



Jason Sokol's *All Eyes Are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn* was published by Basic Books (2014) and the University of Massachusetts Press (2017). The cover photo shows Edward W. Brooke during his election campaign for Massachusetts Attorney General, Nov. 3, 1962.

**EDITOR'S CHOICE**

## The Color-Blind Commonwealth?: Edward Brooke's Senate Campaign in 1966

JASON SOKOL



**Editor's Introduction:** *The HJM is proud to select as our Editor's Choice Award for this issue an excerpt from All Eyes Are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn, by Jason Sokol, 2014, reprinted by permission of Basic Books, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc. The book was later published in paperback by the University of Massachusetts Press in 2017. In each issue, we highlight a book that relates to an aspect of New England history that we feel is particularly noteworthy and would be of special interest to our readers. The HJM is especially interested in publishing articles and showcasing books that provide a historical perspective on contemporary political, social, and economic issues. Jason Sokol's study offers a deeply nuanced, incisive, and engrossing account of the limits of Northern racial egalitarianism from the 1930s to 2012. As the publisher explains:*

*Massachusetts attempted to abolish racial and religious prejudice; white fans in Brooklyn embraced Jackie Robinson . . . Yet during these same moments, an opposing narrative unfolded—one highlighted by worsening black poverty, hardening patterns of segregation, and exploding incidents of racial violence.<sup>1</sup>*

*Jason Sokol, a historian of the civil rights movement, “probes the conflict between these two warring traditions.” As other historians have also documented, “although the dominant racial philosophies of whites in the North and South were antithetical, opportunity for a majority of black men and women in the North was not very different from what it was in the South.”<sup>2</sup> Sokol agrees: “Rampant segregation in cities across the country rendered racial inequality a national trait more than a Southern aberration” (ix). Historian David Levering Lewis writes that Sokol:*

*argues for a somewhat novel understanding of the North’s “conflicted soul,” which combined two parallel narratives—knee-jerk opposition to change and tokenistic inclusiveness. On the one hand, the region’s violent opposition and calculated amnesia in relation to the civil rights of African-Americans; on the other, its high-minded conceit as custodian of the nation’s conscience and embodiment of John Winthrop’s words: “We shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us.”*

*Most HJM readers will be aware of the violent conflicts over busing and the efforts to integrate Boston schools in the 1960s and ’70s. Few will be aware of the many other struggles that Sokol profiles in All Eyes Are Upon Us. Although some names may be familiar—such as baseball legend Jackie Robinson and Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to the U.S. Congress (1969–83) and the first woman to run for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination (1972)—Sokol’s seminal contribution lies in recovering many hitherto unknown but critically important local stories that challenge the “mystique” or myth of Northern racial egalitarianism.*

*In his first chapter, Sokol explores the rise and fall of the “Springfield Plan,” a pioneering effort to develop a multiracial K–12<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum that was implemented in the late 1930s in Springfield, Massachusetts. It was designed to promote social equality and “a sympathetic attitude toward all racial and nationality groups” (8). Titled “And to Think that It Happened in Springfield: Pioneering Pluralism, Practicing Segregation (1939–45),” Sokol charts the rise and fall of this radical experiment which had gained national recognition and was widely publicized in the national press, newsreels, and Life magazine.*

*At the same time that this new curriculum was being implemented, psychologist Kenneth Clark selected Springfield as his representative Northern, desegregated school system and the site for one of his doll experiments—the experiments which would become famous in the Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case. Traveling from New York City, Clark brought a suitcase of black and white*

dolls which he used with 119 black children ages five to seven in racially mixed classrooms. Clark's results revealed that more black children in Springfield than in the South preferred the white doll (72%), identified it as the "nice" doll (68%) with the "nice" color (63%), and selected the black doll as the "bad" doll (71%). Most significantly, more African American children in Springfield seemed deeply distressed during the testing: some described the brown doll as "ugly" and "dirty"; several burst into tears; others tried to explain away their own skin color as being the result of a suntan. The question that generated the most distress asked the children to self-identify and select the doll that "looks like you." To some, these results suggested that "Springfield blacks suffered more self-hate" than Southern black children and "were more tormented in their racial identities" (13), although Clark himself rejected this interpretation. Clearly, however, Springfield's school system had not instilled racial pride in these young children. Although these Northern results were reported in psychology journals, they were never publicized for fear they might undermine the claim that the South's segregated schools were exceptionally damaging to black children.

In a subsequent chapter, Sokol returns to Springfield as a case study of the challenges of integration in the North. Sokol explores the long and contentious legal battle to desegregate Springfield's public schools. In 1963–64 the Boston NAACP and the city's civil rights leaders had reached an impasse on the issue of whether *de facto* segregation existed in Boston. In February over 20,000 students boycotted Boston schools. Similarly, in 1964 African American parents filed a lawsuit against the Springfield School Committee. Sokol reports that, "The [national] NAACP took up their case, believing that if it broke the back of school segregation in this small city, the North's version of Jim Crow might crumble" (74). The North, however, proved highly resistant to integration, whether in its small or large cities.

Civil rights attorney Robert Carter, described as Thurgood Marshall's "second-in-command" (78), led the Springfield legal case. White school officials, politicians, and other elites repeatedly denied the existence of *de facto* segregation (as opposed to the South's "*de jure*" system of mandated Jim Crow segregation) and repeatedly proclaimed that they were genuinely "color-blind." Averting that they "didn't see" or "notice" color, they questioned how they could be aware of, much less responsible for, segregated schools. The plaintiffs easily proved that Springfield school boundaries had been continuously redrawn over the years in a way that resulted in high levels of school segregation. Employing their color-blind defense, school officials repeatedly denied the physical evidence displayed in the maps brought into the courtroom and the photos of school hallways and classrooms.

