

**Walter Sheridan Oral History Interview—RFK#2, 8/13/1969**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Walter Sheridan  
**Interviewer:** Roberta Greene  
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**Biographical Note**

Sheridan, a Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) campaign coordinator in 1968, and a government investigator, discusses RFK's 1968 presidential primary campaign in California, including outreach efforts to Mexican-American voters with the help of Cesar Chavez, outreach to African-American voters, differences among moderate and liberal voters, and security for RFK, among other issues.

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Walter Sheridan—RFK #2

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Second of Six Oral History Interviews

with

Walter Sheridan

August 13, 1969  
Washington D. C.

By Roberta Greene

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

SHERIDAN: And I think it was the next Monday, but whenever, we went home and then went out, so I guess it was a weekend or a few days. I don't remember what day of the week the Indiana primary was held. So we went out, and these things always start helter-skelter, and they had some people out there, Tony [Anthony B. Akers]?—what was Tony's name?

GREENE: What was his...

SHERIDAN: He was running the campaign when we got there.

GREENE: Roncan, Roncoon....

SHERIDAN: Is this our group? No, this is...

GREENE: Yes, this is L.A.

[-37-]

SHERIDAN: He was there because he was a fundraiser type. The background of the California thing, as I know it, is that, one, Jesse Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh],

who is the Democratic leader out there, came out for John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] very early, came out for Bob [Robert F. Kennedy], wanted Bob to go. So there was an indebtedness there, and there was at the beginning a tendency.... Unruh did not want any of us out there, I mean any of us. He didn't want.... You know, the people who were out there were Tony and Chuck Spalding [Charles Spalding] and one other.

GREENE: You mean Tony Akers

SHERIDAN: Tony Akers. Right, that's it. But their role really was fundraising, and Jesse Unruh really didn't want anybody out there. People like Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and John Reilly [John R. Reilly], who were very close to Unruh, supported Unruh's position. And Kenny O'Donnell had a meeting with Bob in which he said that he got an agreement from Bob that he wouldn't send people out, that they could run it. When I went out.... I ran into Kenny at Duke Zeibert's and told him I was going out. He was upset because we were going out, not because he didn't like us, I think, but he just respected Jesse Unruh's judgment, that, one, he could do it himself; and, two, that our going out there just antagonized him.

Now I happened to think that Kenny was wrong because when we got there, Tony Akers was doing his best at trying to represent the Kennedys. First of all, Jesse Unruh's organization was almost nonexistent, was very shallow. They didn't have precinct chairmen and committeemen and everything else like the normal organization does because for years the thing has been fragmented. And the organization, to the extent it was there, was mostly the old Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] group, who hate Kennedys, always did and always will. What do you call them, the CDC [California Democratic Council]?

[-38-]

GREENE: Yes.

SHERIDAN: And they were all McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy], and so the real motion that was going in the neighborhoods was all McCarthy motion. It was all these very aggressive liberals, mostly women, who were very pro-McCarthy, very anti, hatefully anti-Kennedy. And Unruh had people like Art Seltzer [Arthur Seltzer] and had people scattered around the city in every ward. But there was no ward organization as such, so that you were dealing with really a paper thing. And Tony Akers, who is a very nice guy, had absolutely no feel for either contending with the Unruh people or for organization or for anything. As the thing went along, you just got sorry for Tony Akers because he willingly let go of control because he knew he didn't know how to do it.

We all stayed at the Ambassador, and there were initial meetings. Just like in Indiana, we kind of split things up: Don Dowd and I took Los Angeles, yes, Los Angeles, and then these other guys, again who are mostly Teddy's [Edward M. Kennedy] guys—I think all Teddy's guys. I was the only Bob guy there again—and they just took different areas around Los Angeles and Southern California. We had Southern California. Seigenthaler [John Seigenthaler] was up in the north, he had Northern California, and again we didn't have much time. Again, I decided to concentrate on the strength, which out there was the Mexican-

Americans and the Negroes, the blacks. And with the Mexican-Americans, there was no real problem with Unruh; there were problems but there wasn't a major problem like there was with the blacks. With the blacks, he had a guy—what's his name? He was his guy handling the blacks, he was an assistant to Mayor Yorty [Samuel W. Yorty]...

GREENE: I know, I have his name. I'll get it for you.

[-39-]

SHERIDAN: The militants didn't like him at all, didn't trust him. He wasn't representative of the black community, but he was Unruh's guy out of Yorty's office, and he was going to handle the blacks, and Unruh did not want any interference with it. It was a strictly mail campaign, which they said had worked before and would work again, where they'd send out letters to somebody in every black community. They'd get this guy to agree to be the black chairman, and then they'd send him the literature and things, and then it was a regular campaign procedure, but all by mail; there was no personal contact. And I was scared to death of it because you didn't know if it was going to work. [Interruption]

GREENE: That's not who you meant?

SHERIDAN: No. He's one of our people, a great guy, incidentally. Well, we'll think of it. So there was reluctance because of the Unruh feeling, the fact that he didn't want us out there at all, and there was a reluctance, at least in the beginning, to tamper with the black thing. So I decided to spend practically all my time in the beginning on Mexican-Americans because it was a sizeable vote if you could get it out, and getting it out was tough. And Henry Santiestevan came out—he's from the UAW, great guy—and a girl came out later, I can't think of her name, from his office. The first thing we did... Everything we did they resented, but with a smile. It depended who; some people smiled less than others. Art Seltzer didn't smile much. But gradually they accepted the fact not only that we were there, but that they had to live with us. And gradually, as the thing went on, they accepted the fact that we knew what we were doing, and we could help. I suppose there's a tendency in any campaign with the Kennedys to mistrust other peoples' motives. You know, your motives are very simple—to elect Bob Kennedy. And you know that their motives are mixed.

[-40-]

For example, when you get into the Mexican-American areas. With the Mexican-American population in East Los Angeles, there was no representation for that population. The Mexican-Americans in 1968 were approaching the point that the black militants had been maybe a couple of years earlier. You had the young who were really militant young Mexican-Americans, and it was just as tough or maybe even tougher to deal with them in the final analysis than the black militants in Los Angeles. However, they didn't really have a



following, so it didn't really matter that they never really came out for Kennedy, which they didn't, but they didn't come out for McCarthy either.

The real force was Cesar Chavez, and he's the one that tipped them. But the Unruh organization, just by its history and everything else, was, I'm sure, committed, for instance, to the white candidate who is running against Richard Calderon. He was running for the state senate. This was a young, good-looking, vocal, articulate—just a good candidate for the Mexican-Americans, who, in the normal course of events, Robert Kennedy would certainly be backing. But because of Jesse Unruh—it was his show sort of, and you knew behind the scenes he was backing his opponent—everything you did for this guy had to be behind the scenes. And we did.

You mentioned Gerry Cummings. Gerry Cummings was a good friend of Steve Smith's [Stephen E. Smith], and he was out there. And he agreed with me that we should back this guy, but we had to do it covertly. Jesse Unruh never knew what we did. And he was really at that point—for all practical purposes, he and his people were really working for McCarthy. And McCarthy had backed him, and they had co-headquarters and everything. But once we had an understanding with him and he trusted us, then as the thing moved into the final days, he was working for Robert Kennedy, which he wanted to do, which all his people wanted to do. But he couldn't understand, and yet he did understand, why Senator Kennedy couldn't come out front for him. And it was this way in several of the Mexican-American areas where there were white incumbents who obviously had the backing of the Unruh organization, except they didn't come out front for them either. But when he had workshops, you just always had the feeling that they were playing it down, which....

