

This is an interview with Judge Ernest Morial on January 9, 1974. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass and was transcribed by Susan Hathaway. The interview was conducted in New Orleans, Louisiana.

JACK BASS: One of the things we are looking at is the political change that is taking place in the South since 1948, that the change in black politics has been a major factor. You, of course, have been right in the middle of it in Louisiana in this capacity, and your most recent elevation . . . you've sort of played some part of the first black this and that. How do you perceive the change, the political change insofar as blacks are concerned in Louisiana?

ERNEST MORIAL: I guess the new development, the new thrust of black participation from the stand point of candidacies of blacks would probably have begun in the forties, '44, or somewhere around that time. I think we had someone running for the New Orleans Parish School Board, which is a non-political office -- "political" -- in fact, an election. Then I guess for a period of time after that you may have had isolated instances of blacks

running for public office. Always though, the voting strengths of blacks during that period were inadequate in terms of ethnic characteristics of a vote to elect one of their own to public office. However, in many areas of Louisiana we had the numbers, population-wise, of blacks. We didn't have the numbers of blacks registered exercising franchise because of the discriminatory practices of registers of voters and the requirements, clause, and understanding provisions and all of the other things which we had as a requirement to become an eligible voter. Even in New Orleans during that time, we had about 28,000 registered and we got it up to about 32,000 and put on voter registration drives in the fifties. Way back in the forties efforts were made but we could never get over that number. That seemed to appear to be where those who in power wanted to keep the number at that figure, 28,000 up to 32,000 or 34,000 or 35,000 in the early sixties. Then the major effort at increasing the vote came with the Voting Rights Act of '65. That is when we really put forth a big effort and had a substantial increase.

J.B.: What do you think is the effect of the Voting Rights Act of '65?

Morial: I think because we then began to have sufficient numbers of voters. We still don't have the potential in spite

of the Voting Rights Act, but that increased interest, not only among people who did not want to be candidates for public office, but of course among those who had any notion that eventually that they would want to be candidates because then it encouraged them to do what was necessary to increase the numbers of persons who would be exercising franchise, recognizing that the major source of support would come from the same ethnic group, or as people would say, the same racial characteristic from blacks. In other words, the attitude of the South, and New Orleans, Louisiana is no different. But whites were not going to vote for black candidates in any large number, not sufficiently large enough to overcome the vote that a white candidate would get from white voters if it were a contest between a white and a black candidate, qualifications notwithstanding. So the Voting Rights Act encouraged and intensified the effort of those who would likely be candidates to increased voter registration among blacks, getting voters on the rolls, which would make it a possibility for a black candidate to be elected with black support, coupled with maybe then the changing attitudes that were beginning to develop.

J.B.: Changing attitudes of whites?

Morial: Attitudes of whites, the die-hards. I guess they began to become more passive.

J.B.: How do you perceive racial attitudes of whites in Louisiana now as well as in New Orleans, and do you make a distinction between New Orleans and the rest of the state?

Morial: I think you could. I think a distinction could be made with the other sections of the state. I feel New Orleans has been more urbanized, more cosmopolitan in its thinking. The educational level, generally, is greater, the economic level, the port of New Orleans, the international flavor of the city and everything else, I think makes in general more liberal attitudes among New Orleanians than say, even Baton Rouge, for example, or Shreveport. But you even find a difference in South Louisiana as opposed to North Louisiana, the attitudes. Historically it has been that way. I haven't been through the state in a couple of years, at least since I left the legislature in 1970, so it is rather difficult for me to make a present day . . .

J.B.: You served how long in the legislature?

Morial: I served three years in the legislature.

J.B.: Beginning in '67?

Morial: I was elected in '67 and took office the following May when the legislative session began. I served until the end of the '70 session, which was the last regular session of the legislature. I would have had one more session to serve which would have been a special,

not a special, a fiscal session under our Constitution, which would have been a thrity day legislative session.

J.B.: When you were elected to the legislature, how many blacks were in the legislature at that time?

Morial: One.

J.B.: Did you perceive any change from the time you first went in the legislature to the time you left?

Morial: Definitely.

J.B.: What happened? What was the impact from the other legislators?

