

New Arenas of Black Influence: Yvonne Brathwaite Burke An Interview Conducted
by Steven Edgington in 1982
Department of Special Collections
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Contents

Use Restrictions

Preface

Introduction

Table of Contents

1. Tape Number: I, Side One (April 26, 1982)
2. Tape Number: I, Side Two (April 26, 1982)
3. Tape Number: II, Side One (April 26, 1982)

Index

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Preface

California government and politics from 1966 through 1974 are the focus of the Reagan Gubernatorial Era Series of the state Government History Documentation Project, conducted by the Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library, with the participation of the oral history programs at the Davis and Los Angeles campuses of the University of California, Claremont Graduate School, and California State University at Fullerton. This series of interviews carries forward studies of significant issues and processes in public administration begun by the Regional Oral History Office in 1969. In previous series, interviews with over 220 legislators, elected and appointed officials, and others active in public life during the governorships of Earl Warren, Goodwin Knight, and Edmund Brown, Sr., were completed and are now available to scholars.

The first unit in the Government History Documentation Project, the Earl Warren Series, produced interviews with Warren himself and others centered on key developments in politics and government administration at the state and county level,

innovations in criminal justice, public health, and social welfare from 1928-1953. Interviews in the Knight-Brown Era continue the earlier inquiries into the nature of the governor's office and its relations with executive departments and the legislature, and explore the rapid social and economic changes in the years 1953-1966, as well as preserving Brown's own account of his extensive political career. Among the issues documented are the rise and fall of the Democratic party; establishment of the California Water Plan; election law changes, reapportionment, and new political techniques; education and various social programs.

During Ronald Reagan's years as governor, important changes became evident in California government and politics. His administration marked an end to the progressive period, which had provided the determining outlines of government organization and political strategy since 1910, and the beginning of a period of limits in state policy and programs, the extent of which is not yet clear. Interviews in this series deal with the efforts of the administration to increase government efficiency and economy and with organizational innovations designed to expand the management capability of the governor's office, as well as critical aspects of state health, education, welfare, conservation, and criminal justice programs. Legislative and executive department narrators provide their perspectives on these efforts and their impact on the continuing process of legislative and elective politics.

Work was begun on the Reagan Gubernatorial Era Series in 1979. Planning and research for this phase of the project were augmented by participation of other oral history programs with experience in public affairs. Additional advisors were selected to provide relevant background for identifying persons to be interviewed and understanding of issues to be documented. Project research files, developed by the Regional Oral History Office staff to provide a systematic background for questions, were updated to add personal, topical, and chronological data for the Reagan period to the existing base of information for 1925 through 1966 and to supplement research by participating programs as needed. Valuable, continuing assistance in preparing for interviews was provided by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, which houses the Ronald Reagan Papers and by the State Archives in Sacramento.

An effort was made to select a range of interviewees that would reflect the increase in government responsibilities and represent diverse points of view. In general, participating programs were contracted to conduct interviews on topics with which they have particular expertise, with persons presently located nearby. Each interview is identified as to the originating institution. Most interviewees have been queried on a limited number of topics with which they were personally connected; a few narrators with unusual breadth of experience have been asked to discuss a multiplicity of subjects. When possible, the interviews have traced the course of specific issues leading up to and resulting from events during the Reagan administration in order to

develop a sense of the continuity and interrelationships that are a significant aspect of the government process.

Throughout Reagan's years as governor, there was considerable interest and speculation concerning his potential for the presidency; by the time interviewing for this project began in late 1980, he was indeed president. Project interviewers have attempted, where appropriate, to retrieve recollections of that contemporary concern as it operated in the governor's office. The intent of the present interviews, however, is to document the course of California government from 1967 to 1974, and Reagan's impact on it. While many interviewees frame their narratives of the Sacramento years in relation to goals and performance of Reagan's national administration, their comments often clarify aspects of the gubernatorial period that were not clear at the time. Like other historical documentation, these oral histories do not in themselves provide the complete record of the past. It is hoped that they offer firsthand experience of passions and personalities that have influenced significant events past and present.

The Reagan Gubernatorial Era Series has been funded by the California Legislature through the office of the Secretary of State. In addition, several of the UC Berkeley memoirs have been funded in part by the California Women in Politics Project under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, including a matching grant from the Rockefeller Foundation; by the Sierra Club Project also under a NEH grant; and by the privately funded Bay Area Land Use Project. This joint funding has enabled staff working with narrators and topics related to several projects to expand the scope and thoroughness of each individual interview involved by careful coordination of their work.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons significant in the history of California and the West. The office is under the administrative direction of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library, and Willa Baum, head of the office. Copies of all interviews in the series are available for research use in The Bancroft Library, UCLA Department of Special Collections, and the State Archives in Sacramento. Selected interviews are also available at other manuscript depositories.

December 1981

Gabrielle Morris
Project Director

Introduction

Born October 5, 1932, Yvonne Watson grew up in South Central Los Angeles. Her mother was a realtor, while her father worked at the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio and was an early organizer and local president of the Service Employees International Union. Because of her Manual Arts High School academic record, Watson won a college scholarship from her father's union. She enrolled at UCLA, earning a degree in political science. She subsequently was graduated from USC law school and was admitted to the State Bar of California in 1956.

In 1957 she married New York engineer Louis Brathwaite, and during the next decade Yvonne Brathwaite pursued a private law practice and held various public service positions. In the administration of Governor Pat Brown she served as a deputy commissioner on the State Corporations Commission. She also was a Los Angeles Police Commission hearing officer and a staff attorney for the McCone Commission investigating the Watts riots.

Campaigning in 1966 as an outsider for the Democratic nomination for the Sixty-third Assembly District seat, she nevertheless won the primary and then the general election. Her three consecutive terms in the assembly began in 1967, as Ronald Reagan commenced his first term in the governor's office and the California State Legislature met for its first session as a full-year, professional body. Jesse M. Unruh, who was largely responsible for the improved status of the legislature, was the powerful speaker of the assembly. Although not at the center of power struggles or the fiscal and educational issues that dominated legislative-executive state politics during the late 1960s, Assemblywoman Brathwaite gained a reputation as an exceptionally intelligent and able legislator. Her efforts were directed toward social legislation—housing, jobs, health, criminal justice, women's rights, child care, and civil rights—then considered political backwaters. During the early 1970s, as social issues became more prominent among the concerns of California government, Brathwaite continued to push effectively for social legislation and environmental and consumer protection bills. Her chairmanship of the Assembly Committee on Housing and Urban Development during her final term crowned a sterling career in the state legislature.

Nineteen seventy-two was a notable year for Brathwaite, both in her personal and political lives: she married businessman William A. Burke (her first marriage had ended in divorce in 1963); she served as vice-chairwoman of the Democratic National Convention, a job which brought her welcome national exposure; and she also ran for the House of Representatives. She campaigned under the name Yvonne Brathwaite Burke so that her former state constituents would recognize her name. She easily won election to represent the Thirty-seventh Congressional District (newly created through reapportionment) after a somewhat stiffer primary campaign. Congresswoman Burke took a leadership role with the Congressional Black Caucus and by 1975 gained membership on the powerful House Committee on

Appropriations. As in the state legislature, social issues, particularly housing and urban development, occupied her special attention in Congress.

Burke returned to California in 1978 to run for state attorney general. She captured her party's nomination but was defeated by George Deukmejian in the general election. In June 1979, Governor Jerry Brown appointed Yvonne Burke to fill a vacancy on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. She served as a supervisor until her 1980 election defeat.

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke is currently an attorney with the firm of Fine, Perzik and Friedman. She remains active in community affairs, now serving on the executive board of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee; and she graciously granted time from a very busy schedule to be interviewed.

-Steven Edgington,

June 1982)

Table of Contents

- [NUMBER: I, Side One](#) (April 26, 1982)

Family and early life--Political involvement in college--Civil rights activity--Fights against discrimination--Deputy in state corporations commissioner's office--Staff attorney for McCone Commission on Watts riots--Community involvements --Decision to run for California Assembly--Other Democratic primary candidates--Campaign strategy--Consumerism issue--Integrating the Southwest Realty Board--Factors in 1966 election victory--Running as a black woman--Opponent's tactics--First impressions of Sacramento and legislature--Women legislators--Committee assignments--Raising campaign funds--Victim of housing discrimination in Sacramento--Invoking the Rumford Fair Housing Act--Black colleagues--Camaraderie in legislature--Contact with Reagan administration--Nonpartisan atmosphere--Serving on Assembly Committee on Government Organization--Reagan's legislative liaisons--Minority appointments--Role as new assemblywoman--Legislative battles fought--Reagan's insensitivity to black issues and needs of poor people.