[-41-]

I really am convinced that Jesse Unruh wanted Bob Kennedy to win. I guess what he thought was that he could win and get enough of the Mexican-Americans without necessarily defeating these candidates. I had absolutely no interest in those candidates; I thought the Mexican-Americans deserved representation. I thought these people should win, and so my whole effort, unbeknown to the Unruh people, was very pro-Mexican-American, and they responded to that. We set up an office.... When we first went into the headquarters, which were a huge, big thing on Wilshire Boulevard, first we set up a little office, and then it obviously was too small. And then we had to move into another side of the building. But we kept that small office, and it became known as "Viva East." [Laughter] And Henry Santiestevan took.... This is where they would come, and they had a place in that headquarters. And it was great because they'd never had a place and a headquarters before. Bert Corona, who was the head of MAPA [Mexican-American Political Association].... Bert was very pro-Kennedy, but really a little bit lazy and talked a good game, but never quite got done what he was going to do. So I was always pushing him. And Henry was invaluable because he was one of them, and he was also one of the Kennedy organization, and now they had their place and headquarters. And the whole thing caught on. Then Cesar Chavez intended to move some two hundred farm workers throughout the state, and he was going to put some in the San Francisco area and some in the Oakland area. And I just decided that—it was piggish—but I decided that we'd put them all in East Los Angeles because this was really where all the strength of the Mexican-Americans was, and I thought it could make

a big difference. He agreed to it. So about three days before the election, he brought his two hundred farm workers up, and they lived in a church up in the Mexican-American area, and the whole thing was just beautiful. Did I tell you about this?

GREENE: No, not at all.

[-42-]

SHERIDAN: Didn't I? When he first got there, first I went up to one of his small meetings. It had nothing to do with the campaign; they were planning the grape boycott and how they were going to boycott the supermarkets all over the country after the election. That was before the farm workers came up, when he agreed to bring them up. He's a deceptively....

He doesn't look like a leader at all. He's a little fellow, his hands are—you know, I have small hands; his hands are half the size of mine. He has a weak handshake, he slouches. He looks like anything but a leader. And yet the discipline he has over those people is unbelievable. When they came up, I went up to one of their—this was about three days before the election—I just went up to one of his sessions, and he conducted it just like a schoolroom. He had a blackboard, and they were all sitting like students at desks with the arm rests, pads, taking notes. And Cesar was up there, and he had these charts and everything. And he was saying, "Forget about California, forget about Los Angeles, forget about East Los Angeles. You just remember your block." He had them all assigned to blocks in East Los Angeles, and their whole function.... When he finished his presentation there was a big cheer, a staccato clapping thing. Then he put it to a vote, "Does everybody agree with this?" They voted and everybody agreed. I later learned that they put everything to a vote.

So his whole thing was that they would get, literally drag every Mexican-American in East Los Angeles to the polls, and they did. We had precincts where we had a hundred percent vote for Robert Kennedy, which is unheard of, absolutely unheard of. The turnout usually is something like 50, 60 percent. And it was one of the major things, I think, in winning that primary.

[-43-]

Just to stick with Cesar for a minute, all he ever asked in return was that he and his people be invited to the victory celebration, which was fine. The day of the election I was up in East Los Angeles, and he was there. I told him that Steve Smith wanted him to be sure that he and all his people came to the reception. Well, it turns out the night before the election they had a rally, just like a football rally, and they had a marimba band, which we paid for, something like five hundred dollars.

So that day of the election when I saw him he said, "We can come?" And I said, "Yes, Steve Smith really wants you to come." He says, "And we'll bring the band. OK?" And I said, "Oh, I have to check with Steve." So I went back, checked with Steve, and he said—well, first of all, the format of the thing really didn't lend itself to a marimba band, and it would be another five hundred bucks. So he said, "Have him come, but tell him to forget the band." So I go back up to East Los Angeles and see Cesar, and I said, "You know, he

really wants you all to come, but could you forget the band because it just wouldn't fit in with the way things are arranged?" And Cesar said, "Oh, that's too bad. But it's all right, we just won't come." [Laughter] And I said, "We want you to come, but you know there's just nothing, it's just it wouldn't..." He said, "I know, but we put it to a vote, [Laughter] and they voted they wanted the band tonight, too. It's all right," he said, "It's all right, but if we can't bring the band, we just won't come. Don't feel bad." So I said, "Well, bring your goddamn band." [Laughter]

So that night, the night of the election, I waited out there in the side for them to come. Parking was tough, and I didn't know how in the world they were getting there, but pretty soon they started trickling up to the front door line. And pretty soon there they were, two hundred of them, with the marimba band and with Cesar. The band didn't speak English, not one word of English, and so Cesar told them to follow me. Again, this was the same discipline. I don't care who said what to them, the rest of the evening they followed me. So we marched right through the lobby of the Ambassador Hotel.

[-44-]

And there were two receptions: There was one upstairs which I suppose you'd call the VIP reception; there was one downstairs. I wanted to take them into the one upstairs, and I knew it was going to be almost impossible because I'd been up there and it was just jammed. So I decided to go to the downstairs one first and then go upstairs. We marched through the lobby and went into the downstairs ballroom, and they had a bunch of Kennedy girls up on the stage, and they had some kind of a band up there, and the place was jammed too, but they followed me. And we just went smack into the middle of that crowd, and then once I got there, I thought, "We're here, let's at least do our thing here." So we finally—it was really a struggle—got the marimba band up on the stage, and they took over, and it was just fantastic.

Then I decided I'd better go upstairs and check on things, and I left them, and when I left them, the marimba band had the stage and the Mexican-Americans had the hall, and it was just great. So I went up to the fifth floor where Bob was. I never saw him because he was in his room and across the hall there was a cocktail party going on. We had the television on, and CBS was saying we're winning and NBC was saying we're losing, and we all knew we were winning. Budd Schulberg and his wife [Geraldine Brooks] were there, and he was furious at NBC because they.... It turned out their computer was broken, but he couldn't understand. His brother works for NBC, and he was furious.

I had a drink there, and then Dave Hackett [David L. Hackett] came along and said, "Where's Cesar?" I said, "He's downstairs," and he said, "Well, let's go get him." It turned out that Bob wanted him to appear on the platform with him. So Dave and I went back down, went down to the lower lobby, and there they all were just as I left them, but no Cesar. But Delores Huerta, who is kind of his right-hand girl and a great person, was there. And I asked her, "Where is he?" And she says, "I guess he went home." And it turns out that's just what he did, he went home. His people were there, everybody was happy, Kennedy had won, so he went home. He's an amazing little fellow. So we couldn't find him.

[-45-]

So by the time we were back up, Bob had gone into the ballroom. Dick Coleman, who had worked with me at the Department of Justice and was an attorney out there now, had come over. He wanted us to come out to his house for dinner and like a dope I said I would. I should have known better. But once he was there, and he waited all through this, and then he and a couple of the girls went across the street to have dinner, and I told him I'd join them. So once Bob was in the thing, everything was fine, and just like Cesar I went home. I went over to join them for dinner, and of course I wasn't there five minutes when the maître d' said, "What's this world coming to?" I just happened to be passing, and I said, "What's the matter?" and he said, "Somebody just shot the Senator." That's a long story with.... Excuse me, I got to just get....

GREENE: Yes, go ahead. [Interruption] One of the things I wanted to ask you about the Mexican-American setup is how did you deal with them surreptitiously without Unruh's knowledge?

SHERIDAN: We just had secret meetings. We went up and met with Calderon at a Mexican bar, at his headquarters, at his house. At his headquarters he wouldn't let on who we were because he didn't want his workers, who were pro-McCarthy, to know that he was dealing with us because they thought that he was pro-McCarthy. So it was surreptitious; it was underhanded and everything, but it worked. Once the professional people....

[-46-]

And there was Doctor Z. Nada. He was an elected official, and I can't think what he was, but he was the most prominent elected Mexican-American official, and everybody said you've got to get him on our side. And we finally had a meeting with him. Oh, he threw a party for Calderon, a fund-raising party, and we all went, which was kind of gutsy. You know, this was getting near the end, and we didn't really care what Unruh thought at that point about what we were doing as much as people would have wanted us to. But we went to the fundraising party, and we had a meeting with him at that party. Then I suggested he meet with the Senator, and the last time the Senator was in Los Angeles he had a private meeting with Doctor—I think it's Nada, N-A-D-A, I think, and won him over in a half-hour. There was a fellow out there helping me just on the professionals, and I can't for the life of me think of his name, but he just worked with them, wooing them. And there was one professor at UCLA who was a Mexican-American, and I can't think of his name. The names are rather tough. But they all did join in at the end, and I think it was helpful.

GREENE: What do you think it was with Unruh? Why did he want so much to keep the Easterners out?