Morial: I think they began to give recognition in terms of, in a quiet way to . . . ability to handle legislative matters, in terms of the presentation of issues and advocacy of legislative matters and that sort of thing that they were perhaps either blinded or had never had their eyes open to the fact that they are black and were competent and could do things. I had a few fellows in whom I had known. I had, in particular, the Orleans delegation, having been involved to some extent in politics prior to my election, having been in other people's campaigns when they were candidates. So, I did have a certain amount of *friends* among them. There were maybe three or four of the total legislative component who continued to remain aloof on the basis of race. But by in large, most of the

others were cordial and friendly. If they thought differently of me than another legislator, it was not that obvious to me. Of course, there were incidents where I introduced legislation and I would look around for a vote, no one was in the house, because they couldn't vote with me and some of them wouldn't vote against me. So what they did, they abstained themselves from the legislature at the time the issues came up for a vote.

J.B.: Can you give any examples to illustrate this point?

Morial: I was just looking at something the other night where I had introduced some legislation to change the Civil Service Commission in this state, which is made up of a representative of Tulane, Loyola University, and I don't know if LSU is included in that, anyhow, white schools. They make nominations to the Civil Service Commission, no black schools. I had put in legislation to change that which would have been a Constitutional amendment, which of course had to be approved by the legislature before being submitted to the voters, and also to change the rule of three to maybe a rule of six.

J.B.: What would your change have done?

Morial: My change would have put blacks on the Civil Service Commission, State Civil Service Commission. Because my change would have provided for nominations to be made by

predominantly black institutions of higher learning, which would have assured us of black representation on the Civil Service Commission. Also, to change the rule of three to maybe a rule of six, and the present rule is the top three names on a list after a competitive examination are certified to the employing agency. I thought that if that number were increased the possibility of getting some blacks within the numbers that were certified would have been greater without the necessity of lowering the standards of employment.

J.B.: What happened?

Morial: Well, when it came time for the vote, you know, you present your legislation and of course, somebody is opposed to it and when you are ready to vote nobody was around, they just got up and would leave the house.

J.B.: How did that make you feel?

Morial: I don't know. I guess I am a little thick skinned when it comes to things like that. I don't generally go to pieces over it. I felt kind of badly about it, but then tried to understand the other person in terms of the elective process in the constituency. Maybe he thinks he is in-tuned with his constituency, maybe he is, maybe he isn't. He is trying, perhaps, to do the will of the constituency, by not wanting to be labeled when he goes back home as a "Nigger lover." You know, "You voted for that piece of legislation that is going to give blacks some of

the things that their constituency might feel that blacks shouldn't have." We had a blood labeling bill here in Louisiana, which required the labeling of blood according to race. I had put in legislation to do away with the labeling requirement because HEW was about to cut off some funds for the state. A similar thing happened except that one guy got up there and got real wild about it and started to yell "I don't want a drop of Nigger blood in my veins," he said that on the microphone in the legislature during the course of the debate.

J.B.: Who was that?

Morial: Archie Davis. But one guy in the legislature, got up the next day and read a long statement, which he had prepared criticizing the legislature. So that showed me some improvement in attitude over the period of time that I was there.

J.B.: Someone told me that that was the last racist speech made before the legislature. Is that true?

Morial: Yes, that's right.

J.B.: What was the reaction to that speech among the other legislators?

Morial: Most of the guys came up to me and apologized for Davis. Even prior to that and subsequent to that, Davis and I had a fairly cordial relationship. We talked like legislators do about legislation. We even swapped votes, I



guess, at some time or another prior to that. I maintained my composure. I didn't think that it was necessary, but I think that I accomplished a great deal by that rather than reducing myself to the level he had reduced himself, his rudeness and discourteous conduct in the course of debate.

J.B.: Is he still in the legislature?

Morial: No, he died. I got a letter from someone telling me that he was in the hospital and that he wanted me to come see him. Unfortunately, I never did get up to see him. He was in the hospital in New Orleans. That is one of the things that I feel a little upset about. I really wanted to see him. Maybe he wanted to apologize on his dying bed. Whether he did or didn't, I would not have wanted to deprive him of the opportunity by not showing up. There was changes in their attitudes, and from what I had witnessed, in the few times that I have been back to the legislature, I witnessed a great deal of change in the legislature as an entity in relation to the black legislators that are in there now.

J.B.: In what respect?

Morial: The exchange of legislation, the joining together on certain pieces of legislation. Though I had some of that when I was there, but I think it is being done to a larger degree than it was when I was in the legislature.

J.B.: Do you think that the black legislators that are in there now have fully been accepted?

