

INTERVIEWEE: GOVERNOR PAT BROWN (EDMUND G.)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

DATE: February 20, 1969

F: Governor, you are that rarity, at least to the rest of the world, a native Californian. Would you tell us a little bit about how you came to be governor and the road you took to get there?

B: Yes, I'm a native Californian, and both my father and mother were born in California, and my wife was born in California, and all of our children have been born here. My maternal grandparents came across the Plains in 1849-50; we are not quite sure when.

F: They came overland?

B: They came overland. My grandfather came overland, and I think he then made a second trip to Germany and brought my grandmother over with him about 1858 or 1859. We haven't very good records of it. We know that the family homestead was acquired in 1852 in a little place called Venado, in Colusa County, California.

F: Was his name Shuckman?

B: His name was Shuckman, that is right, S-h-u-c-k-m-a-n, although some people spell is S-c-h-u-c-k-m-a-n, and he came from Germany. I don't know what part. My grandmother--her name was Augusta Shuckman, and her maiden name was Fiedler--and I went back to Germany two or three years ago, and I found the baptismal records of August Fiedler in the little town of Soest in Westphalia, Germany. They were German and Protestant, although my grandmother was baptized a Catholic.

F: You are always thought of in the public print as good Irish.

B: Well, that's my grandfather and grandmother on my father's side, Brown. They came from County Tipperary. Both my grandfather, Joseph Brown, and his wife, Bridget Burk Brown. They were both born in the town of Thurles in County Tipperary in Ireland. They came to California in, so far as we can find out, about 1860. My father was born in 1870, and he was the second youngest of eight children, and he was born in San Francisco. My grandfather was a gardener in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. My maternal grandfather was a farmer who lived on his farm all his life--never left it, as a matter of fact, from the time he went there until he left.

F: You were educated entirely in California?

B: Yes, both my wife and myself are products of Lowell High School in San Francisco. She went on to the University of California. I went to San Francisco College of Law, a night-time preparatory school for four years. I worked for a blind lawyer for a period of two years as his eyes during my last two years of law school. I passed the bar as soon as I graduated from school and went to work for two or three lawyers, but branched out on my own about three years later. I was in private practice for seventeen years.

[I] never held a public position [though] I ran for two offices. I ran for the Assembly and was badly defeated, and then I ran for District Attorney and made a very creditable showing. Then in 1943 I ran for District Attorney against a man by the name of Matt Brady, who had been District Attorney for twenty-four years, and defeated him; and served as District Attorney for a period of seven years. I was then elected Attorney General of the state and served eight years and then eight years as Governor. I

defeated Senator Bill Knowland, who was then the Minority Leader in the Senate, the first time, and defeated Richard Nixon, who had defeated Kennedy in California two years previously in the campaign for the presidency. [I] then succumbed to the motion picture actor Ronald Reagan, myself, when I sought a third term.

Since that time, I have been in the private practice of law. I've been lecturing at UCLA. I'm on two presidential commissions, both of them by appointment of President Lyndon Johnson--one, the National Commission for Reform of the Federal Criminal Code; the other, the National Commission on Income Maintenance. The latter commission is one chaired by Ben Heineman and it's a study of the welfare laws of this country with a mandate from President Johnson to try to find out what we can do to do a better job with all of the money we see spending in rehabilitating and helping human beings in this country. The National Commission on the Reform of the Federal Criminal Law is a--I'm chairman of that--codification, plus substantive changes, in the Title 18 of the Criminal Code. We are rewriting the whole Federal Criminal Code.

F: Do you have a time limit, or are you just doing the job?

B: No, in the National Commission on the Federal Criminal Code our time expires on July 1 of this year, but we won't complete it by that time. We will have our first draft completed, and we will have sent it to all of the judges and all other interested parties for their comment. But we are seeking a year's extension.

F: Governor, let's talk politics today. In your association with Mr. Johnson personally, when did you first meet Lyndon Johnson?