SHERIDAN: Well, I think it was things like the Mexican-American situation, where he was certainly for Bob Kennedy a hundred percent, but he was also for Jesse Unruh. He was looking towards his political future in the State, and he had certain allies and commitments and everything else that he, I think, knew were at

cross-purposes with the kind of thing Robert Kennedy would stand for, like Mexican-American candidates. And his people, they just didn't think they needed us. They thought they knew how to run a campaign, they thought they could win for Bob Kennedy, and they would get the credit. Art Seltzer and Sylvia—what's her name?

[-47-]

GREENE: Chase.

SHERIDAN: ...Sylvia Chase and Steve West [Steven E. Smith], they were the three key ones—and Adele Leopold. They were all capable people, but they had never been really in a presidential race before; they'd never been in a Kennedy race before. If we hadn't gone out, I think we would have lost. They would have done quite well, but we would have lost, and that's what they didn't understand is that you can't take that gamble. So they did the things they would routinely do, and they knew what they were doing, but there was no push, no drive, no insurance. Like in the Mexican-American area, they wouldn't have gotten them out. And the blacks, their thing either would have worked or it wouldn't. It turns out it worked, but again, there I think our push in that area helped. And there were actual suspicious things that happened like the "Get Out the Vote" people and the canvassers. They had a computerized system where you got the lists of all the registered Democrats in the different areas. Well, when the lists came out at the last moment, the lists in the Mexican-American areas where the white candidate, who was a friend of theirs, was running were missing, and I just don't think that was accidental. So I think that they just thought they could win it and not make any enemies in their own state, and they were wrong.

GREENE: What was the opinion of Unruh personally?

SHERIDAN: I think he was at the heart of this feeling. I think he more than any of them. But he instilled in the others this feeling that he didn't need us. I think he resented our being there. I don't think he does now. I never saw him until the last week of the campaign. He stopped into headquarters, and we were introduced, and he said, "Oh, yes, I've heard of you." He didn't say it in the nicest way, and I think he heard what I was doing, and he knew he couldn't do anything about it, but he didn't like it. But I think afterwards he did.

[-48-]

Just an aside, the night of the funeral in New York we somehow ended up at Toot Shor's [Bernard Shor], and Jesse Unruh was there and Budd Schulberg was there—we were with Budd Schulberg—and Jesse Unruh and Budd Schulberg hated each other's guts for a similar reason. Budd Schulberg was a liberal and anti-organization man. They were both very pro-Kennedy, but within the state, they clashed. So I decided that man is going to get them together, and it was a terrible mistake; they ended up almost killing each other. A few drinks did that.

GREENE: Do you know anything about how the Senator felt about Unruh personally?

SHERIDAN: I think he felt, first, terribly loyal to him and obligated, as he always did, like with Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] in New York or anybody who came out for John Kennedy when it was tough to come out. He just never forgot it and would never desert him no matter what the liberals thought or anybody else thought. And it was a very similar situation, the Unruh and Buckley: You know, he lost a lot of liberal support in New York because of Buckley, and he lost a lot of liberal support in California because of Unruh. But this was his thing: He was loyal to people who had been loyal to his brother and to him, and Jesse was the one that really pushed him to run. So I think he felt that very strongly, and I think he understood what Kenny O'Donnell's position was and may have agreed to it, but he also knew he had to win, and he knew.... The whole Kennedy thing is they got to be sure, and they got to have their own people doing it, and he just couldn't not do that.

[-49-]

GREENE: Did this dissension ever break into open conflict, or was it something that you could keep below the surface?

SHERIDAN: For the most part it was kept below the surface. And it got better as the cam-.... When the campaign was over, we were all pretty good friends, we and the Unruh people. But it was a gradually bettering thing because as it went on and as it got closer, then they started getting a little scared, and I think at the end they were damn glad we were there. It reached a point where they wanted our advice, and they wanted to know what our people were doing and finding out. There were some flare-ups, minor ones, with Art Seltzer, and we had some of the kids in at the end. And some of them were and are immature. They do think they know it all, and they do make mistakes. That really was the only dissensions we had is when the kids out in the field would do something which they shouldn't have done, and it was usually throwing their weight around. Then we'd get complaints from Seltzer.

GREENE: You mean student volunteers?

SHERIDAN: I guess they're students, but it was the Dave Borden [David M. Borden] corps. Some were students and some were young people who were not students, all very enthusiastic and very willing, but all very much, too much, know-it-all, and have a lot to learn and had a lot to learn, and didn't think anybody was doing anything right except them, then they didn't think anybody was doing enough.

GREENE: Was there anybody who was helpful in mediating these problems, someone like Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz] or Nolan [John E. Nolan] or Akers?

[-50-]

SHERIDAN: Gradually, Akers took on kind of that role, where he was really a little bit out of the day-to-day thing and was more in the being nice to Unruh people and mediating type thing. I think Mankiewicz did that to some extent too because he was from California; he knew all these people. Joan Braden [Joan R. Braden], I think, was helpful in that area of smoothing things over.

GREENE: What was Mankiewicz's role, generally speaking, in California?

SHERIDAN: He was one of the press guys, but like everything else, everything was a joint thing, and they had their own press guy. Who was their press guy?

GREENE: You've got his name right there. I can't recall it.

SHERIDAN: I can't either.

GREENE: I know I saw that just before I left.

SHERIDAN: Dick Kline, yes, Dick Kline. So he and I would deal with Mankiewicz on press matters, naturally, because I knew him. And I don't know how they all got along together. And remember there was a black guy working with them who didn't seem to be doing much for them, but tried to get into the militant bag with us.

GREENE: How did the Ted Kennedy people fit into this? Were you and they kind of working together...

SHERIDAN: Oh yes.

GREENE: ...sort of against Unruh?

[-51-]

SHERIDAN: Well, not against him, but I think we all agreed that he just didn't have the organization, he didn't have the wherewithal to do what had to be done. And so we felt we were augmenting what we had and, I think, tried very sincerely to get along with them all the best we could and, I think, did, for the most part.

GREENE: Did you find the same kind of suspiciousness from the...

SHERIDAN: With Teddy's people, with me?

GREENE: ...Ted Kennedy people towards you?

SHERIDAN: [REDACTED]

GREENE: [REDACTED]

SHERIDAN: [REDACTED]

GREENE: [REDACTED]

SHERIDAN: [REDACTED]

[-52-]

SHERIDAN: [REDACTED]

GREENE: Were there other people like this who were in over their heads, or trying to...

SHERIDAN: I thought all the Boston guys were really in over their heads, only because they'd never done it before. You know, they'd done Boston politics.... They're good at getting the vote out because this is what you do in any election in Boston, but in the broader overall thing, they're over their heads and still are, and Teddy's people still are. And this is one of the problems, they don't know what it's all about.

GREENE: Were you aware also of a lot of people kind of pushing themselves into...

[-53-]

SHERIDAN: [REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

GREENE: [REDACTED]

SHERIDAN: [REDACTED]

GREENE: This kind of competitiveness that a lot of people have talked about, competitiveness for the Senator's attention and recognition....

SHERIDAN: I suppose it's always there, but I must say I never saw it really manifested in either Indiana or California except for Don Dowd. Don Dowd was a real pusher and didn't have it. Teddy's girls were great, like Katie Murphy, a fabulous girl. And she became Tony Perkins' secretary and just kept him happy, knowing that he was out of it, that he was crushed and everything else. And she just kept him smiling all the time because she smiles all the time.

GREENE: What was the difference in working in the California black areas and in the Indiana black areas?

[-54-]

SHERIDAN: In Indiana you had complete control, and you could go in and do what you wanted to, and in Los Angeles you had practically no control, and everything you did was kind of behind their back again. Jack Conway [Jack T. Conway] came out. I was trying to play the game a little bit, and do a little bit of both, and Jack Conway met with Tom Bradley [Thomas Bradley]. No. Who was...

GREENE: The labor guy?

SHERIDAN: No, one of the black officials out there. There was Bradley, Diamond, and a woman. But anyway, they decided—and this was the UAW, and the UAW is terribly helpful; Jack Conway was kind of Kenny O'Donnell's man out there—and they decided they were going to work through this one guy and Unruh's guy and that it would all work. I met with Jack and I kind of agreed to that, but as the thing went on, I just knew more and more that we just weren't sure whether it was going to work. And so then we started reaching out into the black community, making contact with these different groups, and getting things going in the neighborhoods, which were also a little bit on the sly, but at least it was something moving. Jim Brown [James

Nathaniel], the football player, his outfit was out there, Manpower something or other. His press guy was very helpful. Finally, there was a meeting....