Morial: It is kind of hard for me to say. I think that they are more accepted than I was. All of them may not be, but I think it gets to be an individual thing, sort of, like people, you either like them or dislike them. You are indifferent towards them, rather than disliking them.

J.B.: I guess my real question is do you think they are treated just like another legislator?

Morial: I was treated just like another legislator as far as the social activities, invitations to things, if there was something at the mansion, the lobbyists put on a party, or if they took legislators out to dinner as they do at night, they entertained my committee, the committees that I was on in the legislature, I was always included. Well, I had a tendency to go, too. If there was something going on, maybe if it wasn't in the nature of a formal invitation by word of mouth kind of thing, well, I went. I wouldn't stay away. In other words, I wanted to be a part of the legislature and did everything that I could to be a part of it rather than just segregating myself.

J.B.: Was there a feeling on your part that you wanted other legislators, as well as those who dealt with the legislature to know that you considered yourself a full-

fledged legislator.

Morial: I wanted the lobbyists and the people who came to the legislature and those who dealt with the legislature, the special interest groups, and others, as well as the other elected officials, and the other members of the legislature, and the press and everyone else, just to deal with me like any other legislator. I didn't want any preferential treatment.

J.B.: What was the perception in the black community to Governor McKeithan after his, I am going to use the term "posturing," on the busing issue, near the end of his second administration, after basically what seemed to be a pretty good record?

Morial: I was the only one who spoke out against it in the legislature, the only one who voted against his . . . in that special session that we had on busing. I was looking for a copy of my speech the other day, but I guess I have misplaced a lot of my papers, and they could have gotten thrown away unfortunately. I considered myself fairly friendly with the Governor. I disagreed with him when I thought I should disagree with him. Sometimes it wasn't necessary to do that publicly and sometimes it was. The most discouraging thing to me about that busing thing was that I tried to get the NAACP and

the Teachers Association people, the LEA people to come before the committee to speak against it and couldn't. So there was fairly little opposition to him.

J.B.: Why?

Morial: I don't know. I called him on the telephone. I had been involved in school desegregation litigation over the years and just took the position that this was nothing more than an effort, although McKeithan was putting it on free choice, freedom of choice, that this was nothing more than an effort to thwart the desires of the court to take affirmative steps towards desegregation. From my experiences, and from what I have seen develop over the last three years, I think that you have to take mandatory steps to bring about desegregation. In other words, you have got to make it almost compulsory integration in the schools. When you see the housing patterns in the South and when you understand the attitudes of blacks as it is against the attitudes of whites in their receptivity to them in certain situations, you've got to almost compel the people to come together. I think to avoid the busing, or to get around it under notions of free choice are nothing more than a disguise and a vice to say, you know, to keep segregated schools, you keep the white schools and the black schools. If you tell blacks they have a freedom of choice, they are not going to choose the white schools, nor are the whites going to choose the

predominantly black schools. You have got to restructure the school lines and redraw the school lines to such an extent that you bring about a racial balance in the schools.

J.B.: Do you think that it was a phony issue when McKeithan raised it, so far as Louisiana was concerned?

Morial: What do you mean, phony?

J.B.: [Interruption]

Morial: You didn't have any busing of white kids past a white school to a formerly all black school, or black kids past a black school to a formerly all white school. You had the same kind of busing that has been going on, black kids past a white school to get to a black school, you know, and white kids past a black school to get to a white school. [Interruption] . . . and that is what he used. He said, "This is what New York is doing, this is the great North. You know, the big liberal New York. If they can do it, it ought to be good enough for Louisiana.

J.B.: Why do you think he raised the issue?

Morial: I think it was a political tact on McKeithan's part. I think he was trying to feel the polls and of course, then you were beginning to get concern on the part of teachers, black teachers in the rural areas about teacher assignment, and teacher security. If you were going to eliminate the black teachers, you could eliminate the black principals, that is an issue that is going on too in the South. The teachers

were the big advocates at one time of school desegregation. In other words, many of the teacher organizations were contributing money to the ink fund in order to bring about desegregation in the school cases around the South after Brown vs. Board of Education. Then the teachers association began to take a different tact because they began to see then that the white principals, black principals were being replaced with white principals, where they began to have teacher desegregation of faculties, that the black teachers were losing jobs, not the whites. So I think that McKeithan sensed that. But he sensed that blacks didn't want to be bused either. So, he was making a strategic political move. He was going to win favor with blacks as well as whites. He was also doing something that would be inoffensive because it was the northern practice.

