they had some confidence in the fact I could do it, and they asked me would I consider running it, and I told them only on a part-time basis and, again, as a volunteer. And I did, and although Orin Lehman did not win his race for the Congress, the effort we made on his behalf was a good one, as far as the advance and the scheduling was concerned. And Orin Lehman indicated this to the Senator, and the Senator, I guess, programmed that in the back of his mind, again, in terms of just one more point for our team, if you want to call it like that.

And then, after Lehman lost there were various programs or things that came up that the Senator was interested in if he was making a trip somewhere around, particularly around the city, or he was going to a dinner that. . . .

And the staff was very short at that time in the Senate Office. They only had Tom Johnston, Pauline Feingold and. . . .

GREENE: Was Phil Ryan still there then?

GRAVES: No, Phil Ryan had left already. I think it was just Pauline and Tom, which was one hell of a schedule for the two of them to try and hold down what was going on. And at that point the Senator's schedule didn't even begin to approach what it was. . . . the dimension of what it was just prior to his announcing for the Presidency, But it was still a hectic schedule, and Tom Johnston and Pauline trying to do it by themselves was unreal, And so he called on me any number of times to go out with the Senator or to do something. But I mean then, as I said, in June of 1966 he asked me would I consider coming on the staff full time, and after many discussions in terms of arriving at the salary that I thought would be satisfactory, and I don't mean to make it sound like there was. . . . we had a lot of haggling, There wasn't. If there was any haggling, it was done vis-a-vis Tom Johnston and [ Joseph F. ] Joe Dolan. They

had any number of discussions with <sup>him.</sup> Of course, the Senate is not ~~is~~ infamous for not paying very high salaries, and I didn't think that I necessarily had to become part of a poverty program in order to work for Senator Kennedy's office. I don't say that facetiously. I just could not see sacrificing what I was doing <sup>and</sup> from where I was economically so that I could say I was a member of Senator Kennedy's staff, of course, although it was/a challenge and very exciting to look forward to. Anyway, we did work out the salary thing.

91 We worked out what my assignments were going to be and the kind of work that I was going to do, which was going to be in the area of economic development and with no really specific heading on it. It was kind of <sup>an</sup> open-end thing. <sup>And</sup> I started working in the Senate Office in the early part of September, 1966, and stayed with the Senator until his assassination in June of 1968. The basic areas that I covered were . . . interruption

GREENE: Why don't you give some kind of broad explanation of what he had in mind when he spoke of economic development?

GRAVES: First of all, initially, you should understand that each one of us had a particular or certain ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> political responsibility in the office in terms of keeping our lines of communication open to various communities, various segments of the communities, and various persons. And I was no different. I had Brooklyn, Staten Island, Westchester County, all of Long Island, <sup>and</sup> particularly Nassau <sup>and</sup> Suffolk County where I did a lot of work with [ John F. ] Jack English and Dominic Baranello, who were respective county chairmans of those areas. And I also did a piece of Manhattan, and I should say really <sup>it</sup> was half of Brooklyn. And what ~~the purpose...~~ <sup>it</sup> ~~the purpose...~~ <sup>it</sup> The purpose of <sup>his</sup> setting it up like that was that when he wanted to know what was going on in a particular area, he knew who had been working on that area, or at least Tom Johnston knew to tell <sup>him</sup> who had been working on that particular area and who should know something about it. <sup>It</sup> In addition to that, programatically, we were given certain responsibilities. In other words, anything that had to do with physical development or housing--physical

development is just whether or not you're taking  
Riker's Island and deciding what you're going  
to do with that, or whether or not you're taking  
some tenements in Bedford-Stuyvesant and deciding  
what you're going to do with that, or whether or not  
you're taking another piece of Central. . . . hacking  
off another piece of Central Park and deciding what  
you're going to do with it. <sup>It</sup> It all has to do with  
physical development, and that was the area I worked  
in in the Senate office. Any mail that came in that  
had to do with housing, I handled all the mail, so  
that you were kind of. . . . Not only were you handling  
their particular area, but you were reading all the  
mail that had to do with that; people's interests; and  
what people were writing about and what. . . . and  
how it varied from time to time; whether it was low-  
income housing projects or the fact that there was no  
rent control, and the. . . . At that point that was. . . .  
happened to be a big issue and was for about two  
years just about. The thing of deed control <sup>led</sup> of the  
<sup>apartments and</sup> part of the landlord just being able to double rents  
with no type of ceiling in terms of where they went.