- [TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two](#) (April 26, 1982)

Death penalty issue--Responsiveness of Reagan's staff--1968 assembly race--Campaigning for Robert Kennedy--Delegate to Democratic National Convention--1968: a difficult year--"Mice Milk" Committee--Democratic fund

raising--Evaluating the Republican-controlled assembly --California Council on Criminal Justice-Distribution of council grants--Reagan's emphasis on taxes and budget--Personal political aspirations--Bradley-Yorty mayoral race (1969)-
-Child-care legislation--Welfare Reform Act (1971)--Equal Rights Amendment legislative debate --Abortion issue--Mental health legislation-Housing bills--
Vetoed--Court reform--Manpower and employment committee--Upsurge of joint and select committees in '70s--Sponsoring antidiscrimination bills--
Redlining issue-Congressional reapportionment fight.

- **TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One** (April 26, 1982)

Role as forerunner--Personal impact on California Assembly--Assessment of the Reagan administration.

1. Tape Number: I, Side One (April 26, 1982)

Edgington

Could you start by telling a little bit about your family and early life?

Burke

My family and early life: well, I grew up in Los Angeles, I was born in Los Angeles. I went to school on the east side of Los Angeles-by the "east side" I mean really close to downtown Los Angeles- and went to Manual Arts High School, went to Cal [University of California, Berkeley] and then UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], where I graduated with a bachelor of art. Then I went to USC [University of Southern California] law school and became a lawyer. My family situation was that my mother was a real estate broker in that area; and my father was a janitor in the studios and then was one of the organizers of the Building Service Employees Union at MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer]. So I grew up more or less in a studio background with a labor background.

Edgington

Was your mother involved in politics at all when she was a real estate broker?

Burke

My parents were both fairly involved; they were Republicans.

Edgington

Oh, that's interesting. Now, your father's involvement in the union eventually led to your getting a scholarship, I believe.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

How were you selected for that?

Burke

On grades.

Edgington

There weren't any other-

Burke

You had to be a child of a union member, but it was one of those given to the University of California for their scholarship program that was only for children of union members. But you had to meet the scholarship program requirements in those days. It was strictly on [academic merit]. They didn't even look at need; they just looked at grades. And then if you qualified, you received the scholarship.

Edgington

I was wondering, particularly that you had won an oratorical contest, whether that had entered in-

Burke

I had also done that. But no, this one was just on grades.

Edgington

I see.

Burke

They had just your transcripts; it was done by the UC [University of California] system.

Edgington

That only carried you then through UCLA, and then you-

Burke

No, I saved part of the money, and then I worked also.

Edgington

Oh, I see. Then you were able to afford to go to USC.

Burke

And I didn't go to undergraduate school for four years; so I had some of the money. They agreed to let me have it for four years, no matter how long I went to college. So since I went on an accelerated program to college, I still had a little extra time.

Edgington

I see. When you were at UCLA, were you involved in any kind of political organizations, student organizations?

Burke

I was not a student body officer, but I was active, I guess, more or less in some of the organizations that were there. At that time everything centered around fraternities, sororities, more or less.

Edgington

Was there a Democratic, I'm-

Burke

I don't recall there being a Democratic organization there then.

Edgington

I was assuming that you were a Democrat even then. I had forgotten that your parents were Republicans.

Burke

Yes, I was a Democrat from the time that I registered to vote.

Edgington

I see. Was that somewhat of maybe an independence on your part, or just that you-

Burke

I think it was the era I grew up in which was, you know, a little bit different. I was born in the [Franklin D.] Roosevelt era, so I think that maybe my- And also growing up in the community where I grew up, where most of the people were Democrats, I think that had a lot to do with it.

Edgington

When I asked you about a political organization at UCLA, I was thinking of perhaps a Democratic counterpart to the Young Republicans or something like that.

Burke

I don't recall that there was. If there was, I wasn't involved in it. I was involved in the civil rights movement. I was a member of Pi Sigma Alpha, which is a political science honorary, which was not too active. I was involved in- Well, in those days, it was really not so much organizations. There were just groups that came together to fight particular issues.

Edgington

What kinds of things did the civil rights groups that you were involved in do at UCLA?

Burke

Well, now, they weren't UCLA groups. They were just groups that I belonged to, and I happened to be at UCLA. But at that time the only issue I can remember at UCLA was the issue of whether or not there would be a black history week, or whether or not they'd have it during recess so that none of the students would be there. That was a big issue that we fought, and I remember having to debate some of the members of the history department and all of that sort of thing.

Edgington

And that then was a community organization? Was that the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]?

Burke

Yes, NAACP. Also there were organizations that would discriminate; for instance, I think the education sorority, or fraternities, was discriminatory, and we would fight against them being able to operate on campus as long as they remained discriminatory.

Edgington

And then when you finished at USC, you went into private law practice.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

And that was specializing in a particular kind, or-

Burke

Well, I was just really general practice at that point. Then after I had been in practice for a very short time I went into the [state] corporations commissioner's office.

Edgington

And that was during Governor [Edmund G.] Brown's administration, Pat Brown.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

And exactly what kinds of things were your duties?

Burke

I was just a deputy corporations commissioner reviewing permits to issue stock and the corporation blue sky law.

Edgington

A little later on, you were-

Burke

And then I went back into private practice.

Edgington

OK. A little bit later on you were also on the [John A.] McCone Commission [Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots] to study the Watts riots.

Burke

Yes, that was some time later.

Edgington

Could you talk a little bit about that and what transpired?

Burke

I was not on the commission, I was an attorney for the commission.

Edgington

All right.

Burke

I did studies on criminal justice, studies on finance, real estate finance, savings and loan participation in the riot area-that's what I really did a study on.

Edgington

And that was then incorporated in any way into the report itself?

Burke

Right.

Edgington

Were there a group of attorneys, then, that were under the [commission's] supervision that did different kinds of-

Burke

[Thomas R.] Sheridan was the chief attorney, and then there was Sam [Samuel L.] Williams and I, and another attorney by the name of [James S.] White, and [Kevin] O'Connell-about five of us.

Edgington

And also I see on your biography that you were a hearing officer for the [Los Angeles City] Police Commission.

Burke

L.A. Police Commission.

Edgington

That was the civilian-

Burke

Heard permits for whether or not- You have to have a police permit if you have what are like arcades now. And you have to have them if you have a junk shop or a pawnshop. Then also somehow or other we also would get involved in some restaurants if it was a known center for crime, Hell's Angels or something like that, those downtown theaters.

Edgington

And so you would hear arguments for and against licensing these particular groups?

Burke

Right, these places, or whether they should be closed.

Edgington

Was that done on your own, or was there a panel of three of you that heard those?

Burke

No, I just heard them.

Edgington

By yourself.

Burke

And then I'd just make a decision that was referred to the police commissioner.

Edgington

What kinds of other community involvement-

Burke

I was always involved with the NAACP and with civil rights organizations.

Edgington

And any other kinds of community groups, lawyers' societies, or-

Burke

Right, I was always active in the legal community and religious community.

Edgington

And that sort of set up a base, then, for you to run for the [California State] Assembly in 1966.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

Could you talk a little bit about that and how you decided to run for the assembly?

Burke

Well, I think most of it came out of the McCone Commission, the fact that we were discussing the riots and really the lack of communication that many of the leaders had with the masses of people. We had done a lot of studies and had looked at a lot of the districts. The report, I think, was finished in December; and in January, Don [A.] Allen, [Sr.], who was my assemblyman, decided he would not run, and it was more or less a foregone conclusion that a black could not win the district. So we decided that we felt that we kind of had different information than they did, and we'd give it a chance, a try. So I ran. It was kind of a last-minute decision. My father's union backed me very heavily.

Edgington

Now, this was the Sixty-third Assembly District.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

What area did this cover?

Burke

It covered Westchester, Inglewood, the Crenshaw area, and all the way over to about Western [Avenue], not quite 'SC, just west of 'SC.

Edgington

It was a predominantly-

Burke

White.

Edgington

Split, but it was a white area, pretty much.

Burke

It started at the airport and came north, Ladera Heights.

Edgington

So this was pretty much an independent decision on your part to run, or were you recruited at all by anybody in the party?

Burke

Well, there were some people who had tried- In the party? No, not the Democratic party.

Edgington

Any party at all.

Burke

[laughter] No. There were people who had attempted to get me to run for city council before. So there were a group of people in the community who had tried to get me to run for offices; so there was a group of those people. But it was more or less a decision by just a small group of people.

Edgington

Could you elaborate a little bit on your being incredulous at my suggesting that the party would recruit you?

Burke

Well, there was a candidate, James A. Evans; his brother was a former assemblyman. He was a lobbyist for the savings and loans in Sacramento, and he had the support of the Democratic party. Then there was a CDC [California Democratic Council] candidate, who had run before, and CDC had supported his candidacy. His name was Herb [Herbert S.] Yates, who had run a fairly good race before. So both wings, the right and the left wings of the Democratic party, both had very distinct candidates.

Edgington

The right wing would be the regular party organization, as opposed to the CDC?

Burke

Right.