J.B.: Do you think that your preception was the general black preception?

Morial: It is hard to say, but I know that there was no big plan in the black community, no great uprising, no great impotence, no great movement, in opposition to it. No major opposition, no organized effort has gotten under-way, ~~no one~~ to ~~on~~ the Governor, you know black leadership to say look, "This is bad, don't fool with it." In fact, I think he might have gotten some

encouragement from some blacks. I say that because of the failure that I had in getting support for my opposition to the busing.

J.B.: Do you think he hurt his image insofar as the black, general black community of Louisiana was concerned?

Morial: I don't know. I don't think so. I think there may have been other things that may have hurt his image. Well, to some extent it might have, but I think McKeithan's popularity just began to diminish. He was being criticized on a lot of other scores. He was sort of a lame duck Governor in his last term, can't run to succeed himself. Your political appointees start leaving you too, because they are looking for a place to roost. The vultures began to pounce upon him. Coupled with all of that. Then the climate of the time. McKeithan's brand of liberality was not as progressive as blacks thought it should be, though he was a big improvement over what we had. The rapid *changes* in which events began to take place, you know, in the later part of the sixties, McKeithan was not suited for that kind of thing. I am just talking this from the minds of the *opponents* as opposed to some of those who perhaps still think that he was a great Governor for blacks because they are comparing him with what was existing before. But there are those who are supporters of the present Governor who compare him with

McKeithan and say ~~he is probably~~ ~~and~~ that McKeithan was a progressive sort of thing in relation to the times.

J.B.: Is there any effective state-wide black political organization?

Morial: No. The nearest thing we had to that was the Louisiana Voter Education project.

J.B.: What is the status of that now?

Morial: I don't think that it is existing to any extent. It is sort of dormant. June Prestige, who teaches Political Science at Siler University, was one of those who pushed for that thing and was having some institutes for black elected officials and a lot of other things, and as recently as last year or the year before last had an institute for black elected officials in Baton Rouge. But other than that, there has been no state-wide political organization.

J.B.: What is the status of black voter registration?

Morial: Right now, I would think that blacks comprise about 26% or maybe 27% or slightly more than that.

J.B.: Are there any organized efforts to register more?

Morial: State-wide? No state-wide organized effort. There may be efforts through the wards and parishes or



political organizations in the cities might push for that, but to have the kind of effort that we had in the late fifties and even after the Voting Rights Act, shortly after the Voting Rights Act, I have not seen any effort like that in the city nor in the state. We had a crusade for voters back in the late fifties, '58, because I was Chairman of the group, when we brought the Ministers and everyone together in the city. Through the efforts of the NAACP, you had a state-wide effort through the Louisiana Conference of branches, but I don't think that even that is existent today. To the extent that the political groups push and press to encourage people to become registered voters, you don't have the same kind of motivation that you had when the franchise was being *extended*. You may find it in spots in some of the rural areas, but I know of none.

J.B.: We hear a lot about the black political organizations in New Orleans, there are basically four as I understand it?

Morial: Well, there are more than four.

J.B.: What would be the most influential?

Morial: Most of them are . . . I guess. The Southern Organization for Unified Politics which is so. You probably have the Community Organization for Urban Politics, the Orleans Parish Progressive Voters League,

which would probably be the most attractive ones. The OPDVLS in a city-wide group are primarily concentrated in one ward, has made efforts to expand itself, but is not disciplined throughout the city with ward leaders and others. Then there is the COUP, which is the Community Organization for Urban Politics primarily in the 6th and 7th and maybe a portion of the 8th wards in the city, where there is some kind of maybe unwritten alliance between COUP and SOUL and some of the things they do. Then in the uptown area where OPVBL has always been strong, though it is city-wide, but it is an elderly group who had not brought in as many young people as perhaps they should. You have another young group called the Black Organization for Leadership Development, BOLD, which is the outgrowth of a voter registration effort, under the funding that the Urban League received some years ago.

J.B.: Do they have elected leaders within those groups?

Morial: I don't think it is a universal effort to franchise. I think they are probably un-democratic. They say they are. You know, they have a board, some of them do. I don't think they have ever had an elected Chairman, maybe COUP does, I don't know. BOLD might do it.

J.B.: Do they get together from the standpoint of

actually meeting together to discuss formally?

