# Edward William Brooke III 1919–

# UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ 1967-1979 REPUBLICAN FROM MASSACHUSETTS

Edward W. Brooke's election to the U.S. Senate in 1966 ended an 85-year absence of African-American Senators. Brooke was the first popularly elected Senator and the first black politician from Massachusetts to serve in Congress. While he professed loyalty to the Republican Party, he was an independent thinker who acted according to his conscience. Throughout his political career, Brooke demonstrated resiliency and defined himself as a representative of his entire constituency rather than as an African-American Senator seeking solely to advance black interests.

Edward William Brooke III, was born in Washington, DC, on October 26, 1919. Named for his grandfather, father, and deceased sister Edwina, he lived with his father, Edward Brooke, Jr., a graduate of Howard University Law School and a longtime lawyer with the Veterans Administration; his mother, Helen Seldon; and his older sister, Helene.<sup>2</sup> After graduating from Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, in 1936, Ed Brooke enrolled in Howard University. Originally intending to pursue a career in medicine, he decided to major in sociology, earning a bachelor of science degree in 1941. Shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Brooke entered the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant. Before serving overseas in World War II, Brooke was stationed with the segregated 366th Infantry Regiment at Fort Devens in Ayer, Massachusetts. Like many black Members of the era, Brooke felt keenly the irony of fighting for democracy abroad while facing racial discrimination in the armed forces. The Massachusetts base implemented a whites-only policy for all clubs, as well as the swimming pool, the tennis courts, and the general store. "In every regard, we were treated as secondclass soldiers, if not worse, and we were angry," Brooke recalled. "I felt a personal frustration and bitterness I had

not known before in my life."<sup>3</sup> While stateside, Brooke defended black enlisted men in military court. Despite a lack of legal training, he earned a reputation as a competent public defender and a "soldier's lawyer."<sup>4</sup> His experience on the Massachusetts military base inspired him to earn an LL.B. in 1948 and an LL.M. in 1949 from Boston University.<sup>5</sup>

Brooke spent 195 days with his unit in Italy. His fluent Italian and his light skin enabled him to cross enemy lines to communicate with Italian partisans. By the war's end, Brooke had earned the rank of captain, a Bronze Star, and a Distinguished Service Award. During his tour in Europe, he also met Italian-born Remigia Ferrari-Scacco. After a two-year long-distance relationship, they married on June 7, 1947, in Roxbury, Massachusetts. The couple had two daughters: Edwina and Remi. Brooke divorced in 1978 and married Anne Fleming in 1979. Brooke and his second wife had a son, Edward W. Brooke IV.

Brooke declined offers to join established law firms, choosing instead to start his own practice in the predominantly African-American community of Roxbury. At the urging of friends from his former army unit, Brooke interrupted his law career to run for the Massachusetts house of representatives in 1950. Lacking party affiliation, Brooke took advantage of a state law allowing candidates to cross-file. Despite his nonexistent political experience, he received the endorsement of the Republican Party for the house seat representing Roxbury. Unsuccessful in the general election, Brooke entered the race two years later, winning the Republican nomination but losing to his Democratic opponent.<sup>7</sup>

Brooke resumed his law career after his failed attempts at election to the Massachusetts legislature. During his hiatus from politics, he established himself as a successful lawyer and built community ties that would prove significant



in future bids for elected office.8 In 1960, he re-entered the political fray, running for Massachusetts secretary of state. Although Brooke lost once again, he surprised many people by capturing more than one million votes in an election in which John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts was the Democratic Party's presidential nominee.9 During this period, Brooke attained valuable name recognition and a reputation as an honest and determined public servant. In recognition of his strong performance in the campaign, Republican Governor John Volpe of Massachusetts appointed Brooke chairman of the Boston Finance Commission, whose purpose was to uncover corruption in the city's municipal agencies. During his two-year tenure, Brooke transformed the commission into a respectable and effective organization, and his position helped make him one of the most popular political figures in the state.<sup>10</sup>