Edgington

The CDC endorsement had become, at least earlier, very important. Was it less important by 1966?

Burke

Oh, no, I don't think that it was less important. I just think that probably it reflected the Democratic party organizations in the district rather than the population of the district itself, which is very often the case. The activists are usually a different group of people than the general electorate.

Edgington

Did you have a particular strategy to win the election or a theme of your campaign?

Burke

Well, there were certain issues that I was very interested in. I was very involved in consumer issues. I was a lawyer, and I was a fairly well known lawyer. I was interested in things such as wage attachments. Prejudgment wage attachments existed at that time, and that was a big issue in my campaign. So I suppose that that was basically the theme; it was more of a consumer approach. Also that was the time before people were really interested in the question of the Vietnam War, but it was an issue that I was interested in.

Edgington

Now, consumerism as kind of a movement really didn't get to be very popular until the seventies.

Burke

Right, that's true.

Edgington

You were sort of anticipating that. Were there other assemblypersons or candidates that would stress consumer-type issues that early?

Burke

Not very many, no.

Edgington

But that was a hot issue in your particular district?

Burke

Right.

Edgington

Was the whole issue of the Rumford Fair Housing [Act (1963)] and the attempts to repeal it, was that an issue in your campaign?

Burke

Not at that particular time. There was a certain antagonism of the real estate interests to me at that time because I had been the attorney for the plaintiff who integrated the realty board in that district, so that it probably would have been an issue, but it was never really a big issue in my campaign.

Edgington

Would that have been a particular interest of yours with your mother having been a realtor?

Burke

I had represented realtors, you see; I had represented real estate brokers who had integrated the realty board in this particular area, which was called the Southwest Realty Board. It had been a long, involved suit, ultimately with the Justice Department settling it on an antitrust basis. So I had a lot of support from, say, certain realty people, real estate people who were very active in my campaign, and then absolutely no support from others who were antagonistic to my views.

Edgington

Who may have been resentful of your involvement. To what factors would you attribute your election victory? Was it just that you were very well known and had a reputation?

Burke

I was very well known, and I think I put on a fairly good campaign. I was able to get to people, and I think that I ran against someone who was just so sure he was going to win that he didn't really campaign. I think he just sent out some mailers. There were also a lot of other issues. There was a freeway issue, as far as the Slauson Freeway; that was a big issue to people, too.

Edgington

They didn't want it to go through that particular section?

Burke

Right.

Edgington

Any other issues you can think of?

Burke

That was about the only ones. It's been a long time ago.

Edgington

Yes, yes, it has. There was a pornography initiative [Proposition 16] on the ballot. Do you recall whether you were pressured to take any kind of stance on that?

Burke

I don't recall that at all. Was it on the primary or the general ballot?

Edgington

I believe it was on the primary ballot. [General ballot-ed.]

Burke

No, I don't recall that.

Edgington

And it failed. You won fairly easily in the primary, if I recall, is that right?

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

Did your opponents make an issue out of the fact that you were either black or a woman?

Burke

I don't think they really took it that seriously. In those days-you know, it was before the women's issue, so there was not very much discussion. I think there was one black male candidate who ran, and in the black community there was some discussion of whether or not it wasn't time to give men a chance to run for office and to move forward. Because in the black community at that time

that was a big issue-that was during the sixties, the whole idea of trying to build up men more-and that certainly was raised by some people. Because in the black community it's kind of different: women tend to be so often the ones in the civil rights movement who were pushing things.

Edgington

So there may have been a reaction, then, against the idea of the woman heading the black family, and so on.

Burke

One more woman, right.

Edgington

That's interesting. In the general election you won fairly handily over a Republican named Gary [R.] Arnold, I think.

Burke

A John Bircher, I ran against a John Bircher.

Edgington

Oh, I didn't know that. Could you talk a little bit about that campaign?

Burke

Well, basically his campaign was aimed at the usual Birch issues, and of course race then became a big issue. As most of my opponents did, he circulated a picture of me on his literature.

Edgington

Which wasn't common for a regular campaign.

Burke

No, it's not too common.

Edgington

To circulate your opponent's picture.

Burke

But that's usually the way people run against me. His literature was mostly *None Dare Call It Treason* [John A. Stormer]; they distributed thousands and thousands of those books, and of course he charged that I was a Communist. Then the former assemblyman put out a statement that I was a left-wing black militant, and I threatened to sue him. Then he withdrew it-that was like in the last weekend-and he retracted the statement.

Edgington

It was a little bit early in the sixties for the so-called black militant movement to really have taken hold or become widely known, wasn't it?

Burke

No, it was during that time.

Edgington

By 1966?

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

OK. And you ended up winning, I think by about nine thousand votes in the general election, so it was fairly close.

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

Then when you got to Sacramento, could you share a little bit about your impressions of, one, the legislature and, two, of Sacramento itself?

Burke

Well, it was an interesting and exciting experience. At that time there were very few women who served in Sacramento. There had only been one woman who had been serving in the legislature for the last ten years, Pauline [L.] Davis.

Edgington

That would have been Pauline Davis.

Burke

So March Fong [Eu] and I were elected at the same time. We came in, I guess there was a lot of skepticism and questions by the legislators; but we were well received. And there was a real camaraderie. I was elected with Jess [Jesse M.] Unruh being the speaker and having defeated Jim Evans, one of his candidates I was not exactly welcomed, but he soon became very friendly with me. And I was given good committee assignments. I was placed on the [Assembly Committee on] Finance and Insurance, and in the past they had held all their meetings at the Sutter Club, before they had their regular meeting. They had to change that because the Sutter Club didn't allow women at noontime. But it was a good experience, and I enjoyed Sacramento. It was during an era of turnover, because that was the time when [Ronald] Reagan was elected.

Edgington

You mentioned that you defeated one of Unruh's candidates, and of course he was quite famous for his legislative fund, in which he would distribute money that *he* had raised to support particular legislators. In your campaign, were you able to raise money without difficulty, and-

Burke

No, I had to put my own money in.

Edgington

Your own personal money.

Burke

I raised some money. In the general I could raise money, but in the primary I raised small amounts and then I got a lot of help, as I said, from my father's union. But I had to also put my own personal money into it, which was not a great amount, but in those days it was.

Edgington

Was it a case where you were taken so unseriously by your opponents that they didn't kick as much money into the primary as they might have?

Burke

No, they put a lot of money in the primary.

Edgington

So you faced that.

Burke

But the way they put it, they put it in mail. I think there are some districts where that works; it works more now than it used to.

Edgington

Maybe because of the computerization of the mailings?

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

What did you put your money in?

Burke

Oh, I had, certainly, a reasonable amount of mail, but I really spent a lot of time just getting out to people on a grass-roots basis.

Edgington

And it certainly was too early for TV, probably, for an assembly race at least.

Burke

Right, oh, sure.

Edgington

How about radio? Did you utilize that to a great extent?

Burke

Yes, I used radio. And newspaper ads.

Edgington

In Sacramento, there is, I guess, a kind of a famous story about your going and looking for a place to live, and then invoking the Rumford Fair Housing Act. Could you kind of summarize that whole episode?

Burke

Well, what happened was that the first year I lived at Capitol Towers, but then the next year I decided to move somewhere else. So just before I went back there [Sacramento] I asked my secretary to find a place for me. So she located a place close by, and she told them who she was getting it for. They said, "OK, fine," and they said to send a deposit. Then when she called back they said, "Oh, no, I'm sorry, that's rented." So she said, "Well, I just talked to you a few minutes ago, and you said, it was OK." And they said, "Oh, no, that place is taken." So then I had another friend, who was white, who went over and called and said she would like to rent it. And they said, OK; they told her that they

would rent it to her. So I filed an injunction against them renting it to her. Ultimately they abided by the injunction, and I moved in, and I stayed there for a year.

Edgington

Having firsthand experienced being able to use that particular legislation, I would expect it would be kind of awkward then, you know, living with that particular landlord, knowing that they didn't want you there. It just seems like it would be an awkward situation. Was that true?

Burke

No, I didn't feel awkward.

Edgington

OK.

Burke

It was a large apartment building, and my feeling was that I had every right to move there as anyone else, and so I just moved there. No, I stayed there.

Edgington

It was certainly your right, but what I meant to say is that at least if someone didn't want me to live someplace, I would, you know- I'm a renter myself, and I guess I'm a little bit sensitive to landlords, I'm a little bit afraid of landlords, even myself, and so that was really the basis of my question.

Burke

Well, perhaps your orientation is different. I think if I ever only went places where I felt that people really wanted me to go, I might be pretty limited, you know. I think that you have to realize that I grew up in an era where hotels didn't really want you to rent, and most restaurants were unhappy with you coming there. So my orientation was one of where I never presumed that people would be happy with me being there. I just had to approach it in terms of the fact that how unhappy would I be if I had my whole life limited by their feelings. And that has not changed a great deal today. Today I would not move into a house or a neighborhood where I won a poll of the neighbors as to whether or not they wanted me to move there.