*Courtroom litigation was accompanied by civil rights demonstrations, campaigns against police brutality, the fear of a “Selma-type march coming to Springfield,” and Mayor Charlie Ryan’s mobilization of one thousand National Guardsmen. This battle impacted Springfield politics for decades afterwards, and the subsequent white flight reshaped the city.*

*As Sokol explains, “The stakes in the North were messier, harder to see and to articulate. The protests and the boycotts, the litigation and the legislation rarely brought the same sense that an entire era had passed in the night” (99). Targets in the North were elusive. Sokol concludes:*

*The Springfield story also illuminated the racial ideology of white northerners. If African Americans in northern cities had all been up against violent segregationists, the fight might have been more straightforward and more dramatic—more likely to grip the popular imagination. In Springfield, the supposed enemies denied that they were adversaries at all. (100)*

*As a result, “white northerners developed a whole worldview that refused to see, or take responsibility for, the patterns of segregation that defined their cities” (100).*

*In his detailed yet highly moving analysis, Sokol explores these patterns and their legacy. In the popular imagination, the national struggle for civil rights crested in the 1960s, yet Sokol extends its narrative forward another four decades. As he documents, “Over the course of the 1970s, the northeast would show itself to be no archetype of racial progress” (171).*

*In 1965 the Massachusetts General Assembly had passed a pioneering “Racial Imbalance Act” that formally outlawed segregation in all Bay State schools. The act defined racial imbalance as any school in which the number of nonwhites exceeded 50% of the student population. However, it was deeply unpopular among the state’s white voters: only 23% approved the act in a 1966 poll. In Boston only 13% voiced approval. Similarly, only 17% expressed support for open housing laws and 68% believed that a white owner “should be able to refuse to sell his home to an African American” (133). After many failed attempts, the state legislature succeeded in repealing the Racial Imbalance Act in 1974, although this was vetoed by Governor Sargent. While whites strenuously resisted busing throughout the North, in the 1970s Boston would prove to be “exceptional in its level of violence” (213). The Northern state that proudly proclaimed itself the “citadel of political liberalism” would clearly display its hypocrisy to the world.*

*In All Eyes Are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn, Sokol includes chapters on nationally-known racial pioneers such as Jackie*

*Robinson, Shirley Chisholm, and (far less well-known) Massachusetts senator Edward Brooke. Two revealing chapters focus on Connecticut: "The North is Guilty: Abraham Ribicoff's Crusade" and "A Tale of Two Hartfords: Politics and Poverty in a Land of Plenty (1980–1987)." Another chapter examines African American politics in New York City in the 1980s. In a final chapter, Sokol analyzes the election of Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick in 2007, along with Barack Obama's presidential campaigns and reception in the North.*

*The following Editor's Choice Award selection was reproduced with permission of Basic Books and the University of Massachusetts Press and is excerpted from Chapter 4: "The Color-Blind Commonwealth? The Election of Edward Brooke." In 1962 Republican Edward William Brooke III (1919–2015) was elected attorney general of Massachusetts, the highest statewide office of any African American in the country. In 1966 he became the first African American to be elected to the U.S. Senate since Reconstruction. In 1972 he was reelected for a second term. An unwavering champion of civil rights and school and housing desegregation, he was defeated in 1978 in an election in which "white backlash" played a crucial role in Bay State politics.*

*Brooke's election remains exceptional. As of 2020 only ten African Americans had ever served in the U.S. Senate. Until 1913 and the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment, U.S. senators were elected by their state legislatures, not by popular vote. The first African American to serve in the U.S. Senate, Hiram Rhodes Revels, was appointed by the Mississippi state legislature to fill an unexpired term in 1870; he served only one year. In 1875 the Mississippi state legislature elected Blanche Bruce to the U.S. Senate, but Republicans lost power in Mississippi in 1876 and he was not reelected in 1881. Edward Brooke was only the third African American senator and the first elected by popular vote. He served two terms from 1967 to 1979. Progress remained glacially slow, however. Over a decade later, Carol Moseley Braun was elected to the U.S. Senate from Illinois in 1993, and Barack Obama was elected to the U.S. Senate from Illinois in 2005. Both served only a single term in the U.S. Senate. In 2020 Edward Brooke remained one of only three African American senators to be reelected.<sup>3</sup>*

*In a later chapter titled "This Bedeviling Busing Business," Sokol chronicles Brooke's full political career. That chapter is descriptively subtitled, "The Long 1970s, the Trials of Edward Brooke, and the Fall of the North (1968–1979)." This Editor's Choice excerpt focuses on the beginning of Brooke's first Senate campaign in 1966. Author Jason Sokol has also written *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945–75* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006) and *The Heavens Might Crack: The Death and Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Basic Books, 2018).*

*-L. Mara Dodge*

“I never succumbed to the reality,” Edward Brooke reflected some forty years later. By “the reality,” he meant the fierce opposition to racial integration that existed in Massachusetts during the 1960s, the riots that exploded across urban America, and an emergent white backlash: “I never let that deter me.” Instead, Brooke offered Massachusetts voters an alternate reality—a place where race was no political object, where issues of segregation and racial violence had little impact on the campaign for a United States Senate seat. “I was also asking the voters to *rise above* that,” Brooke recalled. “*Rise above* that and vote for me.”<sup>4</sup>

Ed Brooke made for an unlikely Massachusetts senator. He was an Episcopalian and a Republican in a state where Protestants constituted less than one-third of the population and where only one in five voters were registered as Republicans. More to the point, 97% of Bay State residents were white. Ed Brooke was an African American.