In 1962, Brooke achieved his goal to win an elected position. After earning the Republican nomination for Massachusetts attorney general, he easily defeated the Democratic challenger. As the only member of his party to win statewide election in 1962 and the first African American to serve as a state attorney general, Brooke garnered national attention.<sup>11</sup> Brooke continued his efforts to thwart corruption in the state government. He also recommended a series of measures to protect consumers' rights and fought to end housing discrimination. Civil rights leaders criticized Brooke's refusal to support a 1964 boycott by African-American students to protest segregation in the Boston school system. "I am not a civil rights leader, and I don't profess to be," Brooke once declared, explaining the divergence between legal interpretation and his personal views on racial equality.<sup>12</sup> His moderate response to the proposed protest won him invaluable backing from many voters in the predominantly white state.13

In 1966 Brooke authored *The Challenge of Change: Crisis in Our Two-Party System*, outlining many of his political principles, including his beliefs about civil rights. The "issue [civil rights] is pressing on the nation, and cries out for a solution," Brooke wrote, arguing that in addition

to legislation, African Americans needed access to a quality education to compete with whites.<sup>14</sup> While he promoted change, Brooke steadily maintained that militancy undermined the civil rights movement.

After two terms as attorney general (1962–1966), Brooke announced his candidacy in 1965 for the U.S. Senate seat left vacant by the retirement of Leverett Saltonstall. During the campaign against Democrat Endicott Peabody, formerly the governor of Massachusetts (he was unopposed in the Republican primary), Brooke vowed to work for "the establishment of peace, the preservation of freedom for all who desire it, and a better life for people at home and abroad."15 Labeling himself a "creative Republican," Brooke successfully courted voters from both parties by emphasizing his moderate viewpoints. 16 His criticism of militant civil rights activists resonated with many voters in Massachusetts. Despite the enthusiastic backing of popular Massachusetts Senator Edward (Ted) Kennedy, Peabody could not best Brooke on Election Day. On November 8, 1966, Brooke earned a seat in the 90th Congress (1967-1969), winning 62 percent of the vote.<sup>17</sup> His victory met with considerable fanfare, both in Massachusetts and the nation; Brooke was the first African American elected to the Senate since the Reconstruction Era. Asked to comment on his victory, Brooke praised the people of Massachusetts for their ability to "judge you on your merit and your worth alone." He promised to use his position to "unite men who have not been united before," reiterating his pledge to represent his constituents equally regardless of race.<sup>18</sup>

On the opening day of the 90th Congress, Senator Kennedy, the senior Senator of Massachusetts, escorted the newly elected Brooke down the aisle of the Senate Chamber by long-standing tradition. The Senators greeted Brooke with a standing ovation. "I felt like a member of the club," Brooke said. "They didn't overdo it. They didn't underdo it." Unlike many of his African-American colleagues in the House, Brooke experienced little institutional racism in the Senate. "In all my years in the Senate, I never encountered an overt act of hostility,"

the Massachusetts Senator asserted.<sup>20</sup> Brooke later recalled using the Senate gym and the adjoining facilities without incident. Early in his first term, Brooke went to the Senators' swimming pool in the Russell Senate Office Building. Southern Democrats and staunch segregationists John Stennis of Mississippi, John McClellan of Arkansas, and Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, greeted Brooke and invited him to join them in the pool. "There was no hesitation or ill will that I could see," Brooke recollected of this positive reception by his Senate colleagues. "Yet these were men who consistently voted against legislation that would have provided equal opportunity to others of my race. I felt that if a senator truly believed in racial separatism I could live with that, but it was increasingly evident that some members of the Senate played on bigotry purely for political gain."21