I think that kind of covers the physical development part or the real estate part of my job, and, of course, the expertise I'd had from running a real estate office was of great value to me in what I was doing there. <sup>9</sup> In addition~~ally~~ I also had a responsibility, that was somewhat the same, in the area of health, so ~~that~~ anything that had to do with the Department of Hospitals or various health projects that came up in the city or throughout the state, Medicaid or Medicare, both of which during the time ~~.....~~ <sup>5</sup> ~~During~~ the two years I was in the Senate Office became a reality. Neither one of them had ~~.....~~ <sup>was not</sup> ~~.....~~ had not been legally a part of either the state or federal laws at the time that I started working in the office. When the Senator died, they both were actualities. So that was rather interesting, and, in fact, the whole area of health that I worked on in the Senate office, has, of course, rubbed off now <sup>o</sup> into what I do here in my consulting firm, the <sup>of</sup> area's health. I'm a consultant to Department of Hospitals so it did kind of ~~.....~~ <sup>assist</sup> <sup>11</sup> The two things did ~~assist~~. Now, the area of narcotics, having been

a narcotics agent, I covered a lot of things that had to do with narcotics in the Senate office, the mail that came in and various rehabilitation programs for narcotics addicts, and making recommendations to the Senator. We did not do as much. . . . I didn't do as much as I would have liked to in this area. ~~Just.~~ It was just a matter of time, what you could get accomplished in a certain period of time.

9) In the area of economic development, I'm talking about things such as our Bedford-Stuyvesant project which we ~~which~~ was probably the most comprehensive poverty program we ever ~~that~~ that I ever saw get off the ground, any time. And I think the thing that really made that program move was we cut across all kinds of party lines, touched base with everyone local that we could, but we didn't go through/community organizations and have it funded through the normal chain of command where the only persons that would have done well were the very people <sup>at</sup> from the top. ~~and~~ none of the money would ever have gotten down into the community. We really worked at it from the bottom up and made it happen. And the Senator

paid a lot of attention and spent a lot of time with that project. That's what made it go, and if there's anything that may cause it to stumble or be short-circuited right now, it's the fact that it doesn't have a person with the Senator's clout leaning over everybody's shoulder to find out why the thing is not going forward. In other areas of economic development, if you start talking about economic development, you're talking about what happens to Mitchell Field. Mitchell Field's in Nassau County. It's a large field that the Air Force had given up and had to be developed, and I worked on that in terms of who got various acreage that was wanted, and that we had all kinds of requests from private agencies and federal agencies and city agencies and state agencies to get a piece of the action up there. . . .

GREENE: I remember that, yeah.

GRAVES: . . . in addition to Hofstra University pushing very hard to get their share of it, and Adelphi University wanting their share, and any number of synagogues or yeshivas wanting their share, and reporting that back and trying to negotiate that out, and I had some

rather interesting, <sup>and</sup> hot sessions with Eugene Nickerson, who was the County Executive at that time, <sup>because</sup> whenever he thought he had it all resolved, somebody would write a letter to the Senator, <sup>and</sup> I'd start scraping away at the surface, and Gene and I would have some rather interesting conversations. <sup>91</sup> In addition to something like that, another problem which would come under the area of economic development, and probably physical development, was the Calverton Airport issue. Grumman Aircraft <sup>Engineering Corporation</sup> is the major employer in Nassau County, <sup>and</sup> they have an airfield of their own which is located in Calverton, which is really Suffolk County, where they use it for their experimental aircraft, <sup>and</sup> it was proposed that Calverton Airport would be taken over by the FAA [Federal Aviation Agency] and that Grumman would continue to use parts of it, but it would be developed into a major jet <sup>port</sup> and would be located in the Suffolk area. Then <sup>they would</sup> ~~it'd~~ have to have high speed <sup>^</sup> trains that would come into New York city, obviously, because you're going to be sixty miles out on Long Island after you land and you can't. . . . <sup>It'll</sup> ~~and you take~~ <sup>^</sup>

you two hours to get into New York, and just why bother coming in from Washington to land sixty miles away. But that was killed. Grumman Aircraft did some excellent lobbying and then that project never got off the ground. And so the reason that project never got off the ground and Calverton Airport ~~that would become~~ never became a reality up there was the fact that Grumman Aircraft did ~~the~~ that amount of lobbying and they accomplished or that they worked on in Washington. And I could go on. There probably... You know, the whole area of poverty programs which was not my particular area. Carter Burden who worked ~~this up has had~~ in the Senator's office had the poverty programs per se, but when you start talking about economic development you are talking about poor people whether they're black, white, or Puerto Rican, and a lot of it had to do with poor areas in south Brooklyn where the people were not black; they were white. In poor areas in Utica, New York, where Mayor [Dominic R.] Assaro is, and again, the people were not black; they were white. So you're talking about helping disadvantaged people when you start talking <sup>about</sup> economic development.

GREENE: ~~Now would you. . .~~ Would it be your responsibility to devise, or at least to suggest, plans for what might be done in these areas or just to follow through on whatever the Senator had decided?