[-55-]

Well, there was a meeting early, which I had nothing to do with, between Bob and the militants in which he was in a hurry and had to leave, and they come out in the papers saying he didn't give them enough time. So two nights before he was killed, when they had this reception for Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] and him, he met with them again and locked the door and stayed in there. Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] was very nervous because there was five thousand people waiting downstairs, and he was an hour late. And Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] was very nervous, and they wanted me to go in and get him. I just knew that it was a "feel" thing, where you had to leave him there just so long. Finally, I said I would go in in something like ten minutes. So I did. He'd been in there then something like forty minutes when I knocked on the door. He answered the door, and I went in, and they were all laughing. He had just turned the corner, and you could hear when you'd go up to the door before that, all this shouting and hollering at him, as they do, but he was very good at it. So it was just the right time. We came out, and we went down in the elevator. And it's the last time I ever talked to him. I said, "They're tough, aren't they?" He said, "Oh, they're not so bad," and then he went into the reception. Where were we?

GREENE: Well, about the difference between Indiana and California, were you dealing with the same kinds of people, the militants?

SHERIDAN: Basically, yes. You had the militants, who were more militant, twice as militant, in Los Angeles. The militants in Indiana are pretty mild militants, but this is Ron Karenga [Maulana Karenga], and the real tough. Then you had the black pols like Diamond, who were on the make, and I mean literally. And you had the black pols like Bradley, who were not on the make, but were legitimate leaders and legitimately for you. You had the feeling that you were going to do well, but it was just that uncertainty, you didn't know whether Unruh's system was going to work.

[-56-]

And we took a tour of Watts, which, as far as I'm concerned, was an absolute bust. You know, the Mexican-American motorcade was just fantastic, but the tour through Watts was a bust, you know, they just weren't out. I can blame Jerry Bruno because.... But you can't blame him because it was a timing thing; it was the wrong time of the day and the wrong week—I mean the wrong time in the wrong day of the week. I just had a feeling it wasn't going to work. I didn't agree with his route, we argued about it, but he was advancing it so we compromised. He later admitted that the route was bad. But it just wasn't good, and so after that I was a little apprehensive. Then it turns out they turned out like crazy.

GREENE: Were there other occasions where you differed with Bruno or whoever the advance people were?

SHERIDAN: Oh, yes, almost all the time. [Laughter]

GREENE: Was there a general reason for this, or did it depend on the situation?

SHERIDAN: First of all, you're dealing with the judgment of different people, first Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] and then Jerry and myself. And generally, we might disagree, but we could kick it around and work it out so that we ended up in pretty good agreement. I think I felt that being involved and on the scene in a smaller area—and they had to deal with the whole state—that I had a better sense of some things than they did. And yet time and time again I had to admit that in some things where I thought we should do this and they thought we should do that, that I was too close to the situation and that they were really right. So I think overall it worked out pretty good.

[-57-]

I think Fred Dutton had a certain veto power on where he went, and I didn't agree with some of the things he was doing. I thought Fred was overly cautious. I think he's an overly cautious person. He'd run Stevenson's campaign in California. I think he has certain inbuilt, I wouldn't call them prejudices, but maybe fears, and they're overreacting type fears. I think he was afraid in California of labor, and I thought he should have played more to labor than he did. They never visited a major plant in Los Angeles, and I thought they should have.

And yet the UAW is our real strength out there, and they're the ones that really wanted us to do it. And we didn't do it, but they still went all out. But there, again, the UAW wouldn't have gone all out if we hadn't been there because they made a commitment. Like for election day, they were going to put out twenty cars and twenty drivers in the black community, and when election day came, or it was two days before, all of a sudden for some reason it wasn't going to happen. I really had to go all out to get them to recommit that, and they did.

GREENE: Who were you dealing with on this? Was it Schrade [Paul Schrade]?

SHERIDAN: What's his name? The guy who was shot.

GREENE: Schrade.

SHERIDAN: Huh?

GREENE: Schrade.

SHERIDAN: Yes, Paul Schrade. That's where I had to go to get this. But on the working day level, I was dealing with Steve Brody. I ran into him here in

Washington or New York recently. They had two UAW guys assigned. One of them had a funny name, he was a Mexican-American, I think, but he was an Unruh guy. But this guy was all for us and was great, and God, I can't think of his name.

[-58-]

GREENE: That's another one we could just stick in later when we think of it. How did the labor groups channel their support? What kinds of things were they working on?

SHERIDAN: Well, labor generally was against us officially; they were all for Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]. So we had this UAW guy, and McNeff was out there, but he was in and out. There were about three people, a man and his wife—I can't think of their name—who were just working on labor, and what they did was just keep making contacts below the top level across the board. It reached a point where they had a damn good ad worked up, and there again, for some reason, the ad was never used. And I don't know if Dutton or who vetoed it. But the UAW is the core, and everything was channeled in through these three or four people. But the UAW did put men out and cars and money. And that's another thing, Cesar Chavez had twenty sound cars manned with his people speaking in Spanish on election day, which made a big difference.

GREENE: I know there was some question of seeking financial support from Schrade for the Mexican community because, as far as I understand it, that was their problem.

SHERIDAN: Originally, they were going to put twenty cars in the Mexican community and twenty in the black community. We got the twenty for the Mexican community through Bert Corona, and Cesar's people were going to man them, so we didn't need that. But we did still need the other. Unruh's people had committed something like ten cars, I think, for the whole black community, which I just knew wasn't enough. So I knew we needed those twenty more, and they did come up with them the last minute, the UAW did. And who drove them? UAW members, and I think pretty effectively. We just assigned them, each one, to a certain area, and they just kept covering that area. But even there, at the last minute you had some conflict because some of them went and worked out of Unruh's candidate's headquarters. We didn't have the real control we wanted to have on election day because some of them were working out

[-59-]

of their headquarters, and we couldn't really control them, but the other ones we could.

GREENE: Did the system that they have in California of posting an up to the minute list of people who are registered and voted or not voted, was that very helpful?

SHERIDAN: Oh, yes.

GREENE: How did you work that?

SHERIDAN: It's very helpful theoretically, and it's only helpful actually to the extent that you've got people to go out and use it, and we didn't have the people. No matter how many people we put in California, there was no way you could substitute for the volunteers and the ward workers that any organization has that he didn't have. So you had to rely completely on volunteers, and when you got right down to it, they just weren't there.

GREENE: Why do you think that was?

SHERIDAN: Because the whole campaign was geared.... The state's so big you're dealing with a Democratic organization that has no organization. And so they made the overall decision that there was going to be primarily a television and public appearance campaign, and so most of the effort went into that. Everything was kind of splashed. They had this one day where they had workshops all over California, and then they had parties that night and the rallies and everything. It was a Hollywood approach to everything, and that technique with those conditions just doesn't work that well. You'd get people to come out to the workshops. It was disappointing in every case, but some cases better than others. But you just can't, overnight, do that without any basic organization to work with.

[-60-]

GREENE: Where were you weakest in volunteers? What kind of groups couldn't you get?

SHERIDAN: The toughest group to get, of course, was the liberals because that was McCarthy's stronghold. We put a lot of effort out there, but it was tough. I'd say generally speaking in the white communities it was hard to get workers; in the Mexican-American communities we did very well; in the black communities it turns out we did well, but we didn't know how or what we were doing. It was just generally tough to get people to work, even students. You had guys like Ed Guthman's [Edwin O. Guthman] son, Lester [Lester Guthman], and Gary Townsend and a handful of just absolutely great workers. They'd be sure they could get two hundred students from UCLA and two hundred from the.... Well, it just never quite worked because, first of all, you ran into exams and summer vacation was coming up. It was frustrating that you just couldn't turn them on out there for some reason. They came out and voted, but to actually get them working, even like you did in Indiana, they just didn't do it.

GREENE: Was McCarthy a big factor?

SHERIDAN: I think he was a big factor in that he already had a lot of them, and his

worked. Maybe all of them that we would have had that would have worked, he already had.

GREENE: Were the CDC...