Morial: No, they meet informally through the leadership kind of thing. But to even say "We've got an election coming up, let's call a meeting and get everyone together," that isn't done.

J.B.: Do they usually split?

Morial: They do, they do. Sometimes they will agree on some candidates and disagree on others. We have had black candidates who have run who have not had the support of all four of the black organizations. We have had situations where they have supported them. In '69 when I ran for the Council, I got all of the groups together. When I say all of the groups, I mean, more than the major ones, plus individuals that I thought had political leadership, who may not have an organization, in an effort to get them to agree on my candidacy.

J.B.: What is your background? Did you grow up in New Orleans?

Morial: I am a native of New Orleans and educated here.

J.B.: Your father did what?

Morial: My father was a cigar maker by profession or trade. My mother was a tailor or a seamstress.

J.B.: You went to school where?

Morial: I went to school here in New Orleans. I went

to Law School at LSU in Baton Rouge. I went to elementary and high school here, I went to college here.

J.B.: Public elementary school?

Morial: I went to parochial elementary school. I went to parochial high school for two years and then to a public high school for two years.

J.B.: You have practiced here since?

Morial: I have practiced in New Orleans except for some time in the military.

J.B.: Governor Edwards told me that he thought that the black organizations in New Orleans got together and decided that some would support him and some would support Bennett Johnson, that they would split the mixture and they would have inroads regardless of who got elected.

Morial: They didn't get together. They just had ideological differences. I thought Edwards was smarter than that. I thought he had a greater perception of the political realities than that. Maybe someone has told him that to make him . . . I don't think it was on that basis, really.

J.B.: What basis would it have been on?

Morial: I think it was on the basis of appeal, the appeals and commitments in terms of what they saw and what they viewed as most wanted by those respective

organizations coupled with financial ability of the candidate to contribute to the organization sufficient monies for their organization to do the kind of job the organization thought it wanted to do.

J.B.: What was the difference in perception of Edwards and Johnson?

Morial: That is kind of hard for me to say since I wasn't in those organizations where they were doing the deliberations. The organizations, as I recall, you are talking about the second primary, of course. Some of them supported Gillis Long in the first. Then, they went to Bennett in the second.

J.B.: I don't want to be unfair to Edwards, but I think what he was saying basically was that he and Johnson both were perceived as moderates?

Morial: Yeah. Basically I would agree on that.

J.B.: But he did suggest that he believed that there was sort of an understanding that he would get the support . . .

Morial: There might be two organizations that might do that because they might get together that close, it might be SOUL and COUP. But as to the others, I don't think they would, knowing the personalities in there.

J.B.: Would SOUL and COUP be the two most influential ones?

Morial: It depends on how you access influential.

J.B.: In terms of the voters they can influence.

Morial: It depends on the candidates too as to their ability to influence. Sometimes they have had bad candidates. Sometimes, you know, if you look at the election results, guys have done surprisingly well without their support in relation to the money that they have spent on a campaign in certain areas. I think you are seeing more independent thinking on the part of the black voter too.

J.B.: Is that because of television to some extent?

Morial: I think it is because of media. It is because the intelligence of the black voter has become sophisticated, the educational level has increased, so that he is reading the newspapers, he is looking at television, his economic level has improved so he is looking at it from his own economic predilections, his own self best interest . . . You don't have to patronize anymore to a large extent that you have had to traditionally. So you can't discipline your membership, or the people who you want to vote because you can't promise to give them anything because there isn't that much to give, except that a few of the leaders in the political organizations may be getting . . .

J.B.: Do you think that white politicians over-emphasize

the importance of these organizations?

Morial: I think to some extent they do. I think to some extent the media has, the local media has. Not that they are unimportant because a candidate should want everyone. He wants all the support that he can muster. He doesn't want to say that this one isn't worth anything and I don't want them. But if he has a choice, he may take one over another, but he would like to get both. The greatest thing I think the organizations have is that they have a *group* of identified people that they can put to work on election day and prior thereto.

J.B.: How do they actually choose which candidate they will ticket?