GRAVES: Both. And I have to come back to the Bedford-Stuyvesant project, because I think that was the most comprehensive planning that I was involved in, and it took the most amount of time of anything that I did in the Senate Office in the <sup>area of</sup> early economic development. And I was involved from the viewpoint of making recommendations, writing programs and really getting the whole thing off the ground, so it would really take off and go. And so, I mean, it was from top to bottom in terms of projects. Now, in another projects, the Senator might send <sup>in</sup> a note or call and say, "What do you think of. . . . How are you active in this?" in a new program they had just gotten, ~~A~~ new program. Again, that would be a poverty program. Or, "What do you think of the idea of ~~putting~~ announcing we're going to give fifty thousand dollars to Congressman <sup>Park Slope through</sup> Hugh <sup>L</sup> Carey for the rehabilitation of some brown stones that really will probably be

bought by middle class persons? Is that a good thing or a bad thing?" ~~Those were the kind.~~ It was that kind of communication. And, of course, the Senator was very tough in terms of when he asked you for a memo, he didn't want a memo that just had a lot of rhetoric in it. He had to have some specifics, and if you said, "I thought X was bad," you'd better be able to explain why X was bad and show the alternatives that were available. So, if nothing else, he really made you realize your potential in terms of what you could accomplish.

GREENE: On the Bedford-Stuyvesant project did you work with Tom Johnston and Adam Walinsky right from the start, or at what point did you come in?

GRAVES: Yeah, I started right from the start. Well, you ~~We~~ have to understand, I lived in Bedford-Stuyvesant. <sup>at that time</sup>

GREENE: Yeah. Now would you have been working largely with the local leaders, or with the business people like Tom and Adam were doing?

GRAVES: Well, first of all, Adam didn't really get into the Bedford-Stuyvesant project till we were pretty well down the pike. I mean I was. . . . You know, Adam

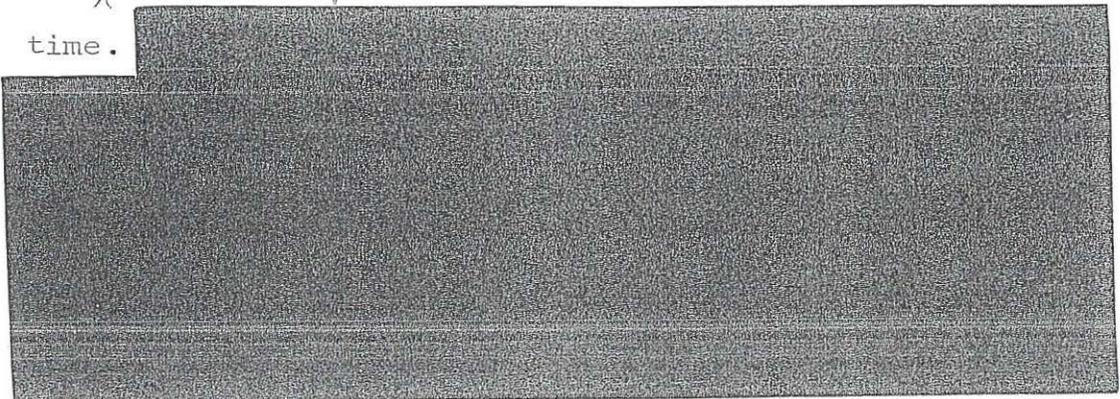
had a lot to do with it after. ~~You know~~ it kind  
of became the thing; The Bedford-Stuyvesant project  
was the popular thing to be involved in after it  
took off. In the beginning the Bedford-Stuyvesant  
project was something we were just grinding it  
out. I mean, we were first talking about maybe we  
could get ten thousand dollars, maybe we could get  
twenty thousand dollars. <sup>In</sup> And the original haggling  
that had to do with those women in Bedford-Stuyvesant,  
<sup>in</sup> and sitting down and deciding who was going to be  
chairman of the board and all of that, and starting  
to figure out some of the businesses you could get  
involved, Adam <sup>wouldn't</sup> ~~didn't~~ get involved in it till very. . . .  
Really Adam didn't get involved in that Bedford-  
Stuyvesant project until, I think, the early part of  
1968. <sup>9</sup> By that time, you know, we were pretty far  
down the pike, <sup>and</sup> I think it's a matter of Tom  
Johnston realizing he had spent a lot of time and  
effort, and <sup>bright</sup> being a black guy, <sup>and</sup> there was no  
reason to give up that thing which he had offered,  
you know, along with us in the office, to the people  
in Washington. <sup>And</sup> Adam's coming in was after, you