[-61-]

SHERIDAN: Dolores Huerta, it just occurred.... Cesar was going to—we were going to have him go up into these liberal communities and speak literally to shame people into voting for Robert Kennedy. You know, “What are you liberals doing for Eugene McCarthy?” And he was good at that kind of thing. After Oregon, Cesar decided he wasn’t going to do any of that; he was just going to get his workers up there and work East Los Angeles, move around the state in the other Mexican-American communities and get his people out. So Dolores had to substitute for all these commitments being made for him, and she went out to UCLA—it’s just a great line. There were always the kids heckling and everything. Finally—she gives great talks—she got through, and this one kid stood up, and he said, “Where was Robert Kennedy in New Hampshire? When we were in New Hampshire, where was Robert Kennedy?” And she says, “In Delano.” [Laughter]

GREENE: That’s a good answer.

SHERIDAN: She’s great.

GREENE: Were the CDC clubs as a big factor in ‘68 as they were in ‘60, do you think?

SHERIDAN: Do you mean against us?

GREENE: Yes, against you.

SHERIDAN: I don’t know, I don’t know how you gauge it. I just don’t think the liberals are effective—in ‘60 they weren’t—because they tend to work in a self-contained thing. They work among themselves and they argue among themselves, and they don’t really move out. But I think they worked hard for McCarthy. I talked to a woman at this party for Calderon who—just the hate for Robert Kennedy was just unbelievable, and I finally walked away from her. And there were so many of that type. They weren’t so much for McCarthy as against Kennedy, and against Kennedy because John Kennedy beat Adlai Stevenson. And boy, that’s what it comes down to.

[-62-]

GREENE: It really does?

SHERIDAN: Oh, absolutely. They never forgave him and particularly in California. They couldn’t wait to get at him, and if it hadn’t been McCarthy, they’d

have gone for.... Well, they couldn't go for Humphrey, but they'd have found a way not to go for Robert Kennedy. Like in the '60 campaign, I worked in Pennsylvania, and with that crowd you spent two weeks, first of all, getting them to even acknowledge that John Kennedy was not a bad fellow, then you had to spend three weeks getting them to move their headquarters from off the third floor of the hotel down into a storefront. Then you had to convince them that they had other things to do than convince each other that John Kennedy wasn't a bad fellow. Their political effectiveness is practically nothing when they're for you, but when they're against you, I think they're more of a force; I think they hurt. They almost beat us.

GREENE: Could you move them at all with the liberal celebrities you brought out?

SHERIDAN: Yes, I think that helped. I think people like Budd Schulberg and the others that came out from the East, I think they helped. But boy, when you're dealing with that time in that big a state and that many people, how much do you really effect? Like McCarthy was smarter, I thought, in some ways than we were. He had a lot of ads on radio, on car radios. Every time you turned on the radio it was McCarthy; you never heard a Kennedy ad. There were some things the McCarthy people did like that that I thought were very clever and very imaginative and very, very helpful.

[-63-]

GREENE: Was there any discussions when you and probably others started to realize this about doing something about it on the Kennedy side?

SHERIDAN: It was too late, really, because everything was committed. It's awfully tough once you reach a certain point, when all the money is spent and all the commitments are made, and you realize that, well, maybe we should be doing this. Even when the people who decided to do something else agree with you, it's awfully hard to undo it, and it's awfully hard to come up with the money to undo it—money is a big factor.

GREENE: Was there actually a shortage in California of....

SHERIDAN: Of money?

GREENE: ...funds to do the things?

SHERIDAN: No, but the approach to California, with the television and everything—I don't know how much it cost, but I'm sure it cost so much that anything else you wanted to do.... It was tougher to get the money, not because they didn't have a lot and didn't spend a lot, but because they had already spent so much on this other stuff.

GREENE: Would you have recommended yourself spending more time and effort on

the media and maybe less on the street campaigning, as McCarthy ended up doing?

[-64-]

SHERIDAN: In retrospect, I would have spent more time on radio advertising and TV—but we did a lot of TV, and I wouldn't cut down on this. There's no substitute—or there was no substitute, for Robert Kennedy's personal appearance. Consistently—in Indiana, for instance, he won, I think, in just about every county he went in. He always won where he went, and if he didn't go, it didn't mean.... It was always a big plus, and I wouldn't cut it down. I'd have expanded it, but you couldn't have the guy survive because it was a killing, killing pace.

GREENE: Was there a noticeable difference, as there had been in Indiana, between his early appearances in L.A. and his later appearances, as far as crowd reaction and interest?

SHERIDAN: Yes, particularly after Oregon. Oregon was the best thing that ever happened to him, it turns out, because all of a sudden for the first time in his life he was an underdog. And he came to Los Angeles that next day, and the turnout was just fantastic, and you had the feeling it was going to be because they didn't want him to quit, one, and all of a sudden he was the underdog. And all the ruthless thing went out the window and from that point on, everything was uphill. Oregon was really the clincher as far as California went.

GREENE: Did Senator Kennedy feel this, too? Did you talk to him about it?

[-65-]

SHERIDAN: I don't know. He asked me if we could win by fifty percent, and I said no. He wanted to, but I knew we would win, and I thought it would be in the high forties. It was forty-six, wasn't it?

GREENE: Was there any measurable impact from the debate that you could see?

SHERIDAN: I think so, I think it was a plus. I think mainly because I think people thought that McCarthy was a pretty cool cookie and would handle himself very well and that Kennedy would be nervous and his ruthlessness would show through and all that. I think the fact that it wasn't that way at all—if anybody had command of themselves, it was him, except on the last question. I think that kind of...

GREENE: Was that the experience...

SHERIDAN: ...I think he gained a lot in presidential caliber stature in that thing. But he loused up the last question because he didn't expect it.



GREENE: I can't remember what that was, was it...

SHERIDAN: It was a summation. He thought the program was all over, and all of a sudden they asked him to sum up. And they just caught him, and he blah, blah, blahed. And McCarthy was ready and did a beautiful windup, which made a lot of people think McCarthy'd won the debate. But I didn't. I thought Kennedy did because he did awfully well through it, even though he loused up the end.

GREENE: I think I ought to turn the tape before we go on.

[-66-]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

GREENE: I wanted to ask you a couple more things about the black community. In Indiana you gave me the impression that at least some of the black leaders were interested in what they could get out of it for themselves, which I suppose is very natural. Did you find this among the more radical leaders in Los Angeles, too?

SHERIDAN: Absolutely.

GREENE: Any difference in the way you handled them?

SHERIDAN: No. You just learned a little by the Indiana thing. But it was the same mixture of guys who were in it strictly for themselves, guys who were in it for the black people and guys who were in it for Kennedy and then the mixtures of that. And there were self-seekers among the black elected people, too.

GREENE: Could you be specific?

SHERIDAN: No. [Laughter]

GREENE: Now this is for five hundred years from now. [Laughter]

SHERIDAN: There are guys who want money. I just personally won't get involved in that.

GREENE: Were there others who would on the Kennedy side?

[-67-]

SHERIDAN: I refuse to answer that question on the grounds that it might tend to incriminate somebody.

GREENE: You mentioned last time that there were people that the Kennedy supporters were dealing with that you would personally not care to have any contact with. Was it the same in Los Angeles?

SHERIDAN: To a lesser degree because I didn't have as much contact in Los Angeles because of the nature of the animal out there. But there were. There were people I would not have dealt with, who I suppose had to be dealt with and were dealt with. I don't know, I think I was right because I always felt that Robert Kennedy represented a revolution in American politics, and I think if he represents that then you can't do some things. I think he felt that way, and yet he probably wasn't any more sure than I am, so he wouldn't want to have known and I wouldn't want to know.

GREENE: What kinds of things were these?

SHERIDAN: Mainly money-seekers. In any campaign there's money-seekers, and when the Kennedys are in it, there's more people seeking more money because they think the Kennedys have more.

GREENE: How much did you see of Earl Graves [Earl G. Graves] in L.A.?

SHERIDAN: He came storming in towards the end...

GREENE: After you had been there awhile?