Brooke announced his intention to run for the Senate in December 1965. At that time, he was serving his second term as state attorney general. Brooke held the highest statewide office of any African American in the country.



**Edward W. Brooke III when he was elected to the Senate in 1966**

Credit: Frank C. Curtin/Associated Press.

Between 1962 and 1972, he would win four statewide contests in a row—including election as the first African American senator since Reconstruction. He remains the only black senator ever to be reelected.

Brooke walked a fine line throughout his political career. During twelve years in the Senate, he fought hard for civil rights legislation. Yet Brooke was uneasy with the insistent focus on his race. He felt that his racial identity could hem him in. “To be defined as a historical first,” Brooke staffer Richard Norton Smith recalled, “is ironically enough in some ways restrictive. For Brooke, that was a greater challenge.” Brooke would strive to perfect this balance—willing and able to embrace his black identity and the historical dimensions of his own achievement, while at the same time urging the electorate to discard those very facts when they stepped into the voting booth.<sup>5</sup>

Ed Brooke was all of these things, all at once. He was a black man committed to civil rights and a leader who downplayed his own race, a politician acutely aware of the toxic racial atmosphere gathering around him and yet completely unruffled by it. That he could be all of these things, all at once, was at the heart of his political genius. It helped explain how he convinced one million whites in Massachusetts to rise above race by voting for a black man. It accounted for his success as a liberal Republican in a state with many conservative Democrats. And it showed how he could resist the temptation to succumb to the more unsavory parts of reality.

During the same years when Brooke was winning elections, blacks were flocking to Boston. School and housing segregation intensified while black poverty and black unemployment worsened. Bay State voters achieved racial progress in the realm of electoral politics, just as racial inequality deepened by almost every other measure. Massachusetts during the 1960s laid bare the duality at the heart of Northeastern race relations.

Ed Brooke was born in the nation's capital in 1919. His father was a lawyer for the Veterans Administration, and a lifelong Republican. Brooke's grandfather had been a Virginia slave. Brooke attended all-black schools, including Washington's Dunbar High School, and passed his days in a segregated neighborhood. “I never interfaced with white people at all when I was growing up,” he recalled. Brooke graduated from Howard University, and in 1942 he joined the army. He became a member of the 366th Infantry Combat Regiment and reported for training at Fort Devens in Ayer, Massachusetts. At segregated Fort Devens, white soldiers enjoyed exclusive access to the swimming pool, tennis courts, and social clubs. Black soldiers traveled to Roxbury for social life. Brooke found “a wonderful sense of freedom” in the city of Boston—a freedom that had existed neither in



Washington nor on the base. He then shipped off to Italy, rose to the rank of captain, and eventually earned a Bronze Star. He also met and wooed an Italian woman named Remigia Ferrari-Scacco.<sup>6</sup>

At war's end, Brooke moved back to the Bay State. He enrolled in law school at Boston University, then married Remigia in June 1947. After earning his law degree, he opened a practice in Roxbury and bought a home nearby on Crawford Street. Brooke was cementing his place in Boston's black community.

In 1950, Brooke delved into Massachusetts politics. That world would consume him for the next three decades. He ran to become the state representative from Roxbury's Twelfth Ward. It was common practice for candidates to "cross-file"—to seek the nominations of both the Republican and Democratic Parties. Brooke finished far off the pace in the Democratic primary, for the old Irish machine still dominated this party. But Brooke won the Republican nomination. In the general election, he finished third in a field of six. By 1952, when Brooke ran again for state representative, the practice of cross-filing had been banned. So he declared himself a Republican at the outset. He lost, but came closer than before. He expanded his law practice and became active in veterans' organizations. Brooke was retooling, networking, and biding his time.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Bay State was deeply Democratic, party meant little in terms of ideology. The political rivalries in Massachusetts involved ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, and geography—not policy. Democrats congregated in the cities and built their strength in Irish Catholic neighborhoods, while Republicans drew their electoral power from suburban Yankees. According to the *Boston Globe's* Martin Nolan, "'Liberalism' and 'Conservatism' have been mentioned as issues in Massachusetts politics as often as, say, the agricultural parity on soybeans."<sup>8</sup>

Personality proved a more valuable tender. Since United States senators were first elected by popular vote in 1913, eight men had represented Massachusetts: two Kennedys, two Lodges, a Saltonstall, and a Coolidge among them. It was a close-knit world of powerful political families. Breaking in could seem impossible.