B: It's not too clear in my mind. I met Senator Lyndon Johnson, I know,

when he was United States Senator. I remember meeting him intimately when he was a candidate for the presidency [Democratic Presidential nomination] in 1960 when my wife and I visited his home for breakfast one Sunday before the national convention. I'm sure that as Governor I had met with him on several occasions in connection with California problems. I have no distinct recollection of meeting him during the period I was Attorney General from 1950-1958.

F: Now, you attended every national convention from 1940 forward.

B: Yes, I attended every national convention from 1940, but--

F: But he wasn't a factor there in your life?

B: Not in '40 or '44 or '48.

F: Of course, in '48, he was running like mad himself for Senator.

B: Or '52. '52, that was the year that Kefauver beat me [actually that was 1956]. I was the nominal head of the delegation. I was the favorite son candidate for the presidency here in California, and in '56 we were all for Adlai Stevenson at that time. In '60, of course, it was hectic goings on.

F: Let's talk a little bit about 1960, and the build-up to that convention. At the breakfast at Johnson's home, who was it--just you and Mrs. Brown and Mr. and Mrs. Johnson?

B: I think that we were the only ones that were there. I was taken there by that young lad that later got into trouble.

F: Walter Jenkins?

B: No.

F: Bobby Baker.

B: Bobby Baker. I can't remember whether Fred Dutton, my administrative assistant, was with me or not. But we were in Washington at that time.

F: Did you seek the breakfast, or did they seek you?

B: I think that they sought me. California, at that time, had a delegation pledged to me. I was the favorite son candidate for the presidency. I had, however, determined that I wouldn't make any effort to become the nominee of the party in 1960, although I had become a national figure as a result of defeating Bill Knowland by over a million votes, and by reason of a tremendous victory in my legislative program in 1959.

However, just prior to the convention in 1960 I had run into a real storm with the execution of Caryl Chessman, to whom I had given a reprieve about ninety days before that. When I had given him the ninety-day reprieve and asked the legislature to repeal capital punishment so I could commute his sentence to life imprisonment, the walls of Jericho fell down on me. I was really blasted and booed from one end to the other. And I can't think of anything in my political life that affected my mental attitude like the Chessman case.

I was really down. As a matter of fact, I was so down and the boos were so resounding and the criticism was so great, that I felt that it would be better for me to--at times in the quiet of my own home--to resign and let the Lieutenant Governor take it over for the sake of the party in our state. I was less effective from February of 1960 until that convention was over with as anytime in my life--either in private or public life.

F: Then the party structure stayed with you through it all?

B: The party structure stayed with me, but very critical privately and publicly. Some of my closest friends felt that I had let them down by doing such a stupid thing as to give Chessman a ninety-day reprieve,

particularly, when I couldn't commute his sentence because I didn't have the power to commute it--he being a two-time loser. A two-time loser a governor cannot commute or pardon without the permission of the Supreme Court of the State of California.

I think a little background might be interesting. I was naturally very interested in who would succeed Dwight Eisenhower, and I wanted a Democrat to be elected President.

F: You had eliminated the Republican Minority Leader.

B: I eliminated the Republican Minority Leader, and I didn't like Nixon. I had, of course, given some consideration to leaving California after my very successful first year and really making a campaign out of it. California was the second largest state in the Union, and I was really the only Democratic governor of the United States coming from a state that might have sufficient number of people to make a good campaign with the necessary financial resources.

F: There was a good bit of national interest in you at this time in journals.

B: At that time, I was considered one of the candidates. I went back to New York--oh I think in November of 1959,--and did a very poor job. At that meeting in New York, they had all of the candidates. It was the meeting of the National Advisory Committee, [of] which I was a member. Lyndon Johnson had never participated in the National Advisory Committee. I think he always thought it was rather an encroachment upon--

F: He and Sam Rayburn both.

B: He and Sam Rayburn both felt that it was an encroachment upon the functions of the Senatorial leadership, so at that meeting there was Jack Kennedy and Stuart Symington and Adlai Stevenson and the governor from

New Jersey, I forget his name.

F: [Robert B.] Meyner.

B: Meyner. And I think that was about it. We all spoke for about three or four minutes. I always had difficulty in speaking for as little as three or four minutes, so I didn't feel that I acquitted myself very well. At any rate, Jack Kennedy had been moving around the whole United States and really working for this campaign, and had the delegates and everything else.