[-68-]

SHERIDAN: Oh, the last few days. I think he'd been out once before that, and something happened that time he was out that was not good. I don't remember what it was, but he came in at the end, and he brought with him a guy from Boston named—he's an attorney up there who I've had dealings with since. Not Frank Holgate [Franklin W. Holgate]. His name is something like Carter Barron—Baron Martin [Baron H. Martin], and a couple of other cats. The last couple of days they were helpful because we had in a hurry set up channels of communication and activities, and in the last couple of days you'd just need bodies to follow up on things. So you could say to Earl, "This is what we got going, would you see that it goes?" And he did, and I think it worked pretty good. He was helpful in Los Angeles in that regard, but I wouldn't want to have him there dealing as Robert Kennedy's representative with the black people; that's when he louses things up.

GREENE: How did he get on with the blacks in the short time he was there, any better than in Indiana?

SHERIDAN: Well, he was in a hotel room on the telephone, so there was no problem.

GREENE: Could you see any evidence of either loss of support or just general annoyance with the Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] wiretap in the black community?

SHERIDAN: That's a good question. The Drew Pearson article appeared, I think, in the last week just before the Oregon election, and we heard that they were going to circulate it in Watts and in the black community.

[-69-]

GREENE: They?

SHERIDAN: They is McCarthy...

GREENE: Oh.

SHERIDAN: Actually, we did a pretty good job on this. We found out that they did have it in all their headquarters in the black community, and so we sent our people into their headquarters to offer to distribute it. [Laughter] And we just dumped reams of that stuff in the trashcans. I think we neutralized an awful lot of it by doing that. It was dirty pool, but what they were doing was much dirtier. Now there were people who wanted to take it down and dump it in Orange County, [Laughter] and I was kind of directed to do that, and I didn't do it because I didn't think we should.

GREENE: Did you discuss the charges at all with Senator Kennedy?

SHERIDAN: Briefly. I discussed them more with people like Jack Miller [Herbert J. Miller, Jr.], who he had discussed them with—just Jack Miller, who was out in California, incidentally. He was a law enforcement, law and order type. He was helpful in certain counties. What do you want to know about it, whether it was true or not?

GREENE: Well, of course, whether it was true and also...

SHERIDAN: It was true.

GREENE: It was.

[-70-]

SHERIDAN: I mean he did authorize wire-tapping of Martin Luther King. But it was an internal security investigation. The FBI asked for it; it wasn't his idea, as J. Edgar Hoover said. And he went along with it mainly to disprove what they were trying to prove and then forgot about it. People thought that that was going to hurt a lot out there. We sent feelers out into the black community, and we're absolutely convinced

that even if they got it out—I'm sure they got some of it out in spite of what we stole—it wouldn't have had any effect. The black people just knew instinctively in every way that Robert Kennedy represented their interest, and they trusted him.

GREENE: What about some of the political contacts you had in L.A., did you see people like Tom Rees [Thomas M. Rees] or...

SHERIDAN: Who?

GREENE: Tom Rees.

SHERIDAN: No.

GREENE: Senator Song [Alfred H. Song], State Senator Song?

SHERIDAN: Yes, yes. I don't remember when. He was in one motorcade, but...

GREENE: But no real...

[-71-]

SHERIDAN: No, these kind of people you would see mainly—again, in the context that we were out there—mostly in the motorcade type situations, where they were going through their areas and they had to be contacted and they had to ride in the car. Like when we went through the black areas, we had all the black representatives there, and they all rode through their particular area. But of course, it never worked the way you thought it would because when you got everybody down at the right place.... First of all, you had....

Oh, Charles Evers, we've got to talk about Charles Evers, great, great human being. And he was a one man campaign. He came out there; he was absolutely uncontrollable. It wasn't that he was being obstinate; he's him. If you'd ask him to go here, he'd go there. But he was so effective, he moved all through that black community, he went into barber shops and bars and poolrooms. Everybody knew who Charles Evers was, that this is Medgar Evers' brother, and they'd listen. He'd be out in the middle of the street down in the black community handing out bumper stickers and literature. He was just absolutely fabulous, and I think he made a major difference out there. You know, as you talk you forget these things. When he came, it really helped your uneasy feeling about the black community because he was not only out there all over the place, but he'd come back and he'd say, "Don't worry, man." [Laughter] Like on the Martin Luther King thing, he went out and he came back and said, "Forget it, forget it." And I believe Charles Evers because he knows what he's talking about. But he was great.

[-72-]

On this tour through Watts we had everybody. At this point the Senator was coming from the white area, where he didn't want the blacks in the car, into the black area. So we had them all meet there, and sure enough, they were all there except Charles Evers; he was late. You didn't think he was going to come, but he came, and he got there just before the Senator. And Rosey Grier [Roosevelt Grier] was there. So the Senator's car pulls up in the motorcade, and we've got all these cars ready, and we're going to have three guys in this one, and three in this one, three in this one. And the Senator gets out of the car, throws his arms around Rosey Grier, and calls them all into his car. You had probably ten people in that car, draped all over the place, on the hood, on the back...

GREENE: Rosey Grier alone is enough!

SHERIDAN: ...and so there we were with two empty cars. They were all in his car, and that's the way it went all the way. Then we got down into Watts—the huge crowd on that tour was in Watts—and we should have stopped, but Jerry Bruno kept the thing going. I thought he was wrong, but he kept it going, so there was no stop. When you go through Watts, you don't have any police escort, which we didn't anyway, but you have the.... What do you call them? What do they call their Panthers out there?

GREENE: Oh, yes...

[-73-]

SHERIDAN: But they're your escorts, anyway. So they were there, and we escorted them, and when we left Watts, they all got in the car. And there was a little girl that somehow got caught in the mess, and so the Senator grabbed her, and she was in the car. So we got out of the black area—he was going someplace out of town—and finally stopped on the Thruway and let the black Watts guys off and the little girl off. But all the way this car was just chock full of black people. But there was a feeling again that television.... They were afraid of the effect of too much black on television statewide. I'm sure these things are all a factor, but...

GREENE: Who was most concerned with that?

SHERIDAN: I think Fred Dutton. I think Dutton was the chief adviser in California as far as those kinds of subtleties went.

GREENE: How much could you and other people who were right in the state do to inform...

SHERIDAN: Counteract that effect?

GREENE: ...yes, counteract that effect.

SHERIDAN: A certain amount because Joe Dolan and Jerry were right there, and so you could influence them, and then they had to influence Dutton. But it was not a direct thing. And you never were that sure you were right, and yet you had.... Now, you know, like if I'd see Bob, I wasn't going to start a big thing with him because there's all kinds of supposedly good advisers taking all kinds of things into consideration. So usually you defer to their judgment even though you might not agree with them.

[-74-]

GREENE: What do you think of—besides being somewhat conservative—what do you think of Dutton's judgment in general?

SHERIDAN: I think, in general, it's good, but I think a little too cautionary, a little too overprotective. I suppose he was a balance to an extent, but I don't think he really understood Robert Kennedy at the end the way somebody like Adam Walinsky did. I think Bob Kennedy, at the end, was more like Adam Walinsky than he was like Fred Dutton. And when the Foundation [Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation] was set up, I know Adam wanted to have Fred Dutton's job, and I think Teddy was the one that nixed him because Teddy is more conservative. I think they think Adam's a bomb thrower, which he is a little bit, but so is Bob Kennedy. That's what it really was all about. Teddy's back where Jack was; we'd passed that a long time ago.

GREENE: How did the Senator feel about Walinsky, especially during the campaign?

SHERIDAN: I have no real way of knowing, but I think that Walinsky was probably the major influence on the Senator, in his Senate years, on Vietnam—or one of the major influences. And I think he was just prodding and pushing, particularly at the Senator's really basic conscience about things. I know that the night of the debate he was excluded from the session.

GREENE: Deliberately?

SHERIDAN: Oh, absolutely.

[-75-]

GREENE: By whom, and why?

SHERIDAN: By Dutton, I understand. I think there was a clash between Dutton and Walinsky, and I think Dutton felt—and I'm sure sincerely—that Adam was too liberal for California, and he just didn't want his influence in on that debate preparation. I think that's wrong; I think Bob Kennedy was very capable of sifting it out. But Adam's been kind of excluded ever since, and I feel sorry about that.

GREENE: What was the general procedure for dealing with the people of the Lynch [Thomas C. Lynch] slate who wished to come over to Kennedy? Did you have anything to do with that?

SHERIDAN: Not really. I know what you're talking about, and I know there was talk about it; I don't know how much it happened. I wasn't really involved in it.

GREENE: Did you have anything to...

SHERIDAN: The McCarthy thing I was...