In 1960, Republican governor Christian Herter encouraged Brooke to seek the open office of secretary of state. At the Republican convention in Worcester, Elizabeth McSherry of Newton seconded Brooke's nomination. She highlighted the gravity of the moment: "Massachusetts has a great heritage in equal rights that started before the Civil War, but that was over a hundred years ago and we need to be reminded that we are still in the forefront of civil rights and must practice what we preached." Republican delegates cloaked

themselves in the Bay State's progressive mystique as Brooke became the first African American nominated for statewide office. This invocation of history, and the spirit of self-congratulation, would recur in many of Brooke's later campaigns.<sup>9</sup>

He faced a steep uphill climb. "I wanted to prove that white voters would vote for qualified Negro candidates," Brooke wrote in his 2006 autobiography, "just as Negroes had voted for qualified white candidates." African Americans numbered 95,000 in a state of almost five million. When Brooke campaigned in small towns, he was changing the color of voters' worlds. "Some of our voters haven't even seen a Negro," Brooke mused to a journalist. "They will have to meet me and be reassured that I'm not an ogre."<sup>10</sup>

Brooke's opponent was also an ambitious young politician: Kevin White. White would later become the mayor of Boston. At the time, he traded on the racial issue. His 1960 campaign used a deceptively simple slogan: "Vote White." Brooke later admitted that he was "surprised and hurt," terming the slogan "a blatant appeal to people to support him—and reject me—on the basis of race." When Brooke pressed the issue, White proclaimed innocence: he had only used his own surname on a bumper sticker. Brooke remained unconvinced. But in public he never broached the subject.<sup>11</sup>

The battle for secretary of state was hardly the most important race on the ticket that year. John F. Kennedy, the Bay State's junior senator, had emerged as the Democratic nominee for president. He tried to persuade Americans to vote the first Roman Catholic into the Oval Office.

At the same moment, Brooke was asking the Massachusetts electorate to look past his racial identity. Kennedy eked out a victory over Richard Nixon. The Republican Party struggled in the Bay State, but Ed Brooke almost pulled off an upset. Kevin White won 1,207,000 votes to Brooke's 1,095,000. Brooke reflected, "I proved that I could overcome the racial and financial handicaps." Some Massachusetts voters were proud to support a black man. For others, race remained a barrier. Brooke's race functioned alternately as an obstacle or an allure.<sup>12</sup>

From 1961 to 1962, Brooke headed the Boston Finance Commission. He went after the corruption and bribery that seemed endemic to Boston politics. This experience helped Brooke to fashion himself as a crusader for good government. And when the office of state attorney general opened in 1962, Brooke considered pursuing it. Elliot Richardson, a wealthy lawyer, also desired that position. He encouraged Brooke to seek the office of lieutenant governor instead. Brooke declined the offer and advised Richardson to prepare for a fight. Richardson "had planned that he would be elected

attorney general,” Brooke remembered, “and then governor, maybe the Senate and then on to the White House.” Brooke threw a wrench into those plans. “This unknown person came up from the South, that had never been elected to any public office . . . Sort of upset the apple-cart.”<sup>13</sup> It was a time when politicians learned their fate in convention halls. At the Republican convention in Worcester, Richardson and Brooke engaged in a nasty battle. Brooke’s father, Edward Brooke Jr., made the trek to Worcester. In the first order of business, the delegates selected Senator Leverett Saltonstall as the



**Above:** In 1962 Brooke won a strongly fought G.O.P. convention endorsement for attorney general, plus a primary fight before his election as attorney general.



**Above:** Senator Edward Brooke waves to the crowd at the 1968 Republican National Convention in Miami. In 1964 he had refused to endorse Sen. Barry Goldwater for president, commenting later, “You can’t say the Negro left the Republican Party; the Negro feels he was evicted from the Republican Party.”

convention's chairman. The Saltonstall name was gold in Massachusetts politics: Four generations of Saltonstalls had held office. Leverett Saltonstall served three terms as governor and twenty-two years in the United States Senate. He was the very definition of a Yankee Brahmin. And Elliot Richardson had previously worked on his staff.

By early evening, Brooke recalled, the auditorium had turned "hectic, hot, and steamy." After every delegation but one had announced its votes, the candidates were deadlocked at 839 delegates apiece. Then Middlesex First District went for Richardson, giving him 854 delegates—the minimum required in order to claim a majority. Richardson supporters celebrated. Some headed out of the convention hall and made for the Massachusetts Turnpike, motoring back toward Boston. But one Middlesex delegate, Francis Alden Wood, stepped to the microphone and asked to be recognized. Wood charged that the votes had been counted before he made his choice. He wished to vote for Brooke. Now Richardson appeared one vote shy of victory. Leverett Saltonstall ordered a second ballot. Chaos gripped the hall. Brooke and Richardson tried desperately to locate their supporters. When the voting commenced, Brooke's father retired to the balcony to sit by himself. The delegates now saw that neither candidate was necessarily the favorite. On the second ballot, Brooke garnered 792 votes to Richardson's 673. As Brooke claimed victory, his father wept with joy.<sup>14</sup>

In the general election, Francis Kelly opposed Brooke. A former lieutenant governor and attorney general, Kelly embodied the stereotype of Boston's Irish Democratic machine. Days before the election, radio host Jerry Williams invited each candidate on the air—one after the other. "If I were not a gentleman," Kelly sniped, "I'd say that my opponent is a Negro man who has a white wife." Brooke followed. And he began to turn the racial issue. "Kelly's statement is sad," Brooke said. He insisted that Massachusetts voters were above racism—that they could, and would, elect him in spite of his race. The electorate would prove itself to be color-blind. But there was also another dynamic at hand. Brooke's race added resonance to an argument about political novelty. Kelly was a politician of the old school; Brooke was the agent of change. Brooke promised to transcend partisan and ethnic divides, and to transform the prevailing culture of political corruption. Everything about Brooke seemed new. He *looked* like the political future.<sup>15</sup>