Initially assigned to the Aeronautical and Space Sciences, Banking and Currency, and Government Operations committees, Brooke also served on the Armed Services and the Joint Committee on Bicentennial Arrangements committees for one Congress.<sup>22</sup> During the 92nd to the 95th Congresses (1971–1979), Brooke was on the Appropriations, Special Aging, and Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs committees. Brooke also sat on the Select Equal Education Opportunity Committee, the Joint Committee on Defense Production, and the Select Standards and Conduct Committee. His ability to secure assignments on prominent committees such as Banking and Currency and Armed Services while a junior Member was due in large measure to the "Johnson rule," instituted by Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas during his tenure as Senate Democratic Minority Leader in the early 1950s; senior Democrats believed giving junior Members at least one important committee assignment benefited the entire caucus. Johnson made sure the junior Members knew that it was *he* who conferred the plum assignments and considered the practice a means to ensure their fealty. He continued this system as Majority Leader, and senior Senate Republican leaders, such as Everett Dirksen of Illinois (who was Minority Leader when Brooke was first

elected), adopted it as well.23

President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Brooke to the President's Commission on Civil Disorders shortly after he was elected to the Senate. Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois led the group, also known as the Kerner Commission. Charged with outlining the causes of the urban riots of 1967, the Kerner Commission also proposed solutions for the epidemic of racial unrest in American cities. The commission reported that American society was sharply divided along racial lines. The 11-member commission, including Brooke, suggested the government fund a series of programs to increase educational, housing, and employment opportunities for minorities living in urban areas. Although President Johnson was dedicated to bettering the circumstances of minorities, his preoccupation with the Vietnam War and his decision not to seek re-election rendered the commission's recommendations ineffective.24

Working with Democratic Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota, Brooke succeeded in attaching an antidiscrimination amendment to the groundbreaking Civil Rights Act of 1968. Title VIII of the legislation included provisions to combat racial discrimination in housing. "Fair housing does not promise an end to the ghetto," Brooke cautioned. "It promises only to demonstrate that the ghetto is not an immutable institution in America."25 The African-American Senator cited his difficulties finding a home after he returned from service in World War II to illustrate the prejudice in the American housing market.<sup>26</sup> Brooke proposed that to combat the "unconscionable bitterness between white and Black Americans, it is encumbent [sic] upon our Government to act, and to act now."27 In 1975, Brooke vehemently defended the need to extend the 1965 Voting Rights Act. When a proposed Senate amendment threatened to dilute the historic voting rights legislation, Brooke joined the debate. "I just cannot believe that here in 1975 on the floor of the Senate we are ready to say to the American people, black or white, red or brown, 'You just cannot even be assured the basic right to vote in this country."28 Brooke's eloquent and

impassioned plea to his colleagues helped extend the landmark measure seven years.<sup>29</sup>

Shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Brooke urged his congressional colleagues to recognize the renowned civil rights leader by declaring January 15 (King's birthday) a national holiday. Arguing that it "would be fitting to pay our respects to this noble figure by enduring public commemoration of his life and philosophy," the Massachusetts Senator earned the support of many African Americans.<sup>30</sup> Brooke also made headlines when he traveled to Jackson State College in Mississippi in May 1970 to help ease tensions resulting from the fatal shootings of two black students by the police. Despite his support of the civil rights movement and his desire to promote equal rights for African Americans, Brooke often found himself at odds with other African-American leaders. The marked increase of black Members in the House of Representatives led to the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in 1971. Although the CBC was billed as a nonpartisan organization to promote economic and social issues affecting Black Americans, the Republican Brooke did not join the group.<sup>31</sup> When the CBC announced it would boycott President Richard M. Nixon's 1971 State of the Union address to protest his refusal to meet with the caucus, the Senator was not asked to participate because the black Representatives expected Brooke to place party interests ahead of race. Brooke repudiated the CBC's boycott by publicly declaring, "It is my duty as a United States Senator to be present, to listen and to consider his recommendations."32