Edgington

OK. And as I understand it, some of the other black legislators, Mervyn [M.] Dymally and-

Burke

Oh, everyone had had the same experience.

Edgington

OK. What I read was that they hadn't pressed to the point where they had invoked the Rumford Act. Is that true?

Burke

Well, I think that they felt it was just- Maybe their attitude was like yours.

Edgington

Maybe more bother than it was worth.

Burke

Right. I mean, I just get very incensed by some of these things, and maybe I'm a little more emotional. I think that maybe their feeling was that they knew when they went there that it was discriminatory and that maybe they just didn't feel like going to all the trouble that I did. But it wasn't the first time I had sued anyone. Plus I was a lawyer, you know; so my attitude was a little bit different.

Edgington

Did that particular episode get publicized among your colleagues to any extent in the legislature?

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

Did they respect you more, or did that cause them to think of you as pushy, or as a-

Burke

I think that most of them would have expected me to do what I did. Some of them were shocked, because I think what happens is, even in those days, most white people who live in a situation have no concept of the level of discrimination that blacks experience. So most of them were really, frankly, very shocked.

Edgington

That that experience could happen to you, not that you went ahead and pressed the real remedy.

Burke

Could happen in Sacramento. That's right. Because they would like to have- If you had asked them, they probably would have said, "Oh, no, there's no discrimination in Sacramento." I'm sure that's what they would have explained.
[laughter]

Edgington

Yes. In the legislature, was there a black caucus in the assembly?

Burke

No.

Edgington

Ever during your assembly tenure?

Burke

No.

Edgington

Why do you suppose that was, as compared to the Congressional Black Caucus?

Burke

Well, I think that was before the Congressional Black Caucus was formed. There were so few of us. There were three of us from Los Angeles, and there were two people from up north. Maybe they just didn't feel it was necessary to have that kind of a formalized structure.

Edgington

Certainly there were only three women in the assembly, and I'm assuming that there wasn't then a formal organization on women's issues.

Burke

Oh, no! But we went to many places together.

Edgington

The three of you?

Burke

Yes. There was a powder room for the women. There was a lot of discussion as far as that was concerned, and then, too, a lot of the activities were not open to women. You know, they had the Derby Club, and they had a lot of things in those days [for men only].

Edgington

The camaraderie of the assembly and the senate, both, were sort of legendary before the full-time legislature began in 1966. Was there some resentment not only of the fact that we have more women in the assembly but also of the fact that now there's a full-time legislature and that camaraderie is gone. Did you feel any of that?

Burke

It didn't happen right away, because, first of all, even though it was voted a full-time legislature, it was a few years before wives started moving up, and *then* you saw the changes.

Edgington

Maybe if you could put a date on it, about '69 or '70 maybe?

Burke

Yes, before you really saw a change, because for a long time everyone still commuted.

Edgington

What kind of contact did you have with the Reagan administration in your early years in the assembly?

Burke

I had fairly good contact. I naturally knew most of the people who were involved. A lot of them were young, and some of them were people that I became very friendly with. And also, Sacramento did not operate on a partisan basis in those years. I don't know whether it does now. First of all, in Sacramento you had Republicans and Democrats who chaired committees, so

you had Republicans who you would be very closely associated with, and who you were friendly with. The socializing was done between parties. The only time there was really a separation off was when there was a party caucus meeting. As a result, there just wasn't the same kind of division as you'd have maybe in other bodies and also developed later. I was on the [Assembly] Committee [on Public Health]. Gordon [W.] Duffy was chairing the health committee. He was a Republican, and I had a very, very good association with him, a very good relationship over the years with him.

Edgington

I believe also that you were on the [Assembly Committee on] Government Organization?

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

That committee has a reputation of being the place where freshmen legislators go, just kind of an extra committee. Is that pretty much the case in that committee?

Burke

At that time they had the licensing. And- Gosh, what was his name? He was the chair of that committee- [Lester A.] McMillan. He's the one that Henry [A.] Waxman beat. So all of the licensing legislation came through there.

Edgington

And that fit into your experience, probably, with the L.A. police and so on.

Burke

Yes. Well, by *licensing* I meant licensing for professionals: physicians, doctors, cosmeto-logists.

Edgington

That would also be connected with the [California] Department of Professional and Vocational Standards.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

The Reagan administration had a legislative liaison, and I believe Jack [B.] Lindsey, first of all, was liaison with the assembly and then George Steffes. Could you evaluate their ability to work with the legislature?

Burke

Well, I think very well. I don't remember Jack Lindsey's, particularly. I could say that certainly George Steffes had a good rapport. And when I look back on those years, certainly he's a person that I certainly liked very much and admired. I think he did a good job and took it with a good humor, too. You know, he had a good attitude.

Edgington

Did you have a lot of personal attention from the Reagan administration? Or being, I guess, a liberal Democrat, do you think you might have been ignored more than some others in the assembly?

Burke

No, I think that I- You have to realize that many of those people were fairly young, and so they tended to associate with people who were more or less in their peer group. Certainly I never at any time felt that there was a lack of rapport or discussion. Well, of course, we disagreed; that's just the way things are: you disagree, you fight each other. But it was not done in an antagonistic way.

Edgington

What about the Reagan administration's inclusion of minorities, women, in their administration? There have been some articles in the newspapers recently in connection with presidential appointments and so on that-

Burke

I don't recall that he had very many women involved at all. Reynolds's wife, who is now at Xerox [Corporation], was the only person I really remember.

Edgington

Oh, Nancy Clark Reynolds?

Burke

Yes, Nancy Reynolds, at Xerox now. Oh, and of course there was Ivy Baker Priest, who was elected independently. She was not really very superactive, even at that time, but, you know, was such a wonderful woman and had a strong presence there. But there were very few women. The minorities were very similar to the kind of minorities he has now. They were very few. They were not political; they were for the most part either athletes or something. One person who passed away was one of the people who was active; and then so far as I remember, there were only two of them involved, and they were involved in the economic development, things like that, on the periphery of the administration, not really involved.

Edgington

Two blacks that I recall reading about were James [E.] Johnson in the Veterans' Administration-

Burke

Oh yes, that's true. James Johnson was there, and he, I guess, was kind of an aberration, a person who was very religious, a military person. As I say he was very typical of the kind of blacks that were there in the administration.

Edgington

And another one that I read about is Robert [J.] Keyes.

Burke

Yes, Robert; he's the one who died.

Edgington

And was he an athlete?

Burke

Yes, he was an athlete.

Edgington

Yes, yes. OK.

Burke

But there was one other person, and I can't remember his name. He is up in Oakland now. I don't think he is in the administration. He was in something like economic development.

Edgington

I don't recall. What did you see your role as being, then, in the first few years in the assembly? You don't seem to have been as much publicized in the first few years as you were later on in '70, '71, '72.

Burke

Well, as most new members of the legislature, I was learning and finding my way and trying to do a job. Fighting some difficult battles, but-

Edgington

Such as?

Burke

Of course, I was still working on the attachment, and at that time I had started working on unemployment compensation for farm workers. Housing, I had started working on the issue of a housing financing agency; so I was very involved in some very long-term projects.

Edgington

There was a pretty elaborate jobs package that I think finally came to the legislature in 1968. Bill Greene sponsored several bills, and I think Lieutenant Governor [Robert H.] Finch was involved with Jess Unruh in putting that together. Do you recall any particular involvement of yours in that?

Burke

I was not involved in that.

Edgington

Do you have any kinds of thoughts on that package? Do you remember or are you familiar with it?

Burke

I really don't recall particularly. I know that it was worked out between Jess Unruh and Finch, and I think that Bill Greene worked on the jobs bill. That was his area; he worked in employment. And I think they had a special consultant who developed it. He was a Ph.D.; I can't remember his name right now.

Edgington

I know that a lot of their work was connected with a businessman down here named Chad McClellan, who had done some private types of things for employment.

Burke

But they were developed by the fellow who was the consultant.

Edgington

Was the Reagan administration, in your view, sensitive to issues that were important to blacks?

Burke

I don't think they had any familiarity with the problems that affected blacks. The impression I got was that there had been a black on his football team when he played football in [Eureka] College, and that was probably the end of his exposure. So it was very superficial as related to blacks. There was never any real awareness, just as it is today. I think that he was very insulated from blacks, from poor people.