This strategy appealed to a specific segment of voters. It was about generation, geography, and class as much as race. Brooke wooed World War Two veterans and new suburbanites. Many of these voters had long felt under the thumb of Boston's Irish Democrats. "The Hub," known for its corruption and its insularity, had become an embarrassment to them. For them, Brooke

was the harbinger of a brighter future—a vehicle that would whisk them away from the dreary present. The younger generation of Massachusetts voters, those who had escaped Boston, became his core constituents.<sup>16</sup>

The 1962 election was cruel to the Republicans nationwide. In Massachusetts, a Democratic groundswell swept Ted Kennedy into the United States Senate in a special election. But Brooke pieced together a decisive victory. He had encouraged Democrats to cross party lines. Thousands of bumper stickers across the commonwealth advertised: “Another Democrat for Brooke.” Racking up large majorities in the suburbs, Brooke won by a margin of 56% to 44%. When one of President Kennedy’s aides told him of Brooke’s victory, Kennedy remarked, “That’s the biggest news in the country.” Brooke was the only Republican to win constitutional office in the Bay State that year. Brooke seized on this as more evidence to bolster his argument about color-blindness. “The voters had ignored race,” he explained.<sup>17</sup>

Brooke could not ignore race during his first term as attorney general. He quickly found himself at the center of a fight over school integration in Boston. The city’s schools were almost completely segregated. In 1963, Boston’s NAACP requested a hearing with the Boston School Committee. Louise Day Hicks presided over the June 11 meeting. She refused to acknowledge the existence of de facto segregation. In response, on June 19, more than one quarter of Boston’s African American students boycotted the schools. Both sides hardened their stances during the ensuing months, and Hicks won reelection in November with almost 70% of the vote. Boston had fast become an incubator of the “white backlash” as well as a crucible of the northern black freedom struggle.<sup>18</sup>

African Americans drew up plans for another boycott of Boston’s schools. They set the date for February 26, 1964. The state commissioner of education asked Brooke to rule on whether the boycott was legal. Brooke lost sleep over the decision. “I labored with it, I prayed, I did everything I could. But mostly what I did was research and have my staff work with me on that.” Brooke kept asking himself one question: “What does the law say about it? It says that you can’t keep children out of school to protest.” In the end, Brooke outlawed the boycott. He questioned its legality and its wisdom. “Boycotts, sit-ins, and demonstrations don’t achieve the desired consequences in this Commonwealth. On the contrary, they merely intensify the resentment of the population at large and undermine the best interests of the Negro community.” Less than a year earlier, deep below the Mason-Dixon line, Martin Luther King Jr. had also ruminated about civil disobedience. He reached the opposite conclusion. In his famous “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” King wrote of those moments in which Americans were compelled to

reject state laws in favor of a higher law. Despite Brooke's ruling, the boycott occurred as planned on February 26. Twenty thousand students, black and white, boycotted Boston's public schools. Interracial groups of activists staged protests and gathered in mass meetings throughout the city. For Brooke's stand, he lost several allies in Boston's civil rights community. "That cat can't help us," said Cornell Eaton, an African American and chairman of the Boston Action Group. "He's too involved with the white power structure." This kind of criticism would dog Brooke throughout his career.<sup>19</sup>

Brooke took the criticisms to heart. During an interview in 2009, he could still feel the sting. "To this day there are critics. They will never forgive me for that." At root, Brooke did not view himself as a civil rights leader. He was a politician, a lawyer, and a policymaker. "I was not known as a big civil rights leader, and I never wanted to be a great civil rights leader. I said you've got them out there . . . thank God . . . but I'm not that one." For Brooke, the distinction between civil rights and electoral politics was crucial.<sup>20</sup>

At the level of national politics, the Republican Party lurched to the right. The party's 1964 convention, held in San Francisco, was one of the low points in Brooke's political life. The party chose as its presidential nominee Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona. Goldwater opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and railed against government spending. Brooke still wanted to believe that the Republicans were the party of Lincoln, that they could stand for innovation and progressivism—for more than just opposition to government. But the events in San Francisco's Cow Palace made him feel like an outcast.<sup>21</sup>

In November, Lyndon Johnson defeated Goldwater in a landslide. For the first time in American history, a Democratic president won every New England state. Johnson carried Massachusetts by a percentage margin of 76 to 23%. Ted Kennedy was elected to a full term in the Senate, winning by one million votes. Still, Ed Brooke won reelection by 800,000 votes. He carried 349 of 351 Massachusetts towns; Blackstone and Millville, on the Rhode Island border, stood as the only holdouts. As the *Newark Sunday News* reported, Brooke was "at a new zenith."<sup>22</sup>

Through the summer and fall of 1965, speculation swirled about whether Senator Leverett Saltonstall would step down at age seventy-three. Indeed, Brooke was thinking about higher office. He had already enlisted a polling organization to analyze his prospects for the United States Senate as well as the governorship. By Brooke's own reckoning, he had amassed "the most powerful . . . political organization in the state." He was prepared to turn it loose.<sup>23</sup>

Saltonstall scheduled a press conference for December 29, 1965. Brooke pounced. Although he did not know Saltonstall's intentions, Brooke quickly announced a press conference of his own for the following day. Brooke devised three possible courses of action. If Saltonstall announced for reelection, Brooke would launch his own reelection bid for attorney general. If Saltonstall retired, Brooke would ask Republican governor John Volpe whether he planned to pursue the Senate seat. And if Volpe fancied the Senate seat, Brooke would declare himself a candidate for governor. If Volpe stood pat, Brooke would run for the Senate.