I had a small group that moved around to try to get the feeling as to whether or not I would have any chance. But I really had no financial backing, and the Democratic financiers in California had not indicated any great interest in my becoming the President. So I just felt that I had better stick to my knitting at this time and become a good governor of California and leave the presidency to others, although I must confess that I thought that, in my own way and in my own mind, that I was equal to any of the people that were being named.

Jack Kennedy, of course, was the junior senator from Massachusetts. Lyndon Johnson had not indicated any great interest in it at that time; he, of course, as Majority Leader of the Senate was being mentioned by a great many, but he had not spent much time in California prior to that time and we didn't know him very well out in California. Stuart Symington was an old friend of mine and made many visits to our state, and appeared like an awfully nice fellow, but for some reason seemed to lack the strength to be the national leader. Adlai Stevenson, I had concluded, had had two chances, and with the disastrous defeat the second time around-- I just felt that Adlai Stevenson was one of the greatest men I had met in

my entire public career, and I felt that he would make a great President of the United States. I just felt that he didn't have the political "it," the political personality, to gather in enough votes for the Democratic Party to win.

F: He would have made a great President if someone could have appointed him.

B: He would have made a great President if someone could have appointed him. He was a great Governor of Illinois. He had done a magnificent job, and I think would have been a truly great President.

But, at any rate, in our office we analyzed and talked it over. Fred Dutton, who was my political advisor at that time and a very perceptive, intelligent man--and very blunt with me. He was tough with me, and I wanted him to be that way. There was no kidding around between the two of us. He told me what he thought, and I told him what I thought. We had fights and quarrels, but I had tremendous admiration for him and I think he had great respect for me.

At any rate, he thought that Symington could win, after talking to Clark Clifford. Clark Clifford had analyzed all the candidates, and he talked with Clark Clifford. But I, on the other hand, leaned to Jack Kennedy. I thought that Kennedy had the youth. I thought he had the money. I thought he wanted to be President. He had been moving all over the United States, and I felt that this was the way to do it. I went in and had a visit with Kennedy in his Georgetown home some time in February following a National Jackson Day Dinner--Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Washington, D. C. I could be wrong about these dates because I'm speaking from memory and not from any notes.

F: We can check that.

B: At this meeting, I asked Jack Kennedy not to enter a delegation from California. I told him it would tear the Democratic Party apart. I said, "You've got five or six candidates. Our election would be in June after the New Hampshire, the Wisconsin, and the West Virginia and the Oregon primaries. By that time, several of the people would be eliminated. We could have four or five delegations--a Humphrey delegation." I forgot to mention Humphrey's name. Humphrey was a very active candidate at the time. All of them would be in it, and by the time the California primary came along, you'd have all these delegations and it would leave our party in shambles.

Senator Kennedy pulled out a poll and showed me that he would defeat me rather badly in a Presidential primary in California--would defeat a favorite son delegation in California--and would defeat anybody else that moved in there. However, he said to me, "I would rather not do that. I'm afraid you would make enemies in defeating the other candidates. I want to win the nomination, but more than that I want to win the election. So he said, "I will--even though I think I can carry California and get that delegation," he said, "I don't think I will need California." He said, "I think I will have enough votes without it." But, "I want a commitment from you."

I said, "What's that commitment, Senator Kennedy?"

He said, "I want you to agree with me that you will not, under any circumstances, be a candidate for the Vice Presidency in the United States." And he said, "It's somewhat obvious why I'm asking you to do that." he said, "You're a Roman Catholic, and so am I, and if you want to be Vice President of the United States, you will try to see that I'm

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not President." And he said, "I'm not concerned about defeating you for the Presidency, but I am concerned with you going along with some other candidate as the Vice Presidential candidate."

And I said to him, "Senator, I will make a commitment."

"Before you do that," he said, "let me tell you one other thing." He said, "If I win in Wisconsin, and I win in West Virginia, and I run second in Oregon and I'm leading in all the Gallop polls--all the polls that are taken at that time--I would expect you to be for me for President. I'm not asking that as a commitment, however. The only commitment I'm asking you is that you not be a candidate for the Vice Presidency."