Morial: I don't know. I really don't know. If it is done by deliberations, I don't know. But if it is done by one or two individuals in there who make a pre-disposition of who is going to be their candidate based upon private conversations that they have had and then come back and say this is the guy we recommend and it comes automatically. Some of them say that they bring in the candidates, but are they going through the motions? I don't know with those candidates and it is a forgone conclusion as to who they will decide to support, or have they made some predisposition even before the candidates come in? Is it based upon dollars and cents, who can give the most money and who can make the

organization look the best in terms of dollars and cents to be spent and the votes that they can deliver on election day? I don't know. I don't know what kinds of deliberations go on within the minds of the candidate. Of course, you don't find the candidates that are that far apart in this area philosophically on the questions that are of interest to blacks. There is not that much disparity between them. For example, let's say based upon, except for isolated little incidents that you might be able to find, where one candidate might have done one thing that might be obnoxious to my views of racial equality, and where another candidate may have done something that may be obnoxious to Mr. X's views of racial equality. It is sort of based on what may be shocking to my predilections or to someone else's predilections. Other than that, the candidates may not be very far apart in the general term of things from which to make a choice.

J.B.: Do you think the politics of race is dead in Louisiana?

Morial: When you talk about it on a state-wide basis, I guess to some extent it has to be more subtle. I think you may find in some communities in Louisiana, some small isolated areas and maybe some fairly moderate sized communities, but on a state-wide, I don't think you are going



to find a candidate making a state-wide appeal to racism. I don't think you will find a candidate doing it in New Orleans.

J.B.: How about on a subtle basis? Can a candidate may hay of busing?

Morial: I don't think so. I think you might find them hintingly and behind the scenes trying to discredit an opponent without coming on, the media coming on in advertisements or anything saying anything, but the word will filter out through supporters and others in the right . I think we are going to have that for some time. For example, "Don't elect that guy, he is going to turn everything over to the blacks." Like witness what we have in the city with the present mayor where there is certain elements of whites and even some who are in City Hall, maybe some of his appointees and others who are displeased because they feel he may have given too much to blacks. They are not going to come out publicly, but they are going to spread the word around among those circles where they think it will be welcomed to try to discredit his moderate approach to city government.

J.B.: Is he susceptible to getting beat on that issue?

Morial: If he can't corral 80% of the black vote he could conceivably be beat. But if he has that much going for him at the outset, he is in a strong . . .

Begin Side Two, Tape One

J.B.: Is there any network of communication among blacks in Louisiana in state-wide races?

Morial: I think so. I think there are people that you can identify across the state and call on the telephone. It is sort of an informal ad hoc kind of thing. I'd know who to call in Baton Rouge if some guy were running up there and asked me. I'd know maybe five or ten guys to call in Baton Rouge, who to call in Shreveport, who to call in Monroe, Alexandria and other places.

J.B.: In other words if you had a candidate, state-wide candidate from New Orleans that you thought deserved support, there would be people you could call and others could call?

Morial: Yes, that others could call across the state.

J.B.: And presume if you had one here who had an image of being pretty good, but you really thought his image was not correct, you could also call?

Morial: Don't go along with this, don't buy his bill of goods. If you are going to support somebody else, that sort

of thing. I think that there is that kind of network.

J.B.: What do you think the Republicans are going to have to do in order to get any black votes? Is there anything they can do in Louisiana?

Morial: I think the elementary thing they are going to have to do is to run a candidate. The difficult thing for them, I guess, is for them to find candidates who would want to run the risk if they have political desires of running under a Republican banner, or find some blacks,

might be willing to run. They are going to have to be more aggressive and be a little more open and want to prove that they really want to build a party in Louisiana. I don't think that the Republicans have ever really done that in Louisiana. I think they have been satisfied to sit it out and hope that every eight years they might get a Republican President and then they don't have enough Republicans for the goodies that have to go around in Louisiana. So you have a bunch of Democrats switching to become Republicans, or Democrats who support a Republican candidate hoping that he wins and then they change their party affiliation so they can get some of the patronage. The parties in Louisiana are not that well disciplined. That is true for the Democrats as well.

J.B.: If you view Louisiana politics from a black

perspective, what would you consider the major issues? Not so much from a personal position, but looking at it from a broader position as you interpret a general black perspective?

Morial: You mean state-wide?

J.B.: Yeah.