On December 29, Leverett Saltonstall announced that he would not seek reelection. Brooke set his plan in motion. He phoned Volpe and asked his intentions, but the governor was noncommittal. Brooke pressed Volpe, noting that he had already scheduled a press conference. In multiple conversations, Volpe pleaded with Brooke to take his time. Volpe never did commit one way or the other, so Brooke forged ahead. On the night before New Year's Eve, in Boston's Sheraton Plaza Hotel, Brooke shared the stage with his wife Remigia and their two teenage daughters. He declared his candidacy for the United States Senate: "I have a deep and abiding faith in the ability and desire of the people of Massachusetts to make their choice on the basis of qualifications and programs." Although the announcement itself came as no shock, the prospect that Brooke raised was no less enchanting.<sup>24</sup>

Brooke rued the emphasis on his skin color. He said in April 1966, "The racial issue has been beaten, beaten, beaten. I'm born what I am so you take me as I am." Two months earlier, Brooke had insisted, "The voters of the state are so racially blind, they reelected me by 800,000 votes." *Life* duly heralded him as the "Bay State's Color-Blind Candidate."<sup>25</sup>

Brooke entered the Senate contest with a clear advantage. One early poll pitted Brooke against Endicott "Chub" Peabody, the eventual Democratic nominee. It revealed a 67% to 21% advantage for Brooke. He maintained a commanding lead in the polls through the spring of 1966.<sup>26</sup>

During the summer, riots flared in some thirty-six American cities—from the Hunters Point section of San Francisco to Cleveland's Hough neighborhood. African Americans clenched their fists and cried "Black Power." The white backlash mounted. Martin Luther King Jr. took his civil rights campaign to Chicago, where he was struck with a rock in Marquette Park. It was an unseemly time to talk about color-blindness. When voters looked at Ed Brooke, they surely registered his race.<sup>27</sup>

Brooke's campaign slogan acknowledged this reality and played on it. In blue letters set against a white backdrop, his bumper stickers and pins proclaimed: "Proudly for Brooke." The slogan summarized, somewhat

implicitly, the relationship between the black attorney general and those millions of white voters upon whom he depended. "Proudly for Brooke," as the *Boston Globe's* James Doyle suggested, was "faintly suggestive of the so-called 'conscience backlash,' that political urge to vote for Brooke in order to place a Negro in the United States Senate and expiate the everyday discrimination members of that race suffer." Parents in Newton, laborers in Holyoke, professors in Williamstown, and bar-backs in Brighton could display their own enlightenment on their bumper or their lapel. They need not support school integration or open housing; they could simply proclaim that they backed Brooke, with pride in their African American attorney general and in their great state.<sup>28</sup>

"Proudly For Brooke" sparked internal debate from the beginning. Brooke's campaign manager, Al Gammal, wrote to him on May 9, 1966: "I do not like the word 'proudly,' and certainly not in this context." Gammal detected in this phrase emotional affirmation more than political substance. "If the salient implication, and it may be taken that way, is that we are proud because you are a Negro from Massachusetts, then I resent it and so will the people, and for that matter, so ought you." Gammal found emptiness in the very syntax, and suggested a number of alternatives. "Believe in Brooke—Vote for Brooke—Elect Brooke—Love Brooke—Hate Brooke—are all affirmative verbs, but 'proudly' . . . is sterile and meaningless. 'Proudly for Brooke' on the bumper sticker says nothing." Al Gammal held out hope for a color-blind campaign: "It seems to me that the advertising firm is not looking at Ed Brooke, the *man*, but Ed Brooke, the Negro." Gammal thought that if Brooke truly wanted to wage a campaign above and beyond race, his slogan ought to reflect that. Gammal lost this battle, at least initially. "Proudly For Brooke" continued to adorn bumpers and billboards across the state.<sup>29</sup>

Whites in New England exhibited two disparate impulses when it came to race, and both of them found expression in Ed Brooke's Senate campaign. On the one hand, they quaked with fear at the prospect of urban violence and Black Power—two entities that became increasingly linked in white minds. On the other hand, many in Massachusetts were eager to support an African American for high office. It was not that white northerners were all either bleeding-heart racial liberals or charter members of the white backlash. For many individuals, the fear and the pride mingled together.

By the end of the summer, the pride still seemed to be winning out. Brooke was juggling the impossible. He waged a color-blind campaign while at the same time encouraging those voters who were happy to bash the racial barrier. The August polls found him well ahead of every potential Democratic nominee.



This *Editor's Choice Award* selection was reproduced with permission of Basic Books and the University of Massachusetts Press and is excerpted from Jason Sokol's *All Eyes Are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn* (2014), Chapter 4: "The Color-Blind Commonwealth? The Election of Edward Brooke," pages 103–114.

## POSTSCRIPT:

Proclaiming, "I do not intend to be a national leader of the Negro people," Brooke presented himself as a politician, not a civil rights crusader. In November he handily defeated former Governor Endicott Peabody with 62% of the vote. His election victory made headlines both nationally and internationally. Sokol caustically notes that:

Massachusetts offered its new senator as a gift to the nation. Half of the story was that a black man would be integrating the United States Senate. The other half was that the old Bay State had done it again. Speakers invoked the example of the Pilgrims and the words of Daniel Webster; the ghosts of abolitionists and Radical Republicans danced across the pages of magazines and newspapers. In the afterglow of Brooke's victory, leaders and citizens alike summoned the northern mystique (126).