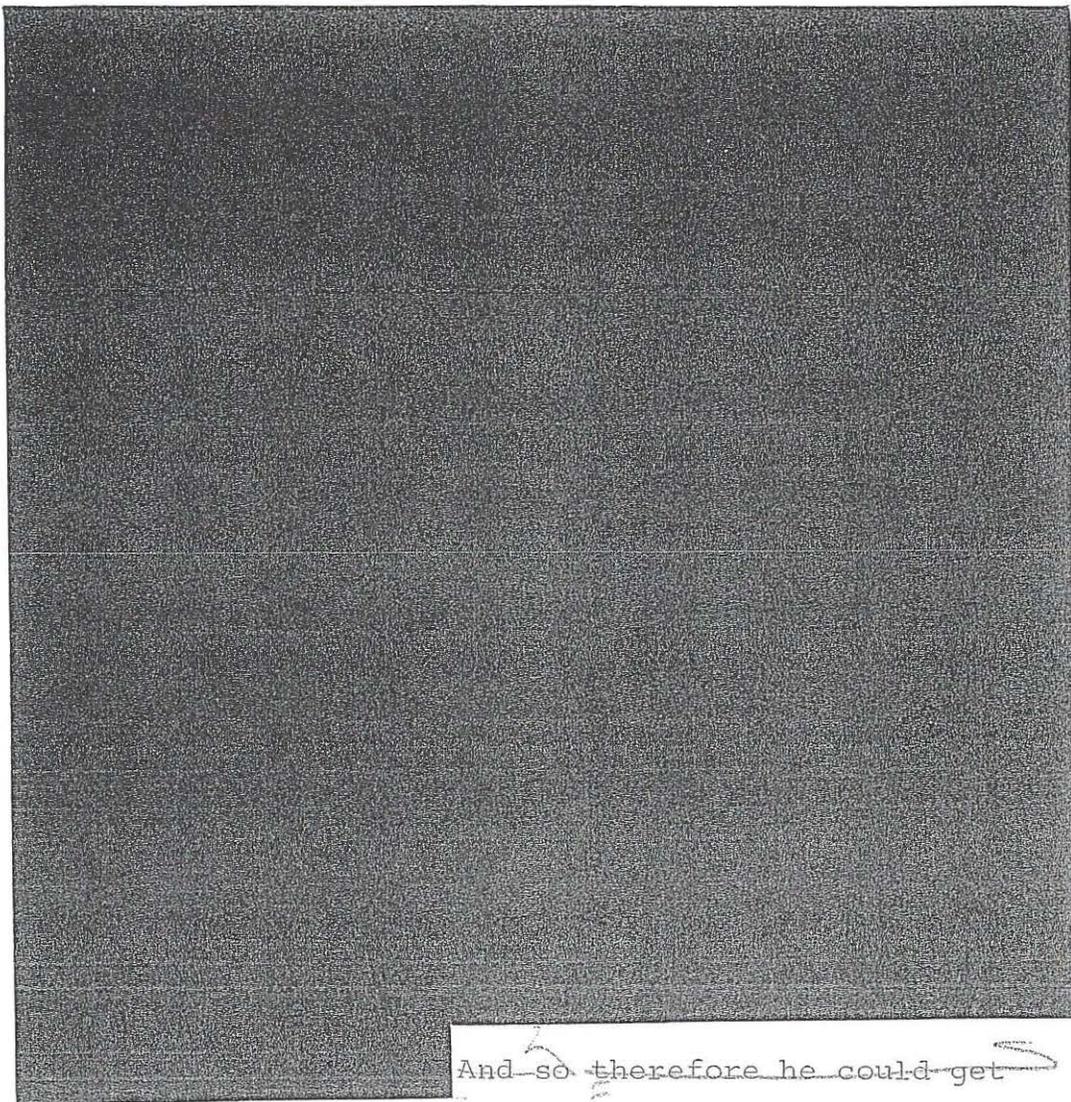
know, we started thinking about legislation and getting Department of Labor funds and so forth, then he became the guy that would do it, but to . . . . You know, if he takes credit for it, I'm surprised that he would in the early stages because he really was not involved in that at all. He did some speech-writing when we announced the thing in December of 1968, but prior to that we had been doing going at it for six months prior. The first time the Senator really focused on Bedford-Stuyvesant per se was in May. In fact, it was February of 1966 we started having discussions as early as February of 1966 when I wasn't even working full time in the Senate office, just coming in to various meetings we were having in the office as a volunteer. And Adam's real involvement, that I was even aware of was when he first started doing something but writing a speech, which would have been in December of 1966, which was almost a full year.

GREENE: What kinds of things. . . [ Interruption ] You mentioned to me that in 1966 you advanced for the New England trip before the election and mentioned

specifically Kenneth Curtis's election. What did you do in that, and how closely involved were you with Kenneth Curtis himself?