And I said, "Let me tell you, Senator, I will not be a candidate for the Vice Presidency unless you release me."

He said, "I don't want any unlessees. Either you will or you won't."

I said, "I will make the commitment, but in the event you are eliminated, I would expect you to release me and let me be the candidate for Vice President. But I won't do it, and I will make a firm commitment to you, unless you say to me, 'Mr. Brown, you are released from this commitment,' and I'm willing to say this in the presence of witnesses so that history will record me as a goer-backer on my word if I try to breach it." And I said, "Let me tell you seomthing furthermore. If you win in Wisconsin, and you win in West Virginia and you are second in Oregon and you are leading in all the polls--although you are not asking this as a commitment, and I'm not making it as a commitment--I'll be for you, Senator Kennedy."

So it was a very pleasant meeting, and I walked out of there, went back and told the people he was not coming into California. We formed our

own delegation, and the only opposition we had was nominal opposition in California by a pension leader, George McLaine, who, by the way, got a surprising number of votes that I attribute to my unpopularity with some of the elderly people in the pension problem we had in the state--plus Mr. Chessman.

F: Mr. Chessman did you nearly as much damage as he did the people he went after.

B: Yeah, I think he did me more damage than he did the women that he raped.

But, at any rate, things went on and we won in the June primaries and, of course, history will indicate that Senator Johnson didn't get into the campaign at all. He didn't enter any of the primaries which, by the way, I think was a serious mistake. Kennedy won in Wisconsin, West Virginia, ran first in Oregon, and was leading in all of the polls. So I, in my own mind, too, had felt that he was the man to be President and the man who could defeat Nixon--who was a lead-pipe cinch to be the Republican nominee. Well, however, I was still besieged by Senator Symington, who came out to California, and I brought them all out here. I brought them all out, and I campaigned.

F: Did Mr. Truman contact you for Symington?

B: No, he never contacted me for Symington, but somebody did come out and contact me for Symington--I think Mike Monroney. By this time, they were leading a draft movement for Stevenson, and Mike Monroney came out to the house and tried to get me to come out for Stevenson, and General McInerney who used to be in the Attorney General's office--Tim McInerney--came out to see me in behalf of Symington. He flew out there. But in my heart I felt that Tim was really for Lyndon Johnson, but he just wanted to get me off Kennedy. I told these people that I was for Kennedy even though,

publicly, I had to take the stance that I wasn't supporting anybody because ours was an unpledged delegation. It was a little bit duplicitous.

I'll never forget being on television with Murray Chotiner and Mark Hatfield and young Ted Kennedy. Chotiner really gave it to me for saying it was an unpledged delegation when, as a matter of fact, I was really for Jack Kennedy.

All of us on the delegation when we put it together before the end of March of 1960--I tried to be absolutely fair. We put on Johnson delegates; we put on Symington delegates; we put on people that didn't know who they would be for until they got to the convention; and we had some Kennedy people on there. And we asked Kennedy--and we had some Humphrey people on there. Of course, Humphrey was defeated in Wisconsin and West Virginia and had pulled out of it, so the Humphrey were footloose and fancy free. I felt that as Governor that I could persuade a majority of the candidates, but some of the people we put on were known Humphrey people; some of those we put on were known Johnson people; some were known Kennedy people; and some were Stevenson people, although Stevenson had not entered. He never entered the campaign, never requested anything, or anything else.

I had another visitor. I had a man come out or call me on the telephone, and that was Dick Berlin, of the Hearst newspapers--the president of the Hearst newspapers. And Dick called me, and he said, "Pat, how would you like to be Vice President?"

And I said, "Who are you speaking for?"

He said, "Well, I'll tell you, I'm for Lyndon Johnson."

I said, "Are you speaking for Lyndon Johnson when you make that suggestion?"

He said, "Well, I'm not saying I'm speaking for Lyndon Johnson."
But he said, "I have a reputation of not talking to anybody unless I have the authority to talk." He said, "You are one of the two people that would be considered for the Vice Presidency of the United States."

Well, it piqued my interest. I said, "Who is the other one?"