This myth would be challenged many times before fading over the next decade. Even as his victory "served as a parable of progress," the social and economic conditions of African Americans in the Bay State had been worsening. Theirs was "a story of increased segregation, solidifying ghettos, deepening black poverty, and endless battles against a resilient white prejudice" (132). Despite fears of a white backlash, Brooke would go on to win a second-term election in 1972 with 61% of the vote.

Brooke had always identified himself as a public official who happened to be black, and not as his state's black senator. As with his racial identity, Brooke had to carefully manage his political identity. He was a liberal, Episcopalian Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic and Irish Catholic state. His commitment to the Republican Party drew from his family heritage, yet the party of Lincoln was changing quickly in the 1960s.<sup>30</sup> Brooke championed civil rights, fair housing, and tax credits for the working poor. He was one of the first Republican senators to challenge and lead the campaign against

President Nixon's archconservative nominations for the Supreme Court. Although Brooke had been discussed as a possible vice president on Richard Nixon's reelection ticket and then as a possible replacement when Spiro Agnew resigned, he became the first Republican to publicly call for Nixon's resignation after Watergate. On the issue of the Vietnam War, Brooke, a decorated combat veteran, was torn. An early critic of the war, he moved from dove to hawk, then back to dove. He supported the Equal Rights Amendment and was a strong defender of abortion rights.

Although he thought it was not an ideal solution, Brooke tirelessly defended school busing as the only way to achieve school integration in a racially segregated society. Even when repeatedly warned that his advocacy of busing was political suicide, he never wavered. In the Senate he led the defeat



### 1967 NAACP Award Ceremony

On the right is NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins presenting the Springarn Medal to Sen. Edward W. Brooke (left) for "distinguished achievement" as a public servant at the NAACP Convention in 1967. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy is in the center. Kennedy had been elected to the Senate in 1962; he and Brooke worked closely together. Both supported busing and abortion rights, hot button issues in the Bay State. Sokol notes that, "The age of busing was not an easy time for Ted Kennedy, but neither did it spell [his] political death." Whereas Kennedy "cruised to reelection" in 1976, Brooke was defeated in 1978 (p. 223).

of numerous bills that sought to weaken or overturn civil rights legislation. The NAACP highlighted his accomplishments, noting that between 1974 and 1978 Brooke had led the fight in Congress “against efforts to cut back civil rights progress in housing, education, affirmative action, human services, community development and voting rights.”<sup>31</sup>

That same year, however, Brooke was defeated in his reelection bid for a third term by a little-known Lowell congressman, Paul Tsongas, who ran as a “color-blind” candidate. Averting reverse racism, Tsongas asserted that it was “the other side of racism” to reelect Brooke because of his race. Tsongas won with a ten-point margin of victory. Brooke was devastated. The U.S. Senate lost its only African American senator and one of its most outspoken and effective defenders of civil rights legislation. Sokol writes that, “The Senate was losing its old liberal lions” (228). A new generation of liberal Democratic politicians rejected busing, as epitomized by Delaware Senator Joe Biden.

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Levering Lewis provides a cogent summary of Sokol’s analysis of Brooke’s “fall from grace” in the eyes of Massachusetts’ white electorate:

[Sokol] highlights the moment when Brooke encountered the third rail of race politics above the Mason-Dixon line. In a 1975 *U.S. News & World Report* article entitled “Should School Busing Be Stopped?” Brooke was saddled with the role of chief senatorial advocate of busing. The article recapped Brooke’s lively debate with Joseph Biden, a young senator from Delaware and already a loud voice among the opponents of “forced busing.” Already facing an order from a federal court to integrate their public schools, many Bostonians were outraged. It was bad enough that their senator defended abortion rights. His espousal of busing left them feeling completely betrayed. Bay State voters had elected Brooke attorney general and senator in the full confidence, Sokol says, that “they need not support school integration or open housing; they could simply proclaim that they backed Brooke, with pride in their African-American attorney general and in their great state.”<sup>32</sup>

By 1978 Brooke had served his usefulness. One of the most popular politicians in Massachusetts was soon forgotten. Sokol concludes with the question, “Very few, including Massachusetts natives and residents, know the story of Ed Brooke. If [his election] was such a landmark, if it so moved the world, why is it so little remembered?” (131). Massachusetts no longer needed

a symbol of racial progress; white Bostonians' violent anti-busing campaign in the 1970s had revealed its hollowness. Massachusetts, along with the rest of the nation, had grown weary of battles over civil rights, busing, affirmative action, and the seemingly intractable problems of a racially divided society.

However, over the next four decades, race relations and racial indicators would improve in the North. In 2006 African American Deval Patrick was elected governor of Massachusetts and reelected in 2010. Despite the North's mixed legacy and historically "warring impulses," Barack Obama's election revealed the schism that remained between white Northerners and Southerners. In 2008 Massachusetts voters gave the Obama-Biden ticket 61.8% of their vote (falling slightly to 60.7% in 2012). This contrasted sharply to the white vote in the former Confederate states (31%) and even fewer white voters in the "Deep South" (less than 15%). Meanwhile, Massachusetts had become far more racially and ethnically diverse, although it was still far whiter demographically than the national average. According to the U.S. Census, in 2018 non-Hispanic whites made up 72.1% (compared to 60.7% nationally), Hispanics were 11.9%, African Americans 8.8%, Asians 6.9%, and Native Americans/Hawaiians 0.6% of the Massachusetts population, while "two or more races" accounted for 2.4%, and "other races" 4.17%. Jason Sokol's *All Eyes Are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn* provides an extremely nuanced and perceptive account of nearly a century of race relations in Massachusetts, New England, and the North.