GRAVES: Well, first of all, once you get out of a place like New York city you start working in a political situation. When you represent Senator Kennedy, you deal directly with the person who happens to be involved. The principle in this case was Ken Curtis <sup>who</sup> was running for governor, and I was directly involved, and I was staying in the Sheraton-Eastland Motor Hotel, which is run by and owned by the [William L.] Dunfey family, which are personal friends of the Kennedy family. And <sup>LA</sup> getting in there, I was supposed to originally spend two days. I got up there and things were really fouled up, and <sup>we</sup> we didn't have it all together, and having conversations with the office back in New York and then [Gerald J.] with <sup>^</sup> Jerry Bruno, who I really didn't know well at that time.



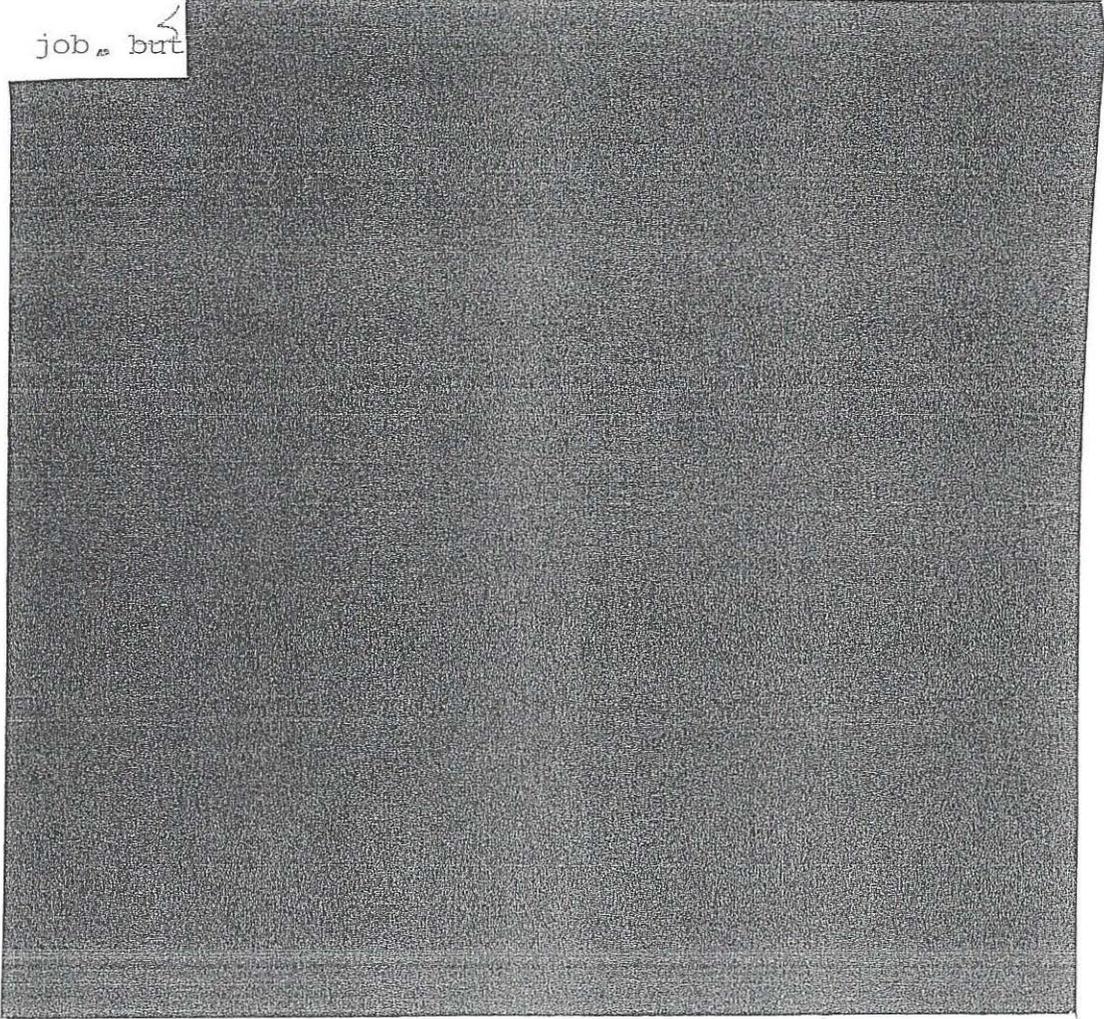


And so therefore he could get

away. <sup>41</sup> You know, he could justify in his mind tolerating them, but when he looked at Earl Graves, who was, one, a challenge to him in terms of ability as far as certainly doing advance work, <sup>1111</sup> ~~because~~ I didn't think it took any great genius to do advance work; I just thought that it took an organized mind and some administration to get it done, both of which