Edgington

And so that was reflected in housing and jobs issues and things like that, not just because Republicans tend to be more conservative on those things or-

Burke

I don't think on housing and jobs issues, because at that time this was the emphasis. The emphasis was on jobs. Today, you know, jobs are an unpopular cause, but philosophically in those days, both by Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, everyone focused on jobs. Today you don't focus on jobs, you focus on the structure out of which supposedly those jobs will come. So at that time, this focus on jobs was one that was not controversial. The place where he was so regressive was in his approach to the poor, the mass of poor, cutting back in welfare programs that had a real impact. At the same time, because he was very supportive of physicians and of the medical establishment, he did pour great amounts in terms of medical assistance to the poor. In education it was a punitive approach, because there you couldn't identify or link up with a constituency that was one that he was identified with. So what really happened was in those areas where poor were the indirect recipients of a constituency that he identified with and was supportive of, then the poor were not penalized. But in those areas where there was direct impact and it was necessary to do something that was a direct benefit to the poor, very little was done, and there was overt neglect.

2. Tape Number: I, Side Two (April 26, 1982)

Burke

A big area with him [Ronald Reagan] was that he was going to start executing all the people on Death Row, and he did start. But, frankly, I think that when it was enjoined he was quite relieved.

Edgington

That it was perhaps harder than he thought to-

Burke

In reality it was different than what he had anticipated.

Edgington

Were the majority of prisoners on Death Row black, then?

Burke

Black or Hispanic, and poor and uneducated. They never got around to any of the famous crimes; they were all the usual kinds of crimes that are associated with poverty and deprivation and ignorance.

Edgington

What about the governor's staff people: were they any more sensitive to issues that were important to blacks, maybe his executive secretary, Phil [Philip] Battaglia?

Burke

I don't know that Phil would have been particularly. Phil was not very long there. He was kind of short-lived.

Edgington

Spencer Williams, secretary of human resources?

Burke

He was known as a person who was a little bit more sensitive. In the criminology area he had people who developed a real reputation for sensitivity. So it was really kind of individual. I think that for the most part [Verne] Orr was considered a person who was aware and sensitive to minority concerns. So it was really very individual. I mean, it depended upon the individual person.

Edgington

Someone like Robert Carleson or some people later on involved in welfare reform had a reputation for being very, I guess, hard-nosed. Was that your perception of them?

Burke

I'm not sure I would say that about Carleson. I think that he was carrying out a position, and I cannot say to you that the people that he had there were, as they are in Washington today, insulated and just totally unwilling to discuss issues; that was not the case. The people that he brought in, for the most part, were people who might not have been aware. Or they may not have been informed but suddenly were faced with a job, and they realized that this job was not as they had thought it would be and that there were many people that were affected in the state of California. It was not the same kind of inflexibility that

you see today. There was flexibility; there were many instances where there were changes. They'd start out with something and they'd realize that it was just totally unworkable. His tax program was probably the best example of that, the whole concept of state withholding tax; I think his statement was "You can put my feet to the fire before I'll ever agree to it." It became so obvious that it was just totally unworkable to have a high state income tax, as he put in, and then not have some method for people to pay it, because people just couldn't pay it.

Edgington

If Mervyn Dymally or yourself or Bill Greene or John [J.] Miller or someone had gone to the Reagan people and said, "You know, this particular program is very punitive, or is working hardships on the poor in general, and especially the black poor," were they responsive to that kind of thing?

Burke

I wouldn't say that they were responsive, but at least it probably would have gone in the file. See, I get the impression today it doesn't go in the file.

Edgington

But they would at least listen politely and captive-

Burke

Also, it was a different day and a different time. It was a time when there was a lot of awareness of things that were happening nationally in the civil rights movement; so there's just some things that they would not have dared to do.

Edgington

In 1968, you had a fairly easy campaign, I believe, both in the primary and general election.

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

Did you get more involved, then, in the presidential campaign, for example?

Burke

Yes, I did.

Edgington

Can you talk a little bit about that?

Burke

I was a [Robert F.] Kennedy delegate. Kennedy came in very late to the state of California. I worked very hard in his primary campaign. Of course, '68 was a very difficult year for me, because I just sort of lived a life of tragedy. I had been very active, as I said, in the civil rights movement; I had gone down to the South with Martin Luther King, [Jr.]-

Edgington

In the early sixties, or-

Burke

I had been down there while I was a state legislator. Then he was killed in April; I went down to assist with the funeral, and I did the protocol for the funeral. Then shortly after that, I came right back here. It was May, and the Kennedy campaign started. I worked very hard on the Kennedy campaign. Robert Kennedy was killed the day of the election. Then it was a summer that was one of where we were starting to really get into the whole issue- The Vietnam War was starting to escalate. I was a delegate to the Democratic convention on the platform committee. I had a personal tragedy in my life: my mother [Lola (Moore) Watson] died in the middle of it. I was involved in the platform committee there; for two weeks I was in Chicago, where the police did everything but just put me in jail. I mean I was harrassed and subject to just tremendous pressures.

Edgington

Coming into the convention.

Burke

Oh, where we went in to work, yes. The California delegation. There was no cabs, so we had to walk everywhere we went, and it was just awful.

Edgington

Even with delegate indentification and everything?

Burke

It was terrible, it was terrible. The whole experience, the whole year, was just one that I just hardly got through.

Edgington

And so there may have been points where you felt like chucking the whole thing?

Burke

I don't know that I felt like "chucking the whole thing," I just felt that it was one of those years where everything just came down, just fell apart. It was a very difficult year.

Edgington

OK. Also in 1968-69, around those years, there were some antibusing types of bills; I think Floyd [L.] Wakefield was one of the main sponsors of those. Did-

Burke

I don't think anyone took them very seriously. I don't recall them. He was kind of an extremist, and he was viewed as an extremist by most people. It was really not anything that was taken very seriously.

Edgington

Bill [William T.] Bagley, one of the Republican legislators, at least from some of things that he said in debates, would seem to have taken it very seriously, and I just wondered whether that was a situation where it was important for as

many legislators as possible to speak out, even though it wasn't taken real seriously.

Burke

Well, it was probably identified by many people as just very typical of a Floyd Wakefield. He was a [John] Birch Society person, and the Birch Society was a threat in many communities.

Edgington

Also, in 1970 you were on a special caucus, the Caucus Steering Committee for Legislative Campaign Funds, and I guess it was sort of an attempt to respond to the Republicans' Cal Plan to elect more Republicans. Can you talk about that?

Burke

We had a committee called "Mice Milk," where we would-

Edgington

"Mice Milk"?

Burke

Yes. We would meet I think on Tuesdays at noon. Well, it was sort of named after- In those days, the top lobbyists in Sacramento had a luncheon called "Moose Milk." It was very elaborate. Everyone would eat-oh, you know, the best of the crab that was flown down from the north shores. It was just really elaborate, over at the El Mirador Hotel, and it was a beautiful luncheon that was once a week. So we had a little luncheon where we would have baloney and liverwurst and salami and french rolls and diet pop, and we called it "Mice Milk." We'd each pay a dollar for our sandwich; we'd go and get the meat and the stuff and put it together. That was a group made up of John [L.] Burton, Bob Moretti, John Miller, and Willie [L.] Brown [Jr.], Jack [R.] Fenton, who each took the responsibility to try and raise some money to get Democrats elected.

Edgington

How did that work?

Burke

We just took it upon ourselves to raise money.

Edgington

I meant, "*did* it work?" I guess would be a better way-

Burke

It did work, and we recaptured the assembly. Wally [Walter J.] Karabian, I left him out; he was a very important part of that group.

Edgington

George [N.] Zenovich, probably, as well.

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

Was Jess Unruh by this time in- Well, of course he was in the governor's campaign, but-

Burke

He was very supportive of that effort; in fact, he'd even come in sometimes and join us.

Edgington

When the Republicans took control of the assembly, beginning in 1969, and Bob Monagan was speaker of the assembly, could you kind of compare the assembly under Jess Unruh and the Democrats and then [under] Republican control: what kinds of differences were there, if any?

Burke

Well, the difference was probably that you had people who had not had direct power, and in those days power meant which measures passed. It was not philosophical issues a great deal in Sacramento. Basically it was a matter of which group would get their legislation through, but most of the strong interest groups played both sides pretty well. But there was no question that there were some groups that were identified more with one than the other. Probably you could say that savings and loans were traditionally identified with Democrats, where banks were identified traditionally with Republicans.

Edgington

Insurance companies?

Burke

Insurance companies were heavily identified with Republicans, but definitely had input into the Unruh ear.

Edgington

Now, as I understand it, the [Assembly] Committee on Insurance-

Burke

Finance and Insurance.

Edgington

-Finance and Insurance, was somewhat of a plum for some people because of receiving contributions from insurance companies.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

Was that the case for you when you were on that committee?

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

In terms of committee assignments, did you fare any worse or better under the Monagan assembly than-

Burke

No.

Edgington

OK. In 1971, you were on the California Council on Criminal Justice for a little while. Can you talk about your role in that?

Burke

Well, [Thomas C.] Lynch, originally, was the [state] attorney general, and I stayed there through Evelle Younger, I guess. It was a time when I was very interested in criminal justice, interested in a lot of the programs, and very concerned about the money being just wasted. My role was really just to try to convince some of the just ridiculous expenditures on, you know, painting nightsticks black so they wouldn't be shown on a TV, or something like that, which were ridiculous kinds of things that would come through, and what I was really interested in was to try to see that some of the money really got into some good, strong law enforcement rather than just thrown away.