GREENE: Excuse me.

SHERIDAN: ...the McCarthy people were. And there was a lot of back and forth in the last days of the campaign about the McCarthy people joining forces after the campaign. One of his key guys came over, and Dave Borden brought him to me. And the night of the debate, the day of the debate, we went out to Steve Smith's house, and we called up to where they were getting ready, and he talked to Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] about what he thought McCarthy was going to do. It was kind of a spy type thing, but just before the election there was some fifteen or twenty of McCarthy's top people who were committed to come over after we won.

[-76-]

GREENE: Could you be specific on this?

SHERIDAN: Who they were?

GREENE: Who some of them were.

SHERIDAN: I can't remember names again. Gans [Curtis Gans] was one. Whoever the top guys are, it was most of them.

GREENE: Were you handling this yourself?

SHERIDAN: No. I was involved in it, but I wasn't handling it. It was Dave Borden; he's the one who initiated these contacts. He'd come to me and tell me where they were and how it was coming, and then at the end I was getting more involved because it looked like they were really going to do it. We talked to Steve Smith and Gerry Cummings and Dick Goodwin about it, and then Dave talked to Bob Kennedy himself about it that last night he was there, two nights before the night of the reception, and he seemed to be all in favor of working out some kind of a thing. And I think it would have happened.

GREENE: Did you have anything to do with this group, Women For?

SHERIDAN: Kennedy?

[-77-]

GREENE: Just Women For, oddly enough, was the name of the group. That's the only way I've ever seen it. And the leader was Jerry Branton. It was apparently a fairly influential, wealthy women's group that was, I guess, of a CDC caliber, and they were...

SHERIDAN: They were for us?

GREENE: Well, they apparently favored Kennedy, but despised Unruh and wanted to work for Kennedy if they could be totally apart from Unruh. You didn't have anything to do with them.

SHERIDAN: No. Joan Braden might have. No, but she was Unruh, they wouldn't be dealing with her.

GREENE: In the Mexican-American community what contact did you have with this Ed Roybal [Edward R. Roybal], the Congressman?

SHERIDAN: One, the day we went through his district we let him ride in the car, or he wanted to ride in the car and he did. But he didn't really have a genuine following; in other words, there were enough people in the Mexican-American community who didn't like him that he was not that much of an asset. You didn't need him; you had Robert Kennedy. And there were enough people that didn't like him that he was more harmful than helpful.

GREENE: What was the objection to him?

SHERIDAN: An Uncle Tom type thing, that he'd made it and deserted them all.

GREENE: I understand there were some problems, mainly problems of money and materials, within the "Viva Kennedy" group. Were you helping out on that at all?

[-78-]

SHERIDAN: Yes.

GREENE: How'd you handle it?

SHERIDAN: I'm trying to remember, first, whether it was more of a problem than the



whole material problem always is. You know, they hollered more because it was a specialized thing because the buttons were different and it was “Viva Kennedy.” And I can remember we did get a lot—I think, it seems to me, the UAW put up some money for that. But at the end it seems to me it was more of a problem of getting the material around the state than of having enough. However, there’s always that period when you don’t have enough. I know we had one guy just touring the whole southern part of the state for the last week almost just dropping off material. But no matter how much you put out, there’s never enough. I don’t think it was a major problem; they probably did.

GREENE: Yes, I think so because there were some pretty volatile memos and telegrams.

SHERIDAN: Oh yes, I’m sure.

GREENE: You take that all in your stride?

SHERIDAN: Oh yes.

GREENE: What changes took place when Steve Smith moved into—Steve Smith East this is—moved into L.A.?

[-79-]

SHERIDAN: You had equal authority; you had somebody on the spot who was bigger than anybody they had on the spot and who they had to respect. You had authority, you had Kennedy authority on the scene, and it’s a major difference. You had somebody to go to. Before that, you had Tony Akers, and it was pointless going to him because he didn’t know what to do when you went to him, and he had no authority. But with Steve, you knew that you should do such and such, and you went to him, and whether it took money, whatever it took, you’d get it, and it would be done. A good man, tremendous help.

GREENE: How did Unruh react to this?

SHERIDAN: I don’t know. I think by that time he probably reacted favorably because I think by that time he realized that it was the big leagues and bigger than he thought. It had to be won, and he’d had to go all-out.

GREENE: Do you know anything about the decision to bring Smith out there?

SHERIDAN: No. I just hate to think what it would have been like if he hadn’t been there. He was a major difference because he’s good, he’s tough, he’s like Bob. He’s the most like Bob of any of the Kennedys, and he’s a cold, tough, calculating guy who’s interest is only Bob Kennedy, and can make decisions, who had not only the authority to make them but to follow through on them. If you needed money, he

could get it. At least in the Mexican-American thing we wouldn't have had the two hundred workers, we wouldn't have had any of the real gut things that made the difference if Steve Smith hadn't been there.

[-80-]

GREENE: Was he fairly accessible?

SHERIDAN: Oh yes, very. Gerry Cummings was there with him and Ray O'Connell was there. And these are kind of right hand men of his who trusted my judgment and who were very helpful. In other words, they understood—like with the black thing—that we couldn't let it go and we had to do something. And so whatever we did, we did with their not only blessing but they agreed with what you were doing.

GREENE: Was there a double clearance of sorts on most things when he got out there?

SHERIDAN: You mean we had to clear with both sides?

GREENE: Yes.

SHERIDAN: Yes, more so in the beginning because you were trying to get along; less so at the end. And at the very end, none at all; you just went ahead and did what you had to do. But as you went along, yes, you did. You said, "You know, we're doing this," and we tried to have meetings and all that, so we were all getting along together. We worked all right under the circumstances.

GREENE: Do you remember a debate, which Witcover [Jules Joseph Witcover] makes quite a bit of, about which groups you should be appealing to in the last couple of weeks, whether it should be the liberals or the so-called backslashers?

[-81-]

SHERIDAN: I wasn't really involved in the policy things; I would just get the fallouts from it. But I know that that debate was going on. I guess I really don't know what final decisions they made, except I think they were generally decisions to appeal to the WASPS [White Anglo-Saxon Protestants], thinking rightly that they had the blacks, the Mexican-Americans, and a lot more of labor than people would have thought they had. And that's why they didn't go to the plant gates, and they might have been right.

GREENE: Who's decision would that have been not to go to the plant gates?

SHERIDAN: I think Dutton's. I think Dutton was the overall influence; I don't think Steve got into that too much. I think it was Dutton and Sorensen—no, Sorensen wasn't even there. Paul Schrade, I think, had an influence, but like there he lost. And he was very, very strong on that. You know, "You've got to give us one thing," and they never got it. And he wanted them to walk in the picket line of the newspaper that was on strike, and I think they were right not doing that because he had this potential love affair going with the head of the *Los Angeles Times* that Guthman had worked up over the years. So I thought they had a lot more to lose by it. McCarthy did go do it. You know labor guys, they're great, but they're very narrow-minded. They're interested in labor, and you should be interested in labor in every way and do everything they think. I'm very pro-labor, but I think in an election you have to balance things.

[-82-]

GREENE: What was your usual job when Robert Kennedy would come to L.A.? Would you be involved in the preparations?

SHERIDAN: Yes. Well, I always got involved more than I should. Technically, Joe Dolan's supposed to decide where he goes, and Jerry Bruno's supposed to go out and specifically advance it with his people. But I always felt that it was a little bit my responsibility, one, to have something to say about where he went. In fact, I wanted to have more to say than they wanted me to have a say, but that worked out pretty well. But then I wanted to be sure that they were good, and so I always made it a point to go out and become part of the advance thing. To do that you can not be doing something else. It takes a day, it takes all your time. But I think it's worth it because I think his personal appearances are terribly important, so I just wanted to be sure that everything went right. Jerry and I got along very well. I think I probably get along better with him than anybody does, even though I see where the weaknesses and everything are.

GREENE: What was your impression of the advance, outside of Jerry Bruno, the local advance people in L.A.?

SHERIDAN: They're mostly not local people.

GREENE: I mean those that were sort of working L.A. during the campaign.

[-83-]

SHERIDAN: I think Pete Smith [Peter Smith] was one of the best of them, particularly in California he was. I have to really think to think who else was out there. Do you know who else was out there?