I <sup>L</sup>had certainly had no problem <sup>with</sup> in any sense. I didn't go from running a battalion in the army to having problems with getting a group of people together to put together a rally. So it kind of gave him some concern that here was the person who actually could do what he thought he was the best at, ~~and he~~ <sup>L</sup> <sup>Q</sup>. You have to recognize it. And the reason I focus on him is because a person like that existed for as long as I was in that office, and existed before I came to that office, and is still, you know, living on the laurels of what, supposedly, he did. There's no question that he did a good job; but the other side of the coin is, also, that if you've got a nice commodity to run with, which was Senator Kennedy, you ought to be able to do a pretty <sup>good</sup> <sup>Q</sup> job. I mean I don't think that I used to be able to put together fantastic rallies and have thousands of people just because I was so bright. The thing was that I ~~had~~ <sup>L</sup>. They gave me a pretty good property to run with. That was Senator Kennedy. ~~And, you know~~ <sup>L</sup> <sup>S</sup>, I'd like to see without money that we had available to us,

either by the persons who would ask Senator Kennedy to come or Senator Kennedy himself, and without the name Kennedy, how good a rally a person like Bruno could put together, or, for that matter, an Earl Graves could have put together. I have to believe I could still do it because I know, ..... and [Charles] either running Evers campaign or other such campaigns in the South, we've been able to do a pretty good job, but



[REDACTED]

49  
And Evers and I have

never had a conversation about black or white advance men, but Evers, as unsophisticated as he might... people might think he is in terms of maybe not focusing quickly on a situation, could turn around and realize that Senator Kennedy, as late as 1968, didn't have, with the exception of Earl Graves who had to fight to stay on the top all the time in this area, black advance men, period.

[REDACTED]

That's what it amounted to.

~~So I mean~~ I don't mean to go off ranting and raving, but, I mean, I really think that it should be. . . . Somebody should focus, for the record, that ~~it was~~ able to. . . . That type of situation was able to exist, and rampantly so, in the Senate office, and I raised it with Frank Mankiewicz, and Frank recognized it, and he'd kind of shrug his shoulders and try to get around <sup>him</sup> it a little bit and work with it. I mentioned it to Tom Johnston, and nobody wanted to rock

the boat as far as this thing was concerned. And it existed. It existed through the entire 1968 campaign.

GREENE: To your knowlege, did anybody ever discuss it with the Senator?

GRAVES: No. Not at all. And I think that it would have been unimportant to him, because at that time. . . . When I say unimportant, he was concerned with having crowds, and if the fact having crowds <sup>meant</sup> ~~met~~ that Bruno was going to end up having his team and his team ~~was~~ consisted of an all white team, so be it. There were a couple of guys that went around locally. If we happened to come into Washington, D.C., they'd call themselves advance men, but if you're talking about ~~guys~~ of the maybe hundred-odd guys that were flying around the country that had some clout to spend some money, with the exception of myself there was nobody. And the guys that they had going around were absolute. . . . Some of them were absolute jerks. Coming back to this Maine situation, if I could for a second, because you asked me about that and I wanted to get this on the record. I worked directly with Ken Curtis, Senator

[ Edmund S. ] Muskie and [ Robert J. ] Bob Dunfey in putting together the Maine trip and had gone there for, supposedly, what was going to be two days, and then I was going to come back again towards the end, at the end of that week when the Senator was going to come back. I got there, and there was a lot of need for organization, and what was, in fact, the state headquarters was in the Sheraton-Eastland Motor Hotel. They had two telephones; and, you know, when I got there at three o'clock in the afternoon one day the offices were already closed for the day, and this is the state headquarters for Curtis! So I saw there was a need to kind of do a couple of things to maybe get <sup>it</sup> just a bit more organized; and we did. We spent some real time and effort and stayed a whole week in Maine. And that Saturday that the Senator was supposed to come, Ethel's brother <sup>[George Skakel]</sup> was killed out West with Dean Markham in an airplane accident, and the Senator did not come. And so what happened was <sup>is</sup> actually what we had spent a week helping Curtis get all set up, and he was rather well structured and well organized and he knew what he had available

to him, and it was so well organized in terms of the advance sheet, in terms of who rode in what cars, and where the cars were going to be, and who did what, and where the bands came from, that we were able to send [ ] [ ] Ron Fox, who worked as an associate in the Senate office on a part-time basis, back to Maine for that trip, and Ron Fox was able to take the program that I had written up for the Senator's stop and put it together, so it was a good rally and a good stop. because what happened was, if I'm not mistaken, Bruno was not welcomed in Connecticut and he was not welcomed in New Hampshire.

GREENE: Why is that?

GRAVES: Why? I don't know. He just had alienated some people and, you know, there were people. . . . To cite an example, in Oregon, Bruno could not go into Oregon because [ ] [ ] What's the woman's name?

GREENE: Edith Green.