Edgington

One of the criticisms of the council was that a lot of the money went to gadgetry and new technology.

Burke

That's right.

Edgington

Can you remember any specific examples of, maybe, a ridiculous expenditure or going overboard on that?

Burke

Well, I think that the thing that you had to watch for was there was so much attempt to hide where the money was really going. I remember once someone came through with a scooter corps that was going to patrol somewhere; and probably they didn't want to spend that money on scooter corps but were probably trying to really get the money to absorb some of their operating costs. And that's really what we had to be very careful about.

Edgington

Because the money was really supposed to go for innovative kinds of programs.

Burke

Right, rather than just to absorb operating [costs]. I guess there was a big debate on the identification computer, for that reason.

Edgington

Was there a difference between the council under Tom Lynch and under Evelle Younger? Did it get better or worse?

Burke

I think that maybe Tom Lynch was more interested in the council as such, I'm not sure; and he was, of course, very active in that council. He established it.

He was directly very, very involved in it. Of course it also was a matter of building up the staff under him; so he took something from the beginning and had to build a staff, had to build the professionals, and it was quite a job doing that.

Edgington

When they targeted grants, their action grants from the council, did you find that they distributed those pretty fairly, or did a lot of them go to middleclass residential districts and not as much to inner cities?

Burke

See, it was under different task forces-I can't remember what they called them: you had narcotics, you had juvenile crime, you had organized crime, and then you had another category. So everything came in under those subcommittees. And everything went by region, too. So you had to divide by region as well as categories. It was pretty broken-down.

Edgington

So they didn't have an overbalance where most of the funds went to a particular type of area.

Burke

I don't think that that- It was pretty hard to do that because everything was really divided. Our biggest fights were trying to get our budget through, and then our proposal supposedly was prepared wrong once; you know, it's just all those things that you go through in agencies.

Edgington

Now, a lot of people that I talked to about the Reagan administration say that the real focus or emphasis was on taxation and budget. That would surely seem to be the case with California politics in general. Do you think that other sorts of issues took second place and were maybe even neglected?

Burke

Well, first of all, you have to realize he came in under a campaign promise to move away from-I guess we were on accrued accounting, and to move into a position to develop a surplus. Frankly it was not clear how he was going to do this, and finally he decided on taxing people. So it was a very hardnosed approach in *forcing* people to vote for taxes. And he forced it. Then of course the cuts that he made were cuts that for the most part were selective. First he started out with an across-the-board cut, but that did not work out. So then he changed to cutting down in certain places, and the cuts were those places where he didn't lose votes. And the budget was the center of attention; not just the budget, but, I guess, the revenue.

Edgington

The money issues, weren't those the real focus of power in the legislature as well?

Burke

Yes. That's right.

Edgington

The leadership would take finance committees and really concentrate on that. Were you included in those kinds of issues to an extent?

Burke

Not so much in the early days.

Edgington

Did you have any kinds of aspirations for going into a leadership role in the assembly?

Burke

Well, it was only one time that it was absolutely, you know, where I had a choice, and I decided that I was not interested in doing it. Under the circumstances, I did not want to go in the way I would have had to go in.

Edgington

Which would have been?

Burke

Going in as minority leader when the Republicans were in, because it was caught into a tie-I'm trying to think who that was between. Willie Brown? No, I guess it was a tie between-

Edgington

Vincent Thomas, wasn't it?

Burke

I can't remember. Yes, I guess it was Vincent Thomas and Willie Brown.

Edgington

The Democrats voted for Vincent Thomas. All thirty-nine Democrats voted for Vincent Thomas on the speakership vote; it was a straight vote.

Burke

No, that wasn't it. There was a tie for minority leader between Willie Brown and someone else, and I can't remember who it was.

Edgington

It might have been George Zenovich.

Burke

Maybe so. I can't remember who it was. Anyway, what happened is that the only way it was resolved was to agree to someone else, and ultimately that person was John Miller. But during the course of that, they tried to get a number of people to move into that position.

Edgington

So they talked to you about that.

Burke

And I was not interested in doing that, because they felt that they didn't want to face the black issue, and one way was to put a black person in.

Edgington

Did you consider ever running for the state senate?

Burke

No.

Edgington

Why not?

Burke

When I became interested in Congress, I was interested in going to Congress, and I decided I would try to go to Congress.

Edgington

So when you moved up from the assembly, your first choice was Congress. In 1969, there was a fairly heated campaign for L.A. mayor between [Tom] Bradley and Sam Yorty. Did you take a role in that?

Burke

Right. I was very involved in that.

Edgington

Could you talk about that campaign?

Burke

Well, I traveled and raised money for him all over the state and was very- Well, I guess the same people who were more or less involved in my campaign were involved in that campaign, because Fran [Frances] Savitch had been my campaign manager and my chairman had been Sam [Samuel L.] Williams when I ran; so the same people more or less were involved. We were all very involved, and it was quite an emotional thing.

Edgington

Did Yorty run a racist campaign in '69?

Burke

Yes. Yes.

Edgington

What sorts of things were involved in that?

Burke

Well, at that time it was when you had the black militant movement; it was really moving. And the same sort of thing that had been used against me Yorty would use; he would just try to link Tom Bradley with the [Ron] Karengas and the militants. And he was successful.

Edgington

Was it a matter of not only campaigning-the kinds of things you talked about, having your opponent distribute literature with your picture on it, or was it also

with the added thing of "This person I'm running against is a militant, as well as being black"?

Burke

I don't think he tried to show Tom Bradley as a militant. But I think that he more or less tried to identify him and link him up with militants. And it obviously worked. I don't know whether it worked, but it just put enough question in people's minds so that when they got in that booth, what was a 7 percent lead two days before evaporated.

Edgington

In the early 1970s, you became quite active in legislation on child care. Could you describe your efforts in that area?

Burke

Well, I was really interested in both child care and many of the other areas that affected women. I had started out with one child care bill, and then I went to the university children's center and the approach to the child care of facilities on the job. I worked with many of the people who were very active in the state in developing some of that legislation. I had carried insurance legislation for infants before that; so then it was kind of a natural thing that I moved into that area. It was at a time, just like now, when people just were not quite receptive to the concept, and it was a long, involved process.

Edgington

Now, eventually child care was enacted, but it kind of came in through the back door, I guess, in a way. Wasn't it part of the Welfare Reform Act [1971]-

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

-that it finally got in. Did you have input into that particular bill?

Burke

Yes, right. My emphasis was a different approach. though. Well, originally, my emphasis had been community child-care facilities, using welfare workers. Then the next place I went was the children's centers, expanding that, so that you had at every university and college a child-care center. And supposedly the next step would have been that [at] every major employment area you would have a child-care center. So that it was not exactly the same concept that was in the Welfare Reform Act. But I did work on that.

Edgington

What kind of input did you have into the Welfare Reform Act?

Burke

I'm not sure whether the input that I had was so much in terms of actually working with the act, as rather that some of my concepts being accepted, and some of the bills that I had pending being just incorporated.

Edgington

Did Leo [T.] McCarthy or Bill Bagley or any of the assembly conferees that went into that session with Governor Reagan and his people, did they consult with you?

Burke

I don't recall that they consulted with me. I think that what I did was that I presented mine kind of at the door and got it in.

Edgington

And they picked up on some things?

Burke

Right.

Edgington

The argument was made that "OK, we're going to reform welfare now; it just makes sense that if we're going to try to insist on women working, that child care would-" Was that one of your arguments?

Burke

That had been one of my arguments all along, and that you had to make it convenient.

Edgington

And that would be consistent, then, with having it at major places of work, and so on.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

In 1972, the state passed the Equal Rights Amendment. Could you describe your role in that?

Burke

All I can just remember is perhaps taking part in the debate. There were just a few old-fashioned minds in those days who would even have thought of voting against it. I can remember participating in the debate and talking about the highway patrolmen and that they [legislators] didn't have to worry, and that probably the standards were such that none of them could be highway patrolmen either. But it passed without a great deal of fanfare; there's no question there were some hot debates.

Edgington

I think the assembly committee held hearings in April of '72, and there were an astounding number of people that showed up to testify. Was it basically one-sided?

Burke

I think so. There were just a few holdouts that were people who were- The very conservative were the only ones. There was some issue on the protective laws at that time that was being debated.

Edgington

Protective labor?

Burke

Right. Labor had some concern about rescinding the protective laws, and that was a debate that was going on. But somehow it never really got way over there into the- It was brought up in the Equal Rights Amendment, but it was never such to totally permeate that debate.

Edgington

The amendment, of course, had been proposed for years and years and years, but finally it got to the state: was it a case where the opposition really hadn't had time to organize in 1972?

Burke

I don't think there was an opposition at that time.