Morial: I guess to really try to maybe formalize a little more the political identities in terms of a unit on a state-wide basis, particularly if we are going to run candidates, black candidates for state-wide office when they have the possibility of being elected, and also to try to develop on maybe a continuing basis, and at the outset on an ad hoc basis, coalitions in the interest of certain candidates for whom we can exact support for black candidates who may decide to come forward for state-wide office. I had, when I was in the legislature in 1970, I talked about the possibility about running for Governor. I had toyed with the idea and I had talked with some guys in the legislature, whites whom I knew, about the possibility of getting a state-wide ticket together, blacks and whites to run state-wide for state-wide offices. I talked with them and said, "Listen, I know none of us may be elected thistime. There is a possibility that we could conceivably. One might be elected, or two maybe, because they could always put together other individual things. You know, you can

never discipline a ticket in state-wide politics like you do in a national election with the President. So people on state-wide tickets tend to go whichever way they want to, although they give the semblance of running together as a team because we don't have a general election in Louisiana. It is the primary election. We don't have state-wide Republican candidates. You may have a guy running for Governor or maybe Attorney General or Secretary of State, or one or two other offices or maybe just two offices in the general election. So you just can't discipline a ticket within a primary to that extent. One or two guys like the idea as an approach to the future politics of the state. But I don't think that I could have ever generated the financial support on a state-wide basis to be a very serious candidate. One of the things that I have done since I ran for office, I've always ended up in the second primary or either won each time I had run. I have resigned myself that I don't intend to be a political whore and simply to be a paper candidate. Unless I can be a viable and meaningful candidate, I would not qualify for any office. I felt that I never could have raised the money necessary to be a . . . to even get my message across. I take the position that candidacy for public office is a tremendous vehicle for a candidate, but particularly for a

minority candidate to express a great number of views. It gives him an entre to a number of areas where he would not have been admitted except for the fact that he is a candidate. The media, organizations, groups, where a minority candidate perhaps would not have been invited will invite him. My theory has always been to never hide your identity as a candidate. There are those who disagree with me and play it down that you are black. I think the people who are going to vote know it. You just go straight out and let them know what you are and what you stand for and what your philosophies are and what you believe in and try to get your message across. Because you are making it much easier for someone who may run in another election even though you may be defeated. But I think you just can't be a political whore to qualify and not wage a campaign.

J.B.: What sort of a coalition of support do you see that could develop? Do you see any possibility of poor whites and blacks getting together? One, to elect white candidates and two, to elect black candidates. In Louisiana there is a fairly strong tradition of electing white candidates.

Morial: And of course the poor voters have always gotten together, that has been their philosophy. Whether they knew it or not, whether they did it unconsciously or not, they ended up supporting the same candidate. Maybe

it could conceivably [Interruption] I think that if an effort were made that addressed the problems of the people, maybe without identifying on the basis of black or white, I am just thinking about a strategy and a device, to talk about consumer protection, so that the economic interest, the educational interest and the quality of education, the new society kind of approach you could conceivably put together .

I think it is going to take some time though. I don't think that we are at the point now where there is sufficient reception on the part of the Joe Blow voter across the state to vote for a black candidate in large numbers. But I think we have got to run some candidates. I think we have got to run some candidates because we have got to encourage people to participate. You have got to encourage them to want to register and we have to encourage white people who want to be able to vote for a black candidate so that they don't think that it is . . .

J.B.: You see in the near term then that black candidates for state-wide office would be a strategy to increase black registration . . .

Morial: Strategy in those areas to maybe increase . . . but here again you just can't run, you've got to organize people, find the candidates, to encourage political participation, political awareness, political education. Voter registration is one thing, voter education is something else. The way to

to do that, people become more interested in elections when there is someone running with whom they can identify personally.

J.B.: Are there any other comments that you wanted to make on general subjects?

Morial: I can't think of any since I am so far out of politics these days. I really don't know too much about what is going on.

J.B.: How substantial has been the change in the last fifteen years?

Morial: In Louisiana? I guess the best way to access that would be on the basis of just viewing what we have as opposed to what we didn't have at that time. We've got several blacks in the house, I guess it is six or eight blacks in the house of representatives. We don't have any black state-wide elected official. We have black appointees on the Governor's staff. We have a black assistant superintendent of education in the Department of Education. We have some black Attorney Generals on the Attorney General's staff. We have, I guess, 60 black elected officials across the state on school boards, constables scattered throughout Louisiana. We rank, I don't have the list here, but you could probably get it through the Metropolitan Research Center, the number of black elected officials. Louisiana ranks very high in total among the states.



J.B.: In so far as New Orleans is concerned is Landrea perceived in the black community with the same high regard that white liberals perceive him to be, as having really opened up the city and really having brought blacks into . . .