He said, "I can't tell you."

And I said, "What do I have to do?"

And he said, "All you have to do is hold the California delegation for one ballot." He said, "If you can hold it for one ballot, I think the convention will tear itself apart. Some of these Kennedy-pledged delegations will move and we hope they will move to Lyndon Johnson. If they do, I know that Senator Johnson has a tremendous respect for you."

F: You had had no second ballot commitments for the California delegation? You were just--

B: I didn't have any--the only commitment I had was not to run for Vice President.

F: I'm talking about the California delegation.

B: The California delegation was pledged to me until I released them, although there was no legal way to hold them. If they wanted to vote, there was no way I could have gotten [an] injunction to make them vote for--

F: This was just a moral thing.

B: Although a civil suit was filed by the Teamsters Union, who I think were supporting Lyndon Johnson against me to compel me to submit my name to the convention for the first ballot.

But getting back to Dick Berlin's call, I said to him, "Dick, I appreciate this and whoever authorized you to make this call, you tell

him I appreciate it. But I made a pledge that I cannot under any circumstances even consider the idea of holding for a consideration, or for no consideration, or for anything else."

Well, he called me back again. He said, "You may have made a commitment, but the situation is radically changed since that time. I think you ought to call Jack Kennedy and tell him that you have an opportunity to be the Vice President and get yourself released."

I said, "I'm not going to call him. It's one of those things that I've learned in politics. When you make a commitment, you live up to it."

So that was that, and I went to the delegation and I met Bobby Kennedy on Thursday, and Bobby in a very rough, tough way said, "I want you to release that delegation today, and I want you to come out for Kennedy--for my brother."

And I said to him, "I'm coming out for him on Sunday."

He said, "Well, we need you right now."

I said, "Well, Clare Engle, who was United States Senator, has asked me to hold it until Sunday. I said, "If I can do that, Clare has given me some indication that he would be for Senator Kennedy. I think it's worthwhile. If you've got the Democratic United States Senator and the Democratic Governor, I think we can get enough votes to put him over on the first ballot.

He said, "I don't care about that. You're not going to get Engle. I know you're not going to get him. I want you to come out for him [Kennedy] right now."

And he was really, here was this young lad who didn't--. The younger brother talking to the Governor of California, and I didn't like

it at all, to be frank with you.

F: He was pushing a little.

B: He was pushing me a little bit hard, although when I look back on it, I think that he had to be tough in this situation. So on Sunday we had a caucus. I released the delegation before the caucus. We had a bitter quarrel. Chet Holifield, who was for Lyndon Johnson, called me a liar, and said I had made a commitment that I would [not] release the delegation and it was what--

F: You did hold it until Sunday?

B: I held it until Sunday, and, of course, the vote wouldn't take place until Wednesday. But I came out for Kennedy on Sunday and worked like hell but was only able to get some thirty-two out of the eighty votes out of the whole convention. Most people thought it was a very poor performance on my part--which it was--in not being able to get more delegates. But when you look back at the way the delegation was constituted with people committed to other candidates, it was just something that you really couldn't do anything about.

Now, one other historical thing that might be of interest. Right after I had that breakfast, I was on "Meet the Press." One of the questions that someone asked me, they asked me whether I thought Lyndon Johnson could carry California.

And I said, "Well, I've just had a most pleasant visit with Senator Johnson and his wife. They were very hospitable hosts, and I liked them very, very much. But I have a feeling that Senator Johnson, coming from where they have not been leaders in the fight for racial equality, and with the tremendous minority population we have in California, plus the

fact that we've got a big case with El Paso Natural Gas which ties Johnson in with oil I think Johnson will have a very difficult time carrying California."

Well, that infuriated Lyndon Johnson. Everybody that came back to California after he became the Vice Presidential candidate in charge of a lot of these space programs. Every one of them--. He would really raise hell about this fellow Pat Brown, the Governor, who tied him up with oil and tied him up with racial intolerance. I never meant to tie him in with any of these things. It was a question addressed to me as to whether or not he could win or not. But they would all come back and tell me about how Johnson would really raise hell about this guy Pat Brown he had been so nice to and had him in his home and then went out and knifed him in the back.