Although Brooke supported the Republican Party, his stances were often contrary to the official party line. He typically adopted a liberal agenda with regard to social issues. During his two terms in the Senate, Brooke backed affirmative action, minority business development, and public housing legislation. He also favored extending minimum wage standards to unprotected jobs held by unskilled workers, providing tax incentives to companies with management training programs, and increasing operating subsidies for commuter rail services and mass

transit systems.<sup>33</sup> At times Brooke even broke party ranks to work with Democrats in the Senate and the House. For example, Brooke and House Majority Leader Thomas (Tip) O'Neill of Massachusetts recommended a swift increase in Social Security benefits in 1972.<sup>34</sup>

Initially a supporter of President Nixon, Brooke grew increasingly critical of the Republican executive. "Deeply concerned about the lack of commitment to equal opportunities for all people," Brooke denounced the White House for neglecting the black community and failing to enforce school integration.<sup>35</sup> He also made waves with the Republican Party and Nixon when he opposed three of the President's Supreme Court nominees: Clement F. Haynsworth, Jr., G. Harrold Carswell, and William H. Rehnquist. In May 1973 he introduced a resolution authorizing the attorney general to appoint a special prosecutor to serve in all criminal investigations arising from the Watergate scandal. Six months later Brooke became the first Senator to publicly call for President Nixon's resignation. "There is no question that the President has lost his effectiveness as the leader of this country, primarily because he has lost the confidence of the people of the country," Brooke remarked. "I think, therefore, that in the interests of this nation that he loves that he should step down, tender his resignation."36 Brooke was also one of the few Republicans to disagree publicly with President Gerald R. Ford's pardon of Nixon, deeming it a "serious mistake."37

Concerned primarily with issues that would affect the residents of his state, Brooke also demonstrated interest in foreign affairs, especially the Vietnam War. During his run for the Senate in 1966, Brooke called for increased negotiations with the North Vietnamese rather than an escalation of the fighting. The Determined to become an expert, he participated in a fact-finding mission in Southeast Asia in 1967. The Massachusetts Senator reported on his three-week trip during his first formal speech on the Senate Floor. Interpreted as a reversal of his position on Vietnam, his speech made national headlines. Brooke commented that his trip had convinced

him "that the enemy is not disposed to participate in any meaningful negotiations," which led him to believe that Johnson's "patient" approach to Vietnam did in fact have merit.<sup>39</sup> Brooke was praised by those who found his willingness to publicly change his position courageous, and criticized by many civil rights activists who believed the Vietnam War siphoned valuable funding away from vital domestic programs. 40 Years later, Brooke maintained that his speech had been misinterpreted by the press because his continued support of a reduction of American involvement in the region was overlooked. 41 As a moderate Republican, Brooke grew impatient with the Nixon administration's aggressive Southeast Asian policies, which escalated the conflict with few signs of success. In 1970, he and 15 members of his party voted for the Cooper-Church Amendment, which originated in response to Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia and prohibited the use of American troops outside Vietnam. Brooke further challenged the President's war effort by voting for legislation that established a time limit for the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam.<sup>42</sup>

In November 1972, Brooke easily defeated Democrat John J. Droney, the Middlesex County district attorney, earning 64 percent of the vote to win a second term in the Senate. 43 After his re-election, Brooke continued his active role in domestic politics. In November 1975 he and seven colleagues on the Banking Committee rejected President Ford's nomination of former Georgia Representative Benjamin B. Blackburn to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board because of Blackburn's opposition to the 1968 Fair Housing Act. During the James Earl (Jimmy) Carter administration, Brooke reaffirmed his support of appropriations for low-income rental housing programs, construction of public housing, and the purchase and refurbishment of existing units. He successfully fought a 1977 amendment to a Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) bill that would have prevented the department from enforcing quotas to meet affirmative action goals, but he failed to block an anti-busing clause from a HEW funding measure.