Morial: By the non-political blacks, the Joe Blow kind of guy to some extent, who know his history and his record back in the sixties when he opposed some legislation, he comes with fairly good credentials. But the political types, probably not because it is the nature of politics never to have gotten enough from the man who dispenses the patronage, and to become offended when he out-maneuvers you to a position where you can't ask him for more. Just today a guy expressed that view to me. I said that the candidate never wants opposition. Don't quarrel with him, if he was such a good politician that he was able to eliminate the opposition in the last election simply because you could not deal with him because he had no opposition. Don't quarrel with him on that score. You should quarrel with yourselves. If you wanted a candidate you should have gone out and gotten one, but not to use someone to trade with him, that's what they wanted, a candidate, but not anyone that they were going to in fact support to put him out as a pawn to frighten Landreau. So that he would then say, "Well, what do you want? Now, get

him out to race. Or, if you don't get him, I'll give you this and I don't support him. Just let him die on the vine." So the political types, because he has outpoliticed them, are not very pleased with him.

J.B.: Am I correct then that there is an element of frustration because in effect he has been so good he has taken away their ability to put his feet to the vine? Because he has delivered in many ways. He has delivered on the basis of identification of blacks and heretofore positions where you didn't have them. He has even delivered on some extent to put blacks in position where the patronage has always gone to whites economically maybe. You know, some architects getting some jobs that they didn't get before. But of course, we don't have but two black architects. You know, some contractors getting some jobs. Of course, that is still not enough because somebody else wants the contractor to provide the services someplace else, which he may have committed to somebody else. Blacks getting on the Insurance Committee of the city, where they share in the commissions of the insurance that the city gets. It is like saying, "Well, look, we want a black mayor." But what Landreau has done is a great deal. He could perhaps do more, but he has to do it on balance because he can't *much more*. ~~other~~. You may disagree with him on

personal kinds of things, items where people will disagree and say he had a hand in this, or that he is a bastard for not doing it that way.

J.B.: But the basic perception in the black community is that he has delivered . . .

Morial: I think the run of the mill, if you talk to the political types, but if you talk to the guy on the street, if you talk to the political type, they wouldn't agree with that. But if you talk with the guy who doesn't belong to any type of political organization, who is just waiting tables and who is shucking and bluffing around, you know . . .

J.B.: So would the political types be able to deliver a vote to an opposition candidate?

Morial: It would have to be a strong opposition candidate or maybe a black candidate who they really want to get behind and push. But you see the element there that is misunderstood is that you have to get a candidate that is going to be appealing to the blacks as well as some elements of the white. They don't think he has done enough, you know. Then there are the others who feel that he may have done too much so they want to vote against him, for anybody because of the anti-Landreau, which always happens in the political scene.

J.B.: How do you access his administration?

Morial: Oh, I think he has had a fairly good administration. When you compare it with the prior administrations on the basis of progress he has been able to put his political thing together. [Interruption]

J.B.: But OEO did provide a political training ground in effect that didn't exist previously?

Morial: I think to the extent that it provided a training ground for people to participate in a process, in an organizational process where they were electing people because those people had never had any organizational experience, just like the blacks. By in large, blacks have always gotten their experience out of fraternal organizations in the black church. Those are the only election experiences that we have ever had, the Elks the Masons, fraternal groups, the Knights of , because we didn't belong to anything else. The Lodges, that is where you learn your politics so to speak, in the confines of an internal operation. It gave those people who were not part of that kind of thing, because you had a great demise after the forties during the World War, when the fraternal organizations were not what they were in the twenties because that is where blacks were going to the fraternal groups, the Elks and the Masons, this is where they socialize, this is

where the politics was, and in the black church there was a demise developing.

J.B.: So, was this OEO thing significant?

Morial: Well, I think to the extent that it filled that void that had developed in terms of a vehicle for people to participate in a parliamentary body. It developed there politically. It was a place where candidates began to look to the OEO entities because they were organized already. You had the target areas in the cities across the country in the South. IF you couldn't identify the political leadership, if you didn't know who they were, you certainly knew who those people were with the OEO funding program. So, you went to them.

J.B.: Did you utilize that?

Morial: OEO wasn't of any consequence when I ran in '67. It was just starting to get under way. People didn't know the OEO. Sixty-nine identified some of those people and caused some of that. [Interruption]

J.B.: Morial later explained that Edwards appeared primarily to the established black organizations in New Orleans, but that Johnston worked through new black leadership and brought new black people into the political process in the last Governor's race.

End interview with Judge Ernest Morial.