Edgington

That's interesting.

Burke

There were a few people who were just against the concept. And the Charlie [Charles J.] Conrads and all those people they made their speeches, but as far as an organized opposition, I just don't think that there was. There were people who had questions, but the kind of opposition of where you had the Phyllis Schlaflys and all of them was not there. The only place you saw that was on abortion issues and things like that, but you didn't really see that anywhere else.

Edgington

Bringing up the abortion issue, which takes us back to 1967 for a moment, was that an issue that you perceived women, or your constituents in particular, as being very concerned about?

Burke

Oh, yes. A plane came up from my district-they chartered a plane to come up- of women who I knew, and I told them I would let them use my office. I worked with them, but I just explained to them my own views. And they respected my views.

Edgington

Which were?

Burke

That I supported the bill.

Edgington

And the plane came up in support or in opposition?

Burke

Opposed. Because the area that I represented was one where particularly the black population was heavily Catholic.

Edgington

Were you lobbied very hard by the Catholic church?

Burke

Oh, yes. All the priests, everyone, talked to me.

Edgington

It seems that in 1971 and '72 you were involved in a whole lot of different kinds of legislation: you had the women's type of issues, you sponsored some bills on court reform and housing and had your-

Burke

Mental health was an area that I was very heavy in at that time, and housing.

Edgington

Did that indicate that by this time your sort of self-view of your role in the legislature had become that now you're going to introduce bills and really push legislation?

Burke

Well, I think what happens is that most people don't sit down and think up legislation. Constituency groups come to you when they believe that you can get something passed, and what had happened at that point was that, of course, I had a large legislative load because I was a chair of a committee. Every chair of a committee has a large legislative role because they have to introduce those bills. In addition to that, there were constituencies who were depending on me. I was pushing licensing of board-and-care facilities, which was highly controversial in those days.

Edgington

For mental health.

Burke

Right. And as a result I was very involved in the whole mental health issue. So I suppose as my visibility rose, then the number of people who looked to me to assist with some of those areas became more- And I was very active in the legislature.

Edgington

The committee you were talking about was the-

Burke

[Assembly Committee on] Housing and Urban Development.

Edgington

And so that led to your receiving a lot of input from interest groups on housing legislation.

Burke

Right. Yes.

Edgington

What kind of success did you have with your housing legislation? I know that at least one bill was vetoed by the governor.

Burke

Well, my housing finance was vetoed, which was a big blow to me, but-

Edgington

Housing finance in what sense?

Burke

Establishing a housing finance agency.

Edgington

For the state.

Burke

Yes. But ultimately it came about. I had relocation legislation that was hard fought, but which passed, and that was really tied in with the whole [Los Angeles International] Airport. You see, I represented the area around the airport, and I was trying to assure that the people who were around the airport would get an adequate amount of compensation. That was hard-fought legislation, for relocation assistance, and so that was an area that eventually I became involved in and am still involved in today. Yes, the governor vetoed a lot of my bills.

Edgington

On some occasions he was known to call people up and personally explain why he had to veto the bill and to sort of apologize that he felt it was necessary, or something. Did he ever do that to you?

Burke

I don't recall; no, that never happened.

Edgington

And of course, correct me, but I don't think that many vetoes were ever overturned by the legislature.

Burke

No, that's right.

Edgington

Were any of your bills?

Burke

No. He vetoed my bill to take out the Slauson Freeway. I got a lot of vetoes, a lot of vetoes.

Edgington

On your court reform bills that you introduced: one was on small claims court; you raised the maximum dollar amount of cases that could be taken to small claims. Did that also come from your constituency? [tape recorder turned

off]We were talking about the small claims legislation and whether that came from your constituents.

Burke

I think that basically came from lawyers who were interested in assisting people with access to the legal system. I don't think it so much came from the constituency as such.

Edgington

There seems to have been a lot of concern among legislators and other government people about somehow relieving the courts of being overburdened, I guess, or crowded, and so on; and there was a lot of legislation like that.

Burke

Yes. Now, of course the big issue that I was involved with was- [tape recorded turned off]

Edgington

OK, I had said something about court reform, and you were about to say that-

Burke

The thing that I fought for most of all in court reform was the selection of the juries. At that time there was an attempt-which would really pass, for instance, in Los Angeles-to expand the jury selection outside of what in the past had been the judicial district to the entire county, and the reason being that there were too large of jury verdicts that were coming out, because of the people you attracted in the Los Angeles city area. So in many instances they were asking jurors to travel long distances so that they could have this expanded jury panel, which I was fighting against. I was trying to have local jurors, a jury of your peers. That was really the fight I was involved in. The rest of the court reform, you know, doesn't get to be quite so furious.

Edgington

Did you win in that particular instance?

Burke

No, I didn't. I almost won, but they caught me at the last minute and defeated it.

Edgington

OK. You were on the Select Committee on Manpower and Employment. That was a committee that Bob Moretti appointed in, I think, 1971. What was the function of that committee?

Burke

I can't remember too well. It does not stand out as one of those things that was earthshaking. But I really believe that it was a continuation of that jobs program that had come up before.

Edgington

There seems to have been a lot of select committees and joint committees that suddenly sprang up in the early seventies. Why then and not earlier?

Burke

Well, if there was a time in government that things began to be more select and more specialized and the issues more specialized, it was probably at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. The whole area of law changed. We saw the emergence of just very highly technical issues. The environmental movement was starting; you were starting to see- Things just became more complex. And I can't tell you why; but it permeated the legal system, it permeated government. So it became a matter that people had to be very, very specialized in their attentions, and you couldn't deal with those large categories anymore. So committees that in the past had been sufficient were just no longer sufficient at all. You had to have specific committees that were concerned with solid waste, or a specific committee that was working on a very detailed problem. As a result, before there was a restructuring of the committees, you found the use of select committees, just as you do today. I guess they have one on cable [television systems], because even though you may have the whole area of communication or public utilities, you have this very specialized little area that demands a great deal of attention and requires a specialized staff, too; I think that's part of it. You could not call on a general committee staff to have the level of expertise that you needed for a particular subject.

Edgington

Also, you sponsored some antidiscrimination bills having to do with contractors that the government of the state would hire, and also in public utilities. Was that a personal kind of goal that you had?

Burke

Those were all personal areas with me. One was in response to the Western Electric case, and that was the matter that the telephone companies could own the instrument and sell it at a loss, or sell it at very high amount to the telephone utility and then charge the utility consumer. So it was one of those consumer issues that I felt very strongly about. And then the discrimination areas and the whole area of procurement and government's role as a purchaser of service was getting at that time to be moving into the forefront. At that time I became very interested in minority business, and I was concerned that minority contractors could not get the bonds often to qualify for government contracts and for large contracts. So I was trying to establish a system where government could assist in providing them with the bonding capability. I was trying to do something very similar to what I had done in the workmen's compensation area: where there were employers who were not insured, we set up an insurance system that was separate and apart, so that the injured employee could look to that government insurance fund rather than suffering a loss if they happened to work for someone who did not have workmen's compensation insurance. So I

tried to apply that concept; I was never able to quite work it out. It's still a problem today; it's a difficult problem-the bonding.

Edgington

But these bills weren't cases where people in your constituency would come and-

Burke

Yes, they were to a certain degree, at that time.

Edgington

Both and.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

Later on, when you were in Congress, you were concerned with the issue of redlining. Was that anything that could have been approached when you were in the assembly?

Burke

Yes, redlining was one of those things that went back to that first report that I did for the McCone Commission.

Edgington

Did you introduce any legislation in the assembly that you can recall?

Burke

I don't recall whether I ever introduced any legislation. I know that I was very active in the whole area of prepayment penalties by savings and loans and was active in the redlining area, and so forth; but at that time I don't know that there was- It was twofold in those days: it was insurance redlining as well as loan redlining. I just don't recall whether I had legislation or not.

Edgington

It might have been a case where that particular issue had not been really brought to the attention, I guess, of other legislators.

Burke

I remember most of the attention being on the prepayment penalty.

Edgington

OK. In 1972, then, I believe pretty early in the year, you decided- [tape recorder turned off] I think it was early in 1972 that you decided to run for Congress.

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

Can you talk a little bit about the-

Burke

Reapportionment fight?

Edgington

Well, OK, the reapportionment fight, we can start with that.

Burke

It was a difficult, terrible one. But I was just, as every other legislator, interested in getting a district that would meet my needs, and I was fighting for that district; and so we were involved in a very deadly reapportionment battle, which ultimately produced a district that I could live with.

Edgington

Which was very similar, I think, to your Sixty-third [Assembly] District in some ways.

Burke

Yes, it was.

Edgington

And that was the Thirty-seventh [Congressional] District?

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

Had you kind of set a date before, that you'd like to run for Congress sometime early in the seventies, or-

Burke

No, I felt the best chance that I had was in a reapportionment district, a new district, and then I wouldn't have to take on an incumbent.