Brooke's solid support base in Massachusetts began to wane as a result of his acrimonious and public divorce in 1978 in addition to allegations of financial misconduct. <sup>44</sup> In the Republican primary, Brooke faced a challenge from conservative television talk show host Avi Nelson. Although he managed to rebuff Nelson's bid, Brooke entered the general election campaign in a weakened position. <sup>45</sup> In November 1978, Democrat Paul Tsongas, a Massachusetts Representative representing a House district including the historic mill towns of Lowell and Lawrence, defeated Brooke 55 to 45 percent. <sup>46</sup>

After leaving office, the former Senator resumed the practice of law in Washington, DC. In 1984 he became chairman of the Boston Bank of Commerce, and one year later he was named to the board of directors of Grumman. Upon being diagnosed with breast cancer in 2002, Brooke returned to the public spotlight to increase awareness of breast cancer in men. Asked to comment about his public advocacy, Brooke responded, "You never know in life what you're going to be called upon to do." In 2004 President George W. Bush awarded Brooke the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. In 2007, Brooke, who currently resides in Miami, published his autobiography, *Bridging the Divide: My Life.* 

# FOR FURTHER READING

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## MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

**Broadcast Pioneers Library** (College Park, MD), University of Maryland Hornbake Library. *Audiotapes:* In the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company Collection, ca. 1945–1981, 18 audiotapes.

**Gerald R. Ford Library** (Ann Arbor, MI). *Papers:* ca. 1974–1977. Correspondence between President Ford and Senator Edward Brooke, as well as briefing papers of Senator Brooke. Finding aids are available in the repository and online.

Library of Congress (Washington, DC), Manuscript Division. Papers: ca. 1956-1988, 273.6 linear feet. The papers of Edward Brooke document his tenure as attorney general of Massachusetts and also include his senatorial papers. Included are correspondence, reports, notes, subject files, draft and printed legislation, briefing books, press releases, and photographs. Other topics covered include the bicentennial of the American Revolution, civil energy policy, fishing rights, foreign policy, military base closures, military policy, the financial crisis of New York City, nominations of Clement H. Haynsworth and G. Harrold Carswell to the U.S. Supreme Court, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate scandal. The papers document Edward Brooke's participation in Republican Party politics as well as his private legal practice in Washington, DC, relating primarily to cases involving the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Access restrictions apply. A finding aid is available in the library and online. Film reels, film rolls, videocassettes, and videoreels: ca. 1963–1978; 12 film reels, 26 film rolls, three videocassettes, nine videoreels comprising government and commercially produced works and unedited footage. Most of the materials relate to Brooke's political career. Access restrictions apply.

**Library of Congress** (Washington, DC), American Folklife Center, Archive of Folk Culture. *Oral History*: In the National Visionary Leadership Project Interviews and Conference Collection, 1997–2003, amount unknown. Interviewees include Senator Edward Brooke.

## **NOTES**

- 1 The two previous black Senators, Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce (both of Mississippi), were elected by state legislatures. John H. Fenton, "Brooke, A Negro, Wins Senate Seat," 9 November 1966, *New York Times*: 1.
- 2 Linda M. Carter, "Edward W. Brooke," in Jessie Carney Smith, ed., Notable Black American Men (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, Inc., 1999): 121 (hereinafter referred to as NBAM); John Henry Cutler, Ed Brooke: Biography of a Senator (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972): 16.
- 3 Edward W. Brooke, *Bridging the Divide: My Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007): 22.
- 4 Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 22.
- 5 Carter, "Edward W. Brooke," NBAM.
- Ibid; Shirley Washington, Outstanding African Americans of Congress (Washington, DC: U.S. Capitol Historical Society, 1998):
- 7 Brooke, *Bridging the Divide*: 54–60; Carter, "Edward W. Brooke," NRAM
- 8 "Edward Brooke," *Contemporary Black Biography* Volume 8 (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1994) (hereinafter referred to as *CBB*).
- 9 Washington, Outstanding African Americans of Congress: 12; Carter, "Edward W. Brooke," NBAM: 122.
- 10 Carter, "Edward W. Brooke," NBAM: 122. For more information on Brooke's tenure on the Boston Finance Commission, see Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 71–79.
- 11 "Edward Brooke," *CBB*; Brooke, *Bridging the Divide*: 96; Layhmond Robinson, "Negroes Widen Political Role; Georgians Elect State Senator," 8 November 1962, *New York Times*: 42; "Big Political Gains Scored by Negroes," 8 November 1962, *Washington Post*: C16.
- 12 Quoted in Maurine Christopher, *Black Americans in Congress* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976): 231.
- 13 American Bar Association, Black History Month 2002, "Edward W. Brooke III," http://www.abanet.org/publiced/bh\_brooke. html (accessed 22 September 2004); "Edward Brooke," CBB. For more information on the boycott, see Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 106–107.
- 14 Edward R. Brooke, *The Challenge of Change: Crisis in Our Two-Party System* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966): 159.
- 15 David S. Broder, "Negro Announces for Senate Race," 31 December 1965, *New York Times*: 6.
- 16 Christopher, Black Americans in Congress: 231.
- 17 John H. Henton, "A Dapper Mr. Brooke Goes to Washington," 2 January 1967, *New York Times*: 22.