-L. Mara Dodge

HJM

## Notes

1. Publisher's description, [www.umass.edu/umpress/title/all-eyes-are-upon-us](http://www.umass.edu/umpress/title/all-eyes-are-upon-us) Accessed Feb. 20, 2020. This paraphrases Sokol's concluding paragraph on p. 314.
2. David Levering Lewis, Review of *All Eyes are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn*, *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, Jan. 9, 2015, 15 (emphasis added). Lewis is the author of a Pulitzer Prize-winning, two-volume biography of W. E. B. DuBois, along with another dozen works.
3. Brooke tells his life story in his autobiography, *Bridging the Divide: My Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006). Brooke has received very little attention from historians and is barely known among the general public. Although included in lists of racial pioneers, he is rarely included in the popular pantheon of civil rights leaders.

4. Interview with Edward Brooke, by Renee Pouissant, February 2001, Oral History Archive, National Visionary Leadership Project, <http://www.visionaryproject.org/brookeedward/>; telephone interview with Edward Brooke, by author, December 10, 2009.
5. Interview with Richard Norton Smith, Public Affairs Radio, C-Span, 2007.
6. Interview with Edward Brooke, by Renee Pouissant; Edward Brooke, *Bridging the Divide: My Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 4, 22–23.
7. Brooke, *Bridging the Divide*, 54–56.
8. Martin Nolan, “The Last Hurrahs Are Fading,” *Boston Globe Magazine*, November 6, 1966, 7.
9. John Henry Cutler, *Ed Brooke: Biography of a Senator* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1972), 55.
10. Brooke, *Bridging the Divide*, 67; “A Negro Runs for State Office,” *Look*, November 8, 1960, 112.
11. Brooke, *Bridging the Divide*, 69.
12. *Ibid.*, 70.
13. Interview with Edward Brooke, by author.
14. Brooke, *Bridging the Divide*, 85.
15. *Ibid.*, 93.
16. Interview with Edward Brooke, by author.
17. Brooke, *Bridging the Divide*, 94–95; John Fenton, “Primary Tuesday in Massachusetts,” *New York Times*, September 16, 1962.
18. Alan Lupo, *Liberty’s Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), 135–150.
19. Interview with Edward Brooke, by author; Edward Sheehan, “Brooke of Massachusetts: A Negro Governor on Beacon Hill?,” *Harper’s*, June 1964, 46; Peter Cummings, “Boston Groups Plan School Boycott Despite Attorney General’s Warning,” *The Harvard Crimson*, February 12, 1964; Cutler, *Ed Brooke*, 120.
20. Interview with Edward Brooke, by author.
21. Interview with Edward Brooke, by Renee Pouissant. Brooke would articulate his views in his 1966 book *Edward Brooke, The Challenge of Change: Crisis in Our Two-Party System* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966). Historian Leah Wright argues that Brooke did not embrace Democratic liberalism. She labels his ideology a “progressive conservatism.” Leah Wright, “‘The Challenge of Change’: Edward Brooke, the Republican Party, and the Struggle for Redemption,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, 13, no.1 (Jan.–Mar. 2011): 98.
22. John Fenton, “Johnson Carries All New England,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1964; Elinor Hartshorn, “The Quiet Campaigner: Edward W. Brooke in Massachusetts,” Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1973, 97; “The Figures,” *Time*, November 13, 1964; Peter Carter, “Boston’s Brooke,” *Newark Sunday News*, December 13, 1964.
23. Interview with Edward Brooke, by Renee Pouissant.

24. David Broder, "Negro Announces for Senate Race," *New York Times*, December 31, 1965; "Candidate for Senator," *New York Times*, December 31, 1965; Hartshorn, "The Quiet Campaigner," 127–128; Statement by Edward W. Brooke, Box 621, Folder: U.S. Senate, 1966—Announcement of Candidacy and Opening of Campaign Headquarters, Edward Brooke Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
25. "The Bay State's Color-Blind Candidate," *Life*, April 8, 1966, 57, 64; "Negro in Mass. Senate Race Stresses Issues," *Newark Sunday News*, February 6, 1966.
26. John Becker and Eugene Heaton Jr., "The Election of Senator Edward W. Brooke," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 31, No. 3 (Autumn 1967): 349, 357; John Becker to Edward Brooke (December 28, 1964), Box 624, Folder—Campaign Materials: U.S. Senate, 1966—Opinion Polls, EB Papers.
27. Ralph, *Northern Protest*, 30–31.
28. James Doyle, "Brooke Alters Campaign Strategy: Drops Slogan, Wants Debate," *New York Times*, October 9, 1966.
29. Al Gammal to Edward W. Brooke (May 9, 1966), Box 621, Folder: U.S. Senate, 1966—Campaign Literature, EB Papers.
30. Why was Brooke a Republican? He explained to author John Avlon that, "The Republican Party was the party that gave hope and inspiration to minorities . . . My father was a Republican. My mother was a Republican. They wouldn't dare be a Democrat. The Democrats were a party opposed to civil rights. The South was all Democratic conservatives. And the African-American community considered them the enemy." Quoted in John Avlon, "Ed Brooke: The Senate's Civil Rights Pioneer and Prophet of a Post-Racial America," *The Daily Beast*, Jan. 4, 2015. Accessed online Feb. 20, 2020.
31. Leah M. Wright, "'The Challenge of Change': Edward Brooke, The Republican Party, and the Struggle for Redemption," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, 13 (Mar. 2011): 91–118.
32. Lewis, 15.