Edgington

And it didn't look like any incumbents nearby were going to retire.

Burke

Right.

Edgington

Yes. Were you involved in other aspects of the reapportionment fight? For example, one of the main bones of contention was a district, I guess, that was supposed to be a Chicano district on the east side.

Burke

I was not involved in that fight. I had plenty of my own.

Edgington

OK. Especially when you were elected to Congress there were a lot of articles and things that came out, you know, that Yvonne Brathwaite Burke is first again, the first black woman to do this and that. Does that kind of thing bother you at all?

Burke

No, I think that to a certain degree most of us like to be the person who takes on- [end of tape]

3. Tape Number: II, Side One (April 26, 1982)

Edgington

I had just mentioned something about whether the newspaper accounts of your being the first black woman to do any number of things, I guess, bothered you, and you were in the midst of commenting on that.

Burke

Well, it doesn't bother me that newspaper comments or people in their introductions refer to me as the first black woman to do this or to do other things because I see this as my role. I obviously decided that I would carve out for myself a position of moving into new arenas, and I have found it very satisfying. I like the challenge. I feel that if I can do something that has some future impact upon others, that it's worthwhile. It's been very difficult for me to rationalize being in public service, in terms of the demands on my own personal life, the costs financially; it hasn't been easy. But I have rationalized it because I felt I did some good, maybe some good legislatively, but also in terms of opening doors and giving opportunities to people and educating people on the fact that you need to broaden representation, and women should be included, blacks should be included. And I feel good about that.

Edgington

What kind of impact do you think you had on the California Assembly?

Burke

It's hard to really evaluate the impact that I had on the California Assembly. For one thing, I feel very comfortable that when I left there, there was an understanding that women could function in the process, that women could take on responsibility, that black women could certainly participate and play the game, so to speak. I was not able to accomplish all the things that I would have liked to, but I did have a record of accomplishment. And I think it's made it easier for other women who came along in politics, that they were accepted much better because people weren't afraid of them. They knew that they could contribute and that you could work with women within the political framework as well as the government framework. You see, the government framework is one that traditionally has been there, but the political framework has not always been there.

Edgington

March Fong said that when she first got to the assembly, it took quite a while before she could get support for any of her bills or the cooperation, I guess, of other legislators. Did you find that to be true with yourself?

Burke

Not necessarily. But I did have to establish the relationships. You have to remember, when we went to the assembly it was still the camaraderie; it was

still [that] most things were not done on a partisan basis, they were done on a personal basis.

Edgington

And once that camaraderie or that rapport was established-

Burke

That's right.

Edgington

-things were able to happen.

Burke

Yes.

Edgington

One last question, and that is sort of an overall evaluation or assessment, I guess, of the Reagan administration when you were in the assembly.

Burke

The Reagan administration, as I look back on it, was one that attempted to do a number of things that sounded good on paper but, after they realized the practical input of it, were not so good for the state. My impression of the Reagan administration was that you had an inexperienced governor who came into government, who certainly had an idea of what he was about but not how to go about it. But he accepted Sacramento for what it was, and he worked within that framework. I don't know if you asked him, in assessing his years, whether he felt he accomplished the things that he started out to accomplish. But somehow he did not dismantle government. There are probably a few areas that we're still feeling the impact. For instance, the university system has not ever really totally recovered from some of the impressions that were given that there was not a commitment by the state of California to its university system. Because that was really all it was: it was not necessarily the punitive, but it was the impression that spread widely throughout the United States and probably discouraged many outstanding faculty and administrative people from coming into this system. If you look at other areas, the courts acted as an insular pressure that prevented many of the things that he had sought to do from being detrimental. The only place that really we feel it today, I think, is that he proceeded to use this idea that government should not own property, and selling off state buildings with the idea that we would rent. And unfortunately, in many of those areas where the state owned property that today would be prime property, we now have to pay outlandish rents and costs to private enterprise in order to maintain facilities. That is probably one of the long-range, real detriments of the policy that he instituted. But overall, I don't think that Reagan took a position of inflexibility. He was willing to listen, and he played the game, and he worked with the legislature, and he realized that he had to make compromises. He was surrounded by people who were young and who

were realistic of what it took to really operate government. So the Reagan years had their impact on California, but they were not devastating. I hope that I can say the same thing when he leaves as president of the United States.

Index

- Allen, Don A., 6
- Arnold, Gary R., 9-10
- Bagley, William T., 24, 31
- Battaglia, Philip, 21
- Bradley, Tom, 29-30
- Brown, Edmund G. ("Pat"), 4
- Brown, Willie L., Jr., 25, 29
- Burton, John L., 25
- California
 - Assembly, 41-42
 - Finance and Insurance, Committee on, 11, 26
 - Government Organization, Committee on, 16-17
 - Housing and Urban Development, Committee on, 34
 - Manpower and Employment, Select Committee on, 36
 - Public Health, Committee on, 16
 - Sixty-third District, 6-11, 33, 39
 - Corporations, Department of, 4
 - Criminal Justice, Council on, 26-28
 - General Ballot (1963)
 - Proposition 16 (pornography), 9
 - Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 4-6, 38
 - Justice, Department of, 8
 - Professional and Vocational Standards, Department of, 17
 - Rumford Fair Housing Act (1963), 8, 12-14
 - Welfare Reform Act (1971), 31-32
- California Democratic Council (CDC), 7
- Capitol Towers, Sacramento, 12-15
- Carleson, Robert, 21
- Catholic church
 - and abortion, 33
- Chicago, Illinois, 23
- Conrad, Charles J., 33
- Davis, Pauline L., 11, 15
- Democratic party, 6-7
 - Legislative Campaign Funds, Caucus Steering Committee for, 24

- "Mice Milk" Committee, 24-25
- national convention (1968), 23
- Derby Club, Sacramento, 15
- Duffy, Gordon W., 16
- Dymally, Mervyn M., 14, 22
- El Mirador Hotel, Sacramento, 24
- Eu, March Fong, 11, 15, 42
- Eureka College, 19
- Evans, James A., 7, 9, 11-12
- Fenton, Jack R., 25
- Finch, Robert H., 19
- Fong, March. *See* Eu, March Fong.
- Greene, Bill, 19, 22
- Hell's Angels, 5
- John Birch Society, 10, 24
- Johnson, James E., 18
- Karabian, Walter J., 25
- Karenga, Ron, 30
- Kennedy, Robert F., 23
- Keyes, Robert J., 18
- King, Martin Luther, Jr., 23
- Lindsey, Jack B., 17
- Los Angeles
 - International Airport, 6, 35
 - Police Commission, 5, 17
 - and Watts riots, 4-6
- Lynch, Thomas C., 26-27
- Manual Arts High School, 1
- McCarthy, Leo T., 31
- McClellan, Chad, 19
- McCone Commission. *See* California: Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots.
- McMillan, Lester A., 16
- Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1
- "Moose Milk" Committee lobbyists' group, 24
- Monagan, Bob, 25-26
- Moretti, Bob, 25, 36
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 3, 5
- None Dare Call It Treason*, 10
- O'Connell, Kevin, 5
- Orr, Verne, 21

Pi Sigma Alpha political science honorary, 3
Priest, Ivy Baker, 18
Reagan, Ronald, 11, 16-17
 -administrative staff, 17, 21-22
 -black issues, 19-22
 -budget and taxation, 28
 -death penalty, 21
 -legislative vetoes, 34-35
 -minority appointments, 17-18
 -University of California, 42-43
 -welfare reform, 20, 31-32
Republican party
 -Cal Plan, 24
Reynolds, Nancy Clark, 17-18
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 3
Rumford Fair Housing Act. *See* California.
Savitch, Frances, 30
Schlafly, Phyllis, 33
Service Employees International Union, 1, 6, 12
Sheridan, Thomas R., 5
Slauson Freeway, 9, 35
Southwest Realty Board, 8
Steffes, George, 17
Sutter Club, Sacramento, 11
Thomas, Vincent, 29
U.S. government
 -Congressional Black Caucus, 15
 -Equal Rights Amendment, 32-33
 -Thirty-seventh Congressional District, 29, 39
University of California, 2, 42-43
University of California, Berkeley, 1
University of California, Los Angeles, 1-3
University of Southern California, 1-3, 6
Unruh, Jesse M., 11, 19, 25-26
Vietnam War, 8, 23
Wakefield, Floyd L., 24
Watson, James A. (father), 1
Watson, Lola Moore (mother), 1, 8, 23
Waxman, Henry A., 16
Welfare Reform Act (1971). *See* California. Welfare Reform Act (1971).
Western Electric, 37

White, James S., 5
Williams, Samuel L., 5, 30
Williams, Spencer, 21
Xerox Corporation, 17-18
Yates, Herbert S., 7, 12
Yorty, Sam, 29-30
Younger, Evelle, 26-27
Zenovich, George N., 25, 29

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