GRAVES: --Edith Green/that if Bruno came in she wasn't going to campaign for the Senator at all. And yet, a person like that. . . . And to cite an example, if a person like a Bruno could cause that kind of concern in

the four or five states I already mentioned, you know, why should a person like that be [redacted] be able to be kept on the staff. You know, that's

the thing I could never quite comprehend. I mean, it's one thing. . . . You know, he was loyal, and if loyalty means that you keep a person like that

around, why, I think that's unfortunate. As far as

coming back again, as far as the New England stop was concerned, what it ended up being was when the

Senator finally did make that trip into New England,

which I guess must have been about three weeks after

Ethel's brother died, maybe almost a month because

it was toward the end of the campaign, I went on the

entire New England stop. I went to each one of the

stops and was the advance man, getting off the

plane, and taking a look at where the cars were and

what was going on, and I knew who the advance men were

on each stop. In Connecticut,

Tim Hogen, worked in the Senate office, had Connecticut.

In New Hampshire. . . .

GREENE: Was Jim Tolan along on this?

GRAVES: No. Wasn't on that trip.

GREENE: What was your feeling about the Senator's performance and mood at this time in '66?

GRAVES: I thought he enjoyed campaigning at that time. I thought in . . . That would have been <sup>the end of</sup> ~~the end of~~ <sup>^</sup> Let's see, '67; The end of '67. We were campaigning for Gene Nickerson who was running for County Exec. I thought he was kind of tired of campaigning at that time. I thought that he'd found it really kind of tiring. He made some comments to me and some other people that indicated that it was kind of like getting to him a little bit as far as campaigning then. He was campaigning for candidates who obviously were not going to win, who were not particularly good, and he just really was not excited nor happy nor content with what he had to do.

GREENE: I wanted to ask you a couple questions about your contacts with people like Baranello and Nickerson and William F. Luddy. Isn't it Luddy in . . .

GRAVES: Yeah, Westchester County.

GREENE: Westchester. What kind of ongoing contact did you have? Did you have any kind of routine way of staying in touch with them or would it generally be on a

specific matter that you would. . . .

GRAVES: Well, once Luddy and Baranello got out of the shock of the fact that Kennedy had a black guy who was going to be their liaison with him, then they started calling me when they had problems. And now Dall Forsythe did ~~are you going to talk to Dall Forsythe?~~ Are you going to talk to Dall Forsythe?

GREENE: I don't think he's on our list, but of course I know the name.

GRAVES: Dall Forsythe also did political work and had some contacts with them, but I talked to Luddy maybe once a week. Baranello. . . . The reason that Jack English had a ~~much more line of. . . .~~ much more open line <sup>that</sup> of communication to Senator Kennedy was/English had a much more viable organization in Nassau County. Baranello in his own right just wasn't getting something going out there in Suffolk County, ~~Not~~ very imaginative. And the same problem with Luddy. Luddy, ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~kind of. . . .~~ <sup>S</sup> The Senator felt had been dragging his feet up in Westchester County and not really getting it together up there and really making it happen, ~~Just~~ not working at his job, <sup>s</sup> whereas English

really worked at it. English was tough and kind of came from the kind of cloth that the Kennedys did. <sup>91</sup> But to answer your question directly, I think I probably spoke to them once a week. And they always had a chance that they could call directly into Washington and speak to Joe Dolan or the Senator directly.

GREENE: What do you know about the relationship between the Senator and these people, how he felt about them?

GRAVES: Well, there's no comparison between the relationship between Jack English and Bill Luddy and the Senator. Jack English was a friend and a person that the Senator really sought his counsel. The other two guys, they were just guys that the Senator had to kind of live with, <sup>and</sup> I think if he had the option of either dealing with them or dealing with somebody who was much brighter <sup>and</sup> sharper <sup>''''</sup> 1 he considered them like one of the organizational hacks, and it's the same thing as the way he treated and felt about Stanley Steingut. <sup>91</sup> He considered Stanley Steingut not a very reputable fellow, to use his quote in terms of . . . .  
"Reputable fellow" <sup>11</sup> is not exactly my kind of language,

but that's the kind of language that the Senator would have used, and, you know, he just. . . . Those kind of guys really just wore on him. I know it really was a. . . . ~~You know, he. . . .~~ It used to go against his grain to have to sit down and deal with a [Frank G.] Rossetti and the five county leaders, you know. ~~You know and who. . . .~~ And it was a matter who was stealing the most, And the Senator was just above that kind of thing, and it really used to bug him when they had to deal with those guys and treat those guys as really straight guys when they weren't. And make deals with them too.

GREENE: What about [H. Lee] Dennison and Nickerson? How close a relationship? I know he was fairly close with Nickerson, but what about Dennison?

GRAVES: Dennison to quote some of our friends, is just "a good old county boy" who was really had no direct. . . . Dennison liked to believe he was the man of the people. He was naive enough to really believe that the people liked him, and didn't consider himself really a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat. He thought that he could almost

run as an independent and win because the people just loved him so much out in Suffolk County. And so Dennison never <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ really close to the Senator.