- 18 Edgar J. Mills, "Brooke Seizes Spotlight," 10 November 1966, Christian Science Monitor: 1.
- 19 "Edward Brooke," *CBB*; Henton, "A Dapper Mr. Brooke Goes to Washington."
- 20 Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 150.
- 21 Ibid., 149.
- 22 As a member of the Joint Committee on Bicentennial Arrangements, Brooke played an instrumental role in the publication of the first edition of *Black Americans in Congress*.
- 23 Robert Caro, *Master of the Senate* (New York: Knopf, 2002): especially 562–565. See also Donald A. Ritchie, "Oral History Interview with Howard E. Shuman," 19 August 1987, U.S. Senate Historical Office, Washington, DC: 206–207: http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/Shuman\_interview\_4.pdf (accessed 12 December 2007).
- 24 Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 172–174; Christopher, Black Americans in Congress: 232–233.
- 25 Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 176.
- 26 Washington, Outstanding African Americans of Congress: 14; Christopher, Black Americans in Congress: 232–233; "History of Fair Housing," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/aboutfheo/history. cfm (accessed 12 October 2004).
- 27 Congressional Record, Senate, 90th Cong., 2nd sess. (6 February 1968): 2281.
- 28 Congressional Record, Senate, 94th Cong., 1st sess. (23 July 1975): 24226.
- 29 Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 217–219; Bill Boyarsky, "Voting Rights Bill Survives Ford's Letter," 24 July 1975, Los Angeles Times: B1.
- 30 Congressional Record, Senate, 90th Cong., 2nd sess. (8 April 1968): 9227; Cutler, Ed Brooke: Biography of a Senator: 290–291.
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- 33 Carter, "Edward W. Brooke," NBAM.
- 34 Marjorie Hunter, "Brooke Joins Democrats in Urging Speedy Rise in Social Security Benefits," 5 May 1972, New York Times: 10.
- 35 "Brooke Says Nixon Shuns Black Needs," 12 March 1970, New York Times: 25.

- 36 Richard L. Madden, "Brooke Appeals to Nixon to Resign for Nation's Sake," 5 November 1973, New York Times: 1; Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 208–209.
- 37 Harold M. Schmeck, Jr., "Reaction to Pardon of Nixon Is Divided, But Not Entirely Along Party Lines," 9 September 1974, New York Times: 25.
- 38 "Brooke Calls Vietnam a Prime Issue," 29 August 1966, Washington Post: A2.
- 39 John Herbers, "Brooke Shifts War View and Supports President," 24 March 1967, New York Times: 1.
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- 41 Brooke, Bridging the Divide: 162–164.
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- 44 George B. Merry, "A Cloud Crosses Brooke Path," 30 May 1978, Christian Science Monitor. 3; "Brooke Admits to False Statement, Under Oath, About a \$49,000 Loan," 27 May 1978, New York Times: 47. See also Brooke's autobiography, in which he discusses his divorce and financial statements, Bridging the Divide: 243–249.
- 45 [No title], 19 September 1978, Associated Press.
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