GREENE: Yes, I think I've got it.

SHERIDAN: Out of all them I would say Peter Smith was top-notch; I don't think any

of the others are that top-notch. I think Chris McGrath was good. It's a tough job advancing, and there again it depends who the advance man is, how much you have to feel you have to get involved, because you sense if they're going to be a little sloppy; and you can't be, you just can't be sloppy. If the thing is advanced right, it almost can't miss with Robert Kennedy, when you've got that kind of a candidate. If it isn't, it can flop. So like with Peter Smith, I have a lot of faith in him, but I'd still go with him. I suppose part of it is wanting to be part of it...

GREENE: Did they ever...

SHERIDAN: ...but you're always worried that they're really not doing it—the thing about getting the flyers out, and the band, and all the little things that go to make it up, and the sound trucks.

GREENE: Did they ever object to having you...

SHERIDAN: I don't think so.

GREENE: ...kind of check things out?

SHERIDAN: I might be wrong, but I don't think so.

GREENE: Was this in some ways a Kennedy system to check and recheck and double-check?

[-84-]

SHERIDAN: Yes, and I suppose you get imbued with it a little bit. And it drives you crazy sometimes because they'd have three people doing the same thing unknown to each other, but it works.

GREENE: And people get used to it, so they don't...

SHERIDAN: You get used to it, so you don't object to it anymore. At first, you wonder, "He told me to do this; why is he doing it?" But then after a while, what the hell—just get the job done.

GREENE: Would you usually travel with him when he was in town in motorcades and things?

SHERIDAN: Yes. Again, I think it's a double thing, wanting to be part of it and wanting to make sure it went right, and feeling responsible because if it didn't go right—the person he was most apt to blame would be me. It's my area. This is, again, the delegation thing, but they are like that too, you know, "This is

your thing, so if you don't do it, it's your ass," as Bob would say. [Laughter] So you always felt that you were accountable for anything that went on in your area.

GREENE: Do you think that most of the other area coordinators were working pretty much the same way?

SHERIDAN: I don't know. How do I know?

GREENE: I mean right within L.A.

[-85-]

SHERIDAN: I don't know, but I think I felt this way more than most of them, but I don't know, I don't know.

GREENE: Do you know some of the major political contacts he personally...

SHERIDAN: I knew how to do it...

GREENE: Excuse me.

SHERIDAN: ...I knew how to advance because I had done it, and not many people do really know how to do it. I guess I felt I knew how it should be, and I just wanted to be sure it was the way it should be.

GREENE: Do you know some of the major political contacts that Robert Kennedy was personally making in the last weeks and days, those that he felt were most crucial in California?

SHERIDAN: The black militants, I told you about that; Dr. Nada, I told you about that. I guess no beyond that.

GREENE: What was your impression in conversations during those last couple of weeks, especially after Oregon, of how he felt towards the organization in California. How satisfied was he with the way it was once Steve Smith got out there? Did you talk about that?

[-86-]

SHERIDAN: Not really. I think that he thought after Oregon, particularly after the trip to Los Angeles, I think that he was going to win, and I think he reflected that. I think the last two days the difference in him as a presidential candidate was tremendous. All of a sudden at the reception two nights before he was killed, I think he felt not only that he was going to win but he felt like a president, that he could be president of the United States. And he showed it, and it was contagious. I think he knew that

last night that he was going to be president of the United States, and he was. I think he knew he could beat Humphrey, and I think he knew he could beat Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. I think he had uncertainties up 'til then; he was driven and he was driving, but....

GREENE: You know Teddy White [Theodore H. White] makes a point of a conversation that he says Robert Kennedy had privately with Dick Goodwin and maybe Fred Dutton—I can't remember the second person...

SHERIDAN: Goodwin's another guy who I'm sure was a major influence, I think, with Dutton. But go ahead.

GREENE: Do you think more of his judgment than of Dutton's? Was he more with it?

SHERIDAN: I don't know. Goodwin doesn't really grab me just because he's a good third baseman for anybody who's got a good baseball team.

GREENE: Were there any...

[-87-]

SHERIDAN: He's very bright and everything, but the way he moved around from one camp to the other bothered me.

GREENE: I was going to ask you do you think that was the general feeling?

SHERIDAN: Yes, I do. I think there was resentment and a feeling he's with us because we're winners now, but where will he be tomorrow? And where was he yesterday?

GREENE: Do you think this went right to Senator Kennedy too, the feeling?

SHERIDAN: I don't think it could help because he was so intrinsically that way. Loyalty was a major thing with him.

SHERIDAN: Well, anyway, in Teddy White's book he makes a point of this conversation between Goodwin, I think Dutton, and Robert Kennedy just before they went downstairs the last night. He says that they had the returns, which showed that they were not going to get fifty percent and perhaps considerably below that and that Robert Kennedy was actually deeply disappointed with the results in California because he felt he had to get to fifty percent for the momentum to be great enough to give him the nomination, but that he covered this up. Was that your impression from talking to him, that it was fifty percent that he was pushing for?

[-88-]

SHERIDAN: Oh yes, there's no question that he wanted fifty percent, and I told him he wasn't going to get it, and you'd get one of those looks. But I didn't think it was that important, particularly with South Dakota doing as well as it did. But he was a very realistic politician, and he could see himself better than most people I know.... I don't think he needed it, but I think you're right; I think he might have thought he did.

GREENE: Did Matt Reese's [Matthew Reese] people work in L.A. on the "get out the vote" the way they had in Indiana, the telephone boxes?

SHERIDAN: If they did, I didn't know it. No, I'm sure they didn't.

GREENE: Maybe they didn't think that was very good in Indiana.

SHERIDAN: I don't know. I don't know what anybody ever decided about all that.

GREENE: I think we talked about most of this. Is there anything about primary night that you haven't discussed that.... Well, really anything at all that you think you ought to cover?

[-89-]

SHERIDAN: I don't think so. Bill Barry [William Barry] and I discussed more times than I'd like to admit the problem of security for Robert Kennedy in Indiana and in California. It was a real problem; we knew it was a real problem. And we knew that, really, there wasn't anything you could do about it because he was uncontrollable, and if you tried to protect him he'd get mad as hell. But I think Bill Barry lived in constant fear that something like that would happen, and when it did happen, it was just one of those crazy things where instead of being ahead of him he was behind him; instead of going this way, he went that way. I remember about a week before the primary a guy went into one of the headquarters, one of the Mexican-American headquarters outside the Los Angeles area and said he was going to kill the Senator. We got his name, and we went and told the F.B.I. We told the Los Angeles police—he was a real nut. There were a lot of threats like that; Barry had a whole file of them. But Barry was absolutely great.

GREENE: Was Robert Kennedy this way about security prior to the President's death and in the New York campaign, or was this something that kind of built up in him?

SHERIDAN: You mean being against protection?

GREENE: Yes.

[-90-]

SHERIDAN: I don't think he ever really thought of it much before the President's death. In other words, there were the threats of Jimmy Hoffa's going to kill him, and we had reports that the mob would get some redneck to kill him if he went down South, or they'd kill him and then some redneck would get blamed for it. But I don't think he really thought about it until John Kennedy was killed. I think after that he became very fatalistic and just figured if anybody wanted to do it, they were going to do it and there's nothing he could do about it, so why bother. And this made Bill Barry's job very tough.

GREENE: Mr. Barry told me that he had planned to have a meeting with Robert Kennedy after California to lay his complaints on the line about security.

SHERIDAN: We talked about it the week before, he and I, and he was just frustrated because he felt the situation was going to get more and more dangerous, that Bob wouldn't listen to him, that there was no real security, and he didn't know what to do about it. I didn't either.

GREENE: How do you think he would have reacted to such a meeting? Barry said he even planned to tell him that he wouldn't go on with it unless he accommodated.

SHERIDAN: I think he would have listened, and I think he would have agreed with everything Barry was saying. Barry wouldn't have quit, and he wouldn't have done anything different. I don't think it would have changed at all.

GREENE: Do you know how Mrs. Kennedy felt about this? Was she...

[-91-]

SHERIDAN: Security?

GREENE: Did she share his attitude?

SHERIDAN: I don't know because I just never discussed it with her. I'm sure she worried about him, but I think we all thought he was indestructible. That's all.

[-92-]

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]



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