<sup>Q1</sup> Nickerson was, but I think that was because of a Jack English, <sup>but</sup> Nickerson also was much brighter, obviously, than Dennison in terms of a grasp of what was going on, and much more sophisticated, <sup>and</sup> Dennison ~~is rather conser.~~ <sup>was</sup> was rather conservative, by necessity, because of where he is, also, I might say <sup>because</sup> Suffolk County; they think electricity is modern out there, or is forward thinking. <sup>And</sup> Nickerson was a guy who, ~~you know,~~ was ambitious, wanted to do other things. Dennison was just kind of a guy who <sup>was</sup> ~~just.~~ just there.

GREENE: Okay, I know you're short on time, so let's. . . . I just would like to get some kind of overall picture from which to plan for the next time. You've mentioned the Mitchell <sup>Field</sup> project . . .

GRAVES: Want this off?

GREENE: No, we can stick it on tape. No, leave it on, then I can just take it right off the tape.

GRAVES: Okay.

GREENE: You mentioned Mitchell Field and, of course, Bedford-Stuyvesant and one or two other projects. Is there anything that you haven't mentioned that we, ~~you know,~~ ~~that we~~ should get on tape that I ought to be preparing for?

GRAVES: I'd like to spend a lot of time talking about the Bedford-Stuyvesant project, and then, in addition to that, I think that these various riots in various communities that went on across the country. I made great effort to try and get the Senator to. . . . Well, in one case, when the Newark riots were going on, I think as a direct result of a call I made to the Senator in Hyannis and his subsequent call that same afternoon to Governor [Richard J.] Hughes, we were able to literally get the National Guard off the street, and it was just a matter that fortunately the Senator knew Governor Hughes and could pick up the phone and call him. [Interruption] . . . Oh, the Bedford-Stuyvesant project, and then I think . . .

GREENE: Well, you were talking about Newark.

GRAVES: Okay, I think that it would be interesting/to say, <sup>to be able</sup> that on the . . . for the record, that Kennedy had some

influence in terms of where some of these riots were going on, or at least had some real feeling about them.

GREENE: Were there a lot of requests from people for him to step in, especially in this area?

GRAVES: Oh, yeah. Yeah. That thing and the Adam Clayton Powell thing. The switchboard<sup>s</sup> just literally lit up. Remember when Adam Clayton Powell was kicked out of Congress?

GREENE: Yeah.

GRAVES: ~~And~~ And those kind of things we could focus on. ~~I mean~~ ~~we could focus on.~~ I would like to focus a while in terms of what I thought I was able to do as a black person in the office, even with him. You know. And I should say to you candidly that he didn't consider me the alpha and omega and everything that had to be answered; He didn't consider anybody that. Just when I thought I had all the answers in some area, I'd find out he had two other people working on the same thing. But that was him; That was the John Kennedy way of doing it, and it was no different with the Senator.

GREENE: How about the lines of communication? Was he fairly

accessible? If you wanted to speak to him, could you generally call him directly, or how did you go through?

GRAVES: Yeah, the thing is you could definitely pick up the phone and call the Senator, and you'd usually find him available. If he was in the Senate office, he would talk to you. The one thing was when you picked up that telephone to call, you'd better have something to say. That was the difference. Just calling up to say, "Gosh, I talked to the Senator today," that was nonsense. But, other than that, you could reach him at home. He was really accessible. I never had the time when I really had something to say to him, that I could not reach him. And Tom Johnston never said to me, "Don't call the Senator and bug him about so and so." He just said, "When you call him, have something to say." But he was always accessible. I can never really say. . . . I mean, even when he was off skiing in California or all the way out West, he was still available.

GREENE: Okay. Very good. Now if the. . . . ~~Just before~~  
you. . . . You want to take your call first?

GRAVES: Yeah. [ Interruption ]

GREENE: Okay. The only thing is, are there any other projects that we . . .

GRAVES: Let me focus on it. Could I do that now that I know what you're going to come back and ask about?

GREENE: Yeah.

GRAVES: ~~And~~ because you're going to take about an hour the next time at least, right?

GREENE: Yeah. Well, we can do it, ~~you know~~, in short spurts if it's easier for you, but . . .

GRAVES: No, well. You know, that two hour thing/<sup>really</sup> is not too handy.

GREENE: It's tough.

GRAVES: Yeah.

GREENE: Okay, so let's start then next time with the Bedford-Stuyvesant.

GRAVES: Talk about the Bedford-Stuyvesant, I just want to, in general, talk about, I think, for posterity now. Now that I, ~~you know~~, I have some confidence in the fact ~~that~~ ~~which~~ I . . . I don't mean that I didn't, but I . . . What we're talking about is going to be part of the record. It'll be part of the record all the way down the

pike, <sup>3</sup>but I think some of the things that went on  
should be said, you know, and without crunching toes  
we'll try and say it.

GREENE: Okay. Very good.