So one day, I can't remember when, I called the Vice President and said, "I would like to have lunch with you and some of the Senators." So we went there, and I can't remember who arranged it. I think maybe Senator Muskie arranged it. I think Senator Muskie had been Governor of Maine, and I was very friendly with him. I think I asked him to arrange the meeting. He was there, and Senator Clark was there. Senator Humphrey came in for a little while. It was in Skeet Johnson's office.

Johnson came in a little bit late, and he really went off on an awful tirade. He never stopped telling me that "Why don't you equate Proxmire with cheese in Wisconsin" and he never stopped. I have never seen the man--. He just kept going--not unfriendly--in defense of himself, in telling me how wrong I was to make that statement. This was after he had become Vice President, and Senator Kennedy was then the President of

the United States. It was really an amazing performance. I've never seen anything like it. You didn't get a chance to get a word in edgewise. Everybody left except Senator Johnson, Vice President Johnson, and myself. But as a result I walked away with the feeling that Johnson was really a tough determined guy. I had never seen anything like it in my life, and I had worked on legislators. But I walked away with the feeling, too, that I had really done him harm in equating him with oil and with racial intolerance. I did it. I didn't intend to do that. If they had asked me whether Johnson was either racially intolerant or favoring the oil companies--

F: It was geography more.

B: It was geography more than personal. But after that President Johnson and I became rather close political friends. We talked to him, and, of course, he asked me to nominate him at 1964, which I, of course, was very, very happy to do.

By the way, I have a copy of the speech that I made, the nominating speech, on tape. You probably have it too, or you will get it.

F: I would like to have it, yes, if we don't.

Let's wind up 1960 here in Los Angeles. Did you have any clue that Kennedy would choose Johnson for Vice President?

B: Not until I went down. Bobby Kennedy called me down to the hotel and said he had an important announcement after he received the nomination early the next mornong.

He said, "What do you think about Johnson?"

And I said to him, "I think Johnson would be pretty good." I think I said, "I think I favor Hubert Humphrey." I can't remember. It's not

very clear in my mind. But I said, "Lyndon Johnson would give balance to the ticket and he's the Majority Leader, and he's a good man."

So I went back to the California delegation. By that time we learned--. Someone called me, I don't know who it was--that Kennedy said it was Johnson, and wondered if the California delegation would go for him.

Then a lot of my liberals in California started to raise hell, and I wired Johnson a letter of--I called him up on the telephone and said to him, "Senator, I'm for you from here to kingdom come. I've got some people in our delegation that are not for you--[that are] going to try to make a floor fight. I think Soapy Williams from Michigan is against you and called up some of our people and called me up and tried to get us to go against you. I'm all for you, and I assure you that you will have nine-tenths of the California delegation." In the end, he had them all, but there was an incipient revolt pending in the California delegation.

F: Did Bobby indicate one way or the other how he stood on Johnson?

B: No, he didn't. I think by the time he saw me that the decision had already been made, and what he was trying to do was to merely give me the courtesy call to ask me--

F: And when the announcement was made, then, you weren't surprised?

B: I wasn't surprised.

F: What did you do during the campaign of '60 to help the ticket?

B: I went all over the United States making speeches. I went to New Jersey and Maryland. [I] went up and down California and fought like hell for the whole ticket up and down the state. I was also fighting for the California Water Project at the same time, so I had to divide my efforts with the California Water Project, and I worked for--. We didn't have a

Senatorial candidate--maybe we did have a Senatorial candidate, I can't remember.

F: No, because Kuchel was defeated in '68, so it--

B: It would have been in '62, and Murphy was elected in '64. So we didn't have a Senatorial fight. But I did everything I could for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, not only in California, but I went around the state, I raised money and did everything I could. When I heard that we had lost in California--We won at first. We were ahead until the absentee ballots came in, and then we lost in the absentee ballots by about thirty-five-forty thousand votes. I was down in Argentina with all the Governors and I was just sick over it, because I thought I had won both my Water Project fight and my fight for Kennedy and Johnson in California.

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Baines Johnson Library.

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