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Interview

with

BETTY CARTER

September 6, 1990

by John Egerton

Transcribed by Jovita Flynn

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Greenville, Mississippi

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

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(SIDE B of this tape is an interview with Daisy Bates)

BETTY CARTER: By the time that the girl came in here from Radcliff, and she said that Hodding, the area in which he could maneuver was over by '54, because once the Supreme Court decision came in, then it was going to be the federal forces against the confederacy, and there you were lost. You were lost at that point.

JOHN EGERTON: Do you think that's an accurate assessment?

BC: I think it probably is, because you had to be so much more circumspect after that. It was pretty awful, and the people that you thought you were going to be able. . . . In that whole--this is before '54--in those editorials that Hodding wrote right after he got home in '45, he was calling on the clergy to do something. Only one man came into his office. He was a young Baptist minister, not the First Baptist Church, but one of the others. And the young man said he agreed, and he had to get to work, and he'd do it. He was gone within three months. You just can't get ahead of your troops.

JE: Yeah, and then you call on the academics and pretty soon they're gone.

BC: And listen, they know perfectly well that if they move, the state will move against them. It was awful. And the power company had the money, and the power company was certainly supporting the reaction.

JE: I think the conclusion that I'm coming to is the right--not the right but the accurate conclusion, the correct conclusion--that it couldn't have worked. See, I kept thinking when I started, there was Carter. There was Ralph McGill. There were the smaller papers of Mississippi. I mean, down at McComb and up in Lexington, and up in the corner, up at Tupelo, those papers were reasonable, progressive papers.

BC: They tried. That's exactly what they were, reasonable, progressive.

JE: Not radical, not really. . . .

BC: No.

JE: But simply trying to appeal to the reason of well intentioned people and it just wasn't there. People listened to James Eastland. They listened to, what was the guy's name who was Speaker of the House?

BC: He was awful. Down in the Rolling Port area.

JE: Rosedale.

BC: Oh Rosedale, Walter Sillers. Oh, they were constantly excoriating Hodding. He got the picture.

JE: Well, I'm going to do the book anyway. So let's talk for a little while.

BC: Okay.

JE: You were born in New Orleans?

BC: Born in New Orleans, brought up in New Orleans, went to girls schools throughout. Went to kindergarten with boys. Then from first grade through Newcomb [College], girls education. Married Hodding, moved to Jackson.

JE: Where did you meet him?

BC: Met him because his sister was at Newcomb, and he was from Hammond, Louisiana as was she. She was rushed Pi Phi and Kappa, and I was rushed Pi Phi and Kappa. So our freshman year we had to take physics, and you had to have a physics laboratory mate. So we looked at each other, and we knew each other from rush, so we choose each other. During the course of the year, she would tell me about her brother, who had graduated from Bowdoin [College] and was now at Columbia, the Pulitzer School of Journalism. And he was so attractive sounding. So in the summers we would go to Amite, Louisiana, which is fifteen miles north of Hammond, where Hodding's family lived. So I had a birthday, and I telephoned Corrine Carter, and I said, "Look, come to my birthday party and bring some men." She said she couldn't come but she would send her brothers. Well, she sent one brother, who was Hodding, and another man friend. And that's how I met him. I thought he liked me, but he spent the whole evening on the front porch with my mother instead of dancing with me. Well, he did come in and dance with me two or three times.

JE: That must have been in about 1930 or thereabouts.

BC: It was earlier than '30 because we were married in '31. So that was the summer of '28.

JE: Then you went to Hammond?

BC: No, then we went to Jackson, Mississippi, and Hodding was the Associated Press manager for five months. A big sales tax fight was in the legislature. Everything got very, very hot. So the sales tax fight, and Greek Rice from Natchez, I think,

told the Associated Press that Hodding was not putting out balanced stories. Also, Hodding's supervisor, Ralph Wheatley, in New Orleans telephoned or put on the machine, the Teletype machine, "Don't file any more stories until I get there." But Ralph Wheatley was known to get drunk, and he didn't come, and he didn't come. United Press was filing. The Times Picayune was filing. The Commercial Appeal was filing, and Hodding just couldn't stand it. So he said, "I'm the AP man. I'm going to get the story." So he went out and got the story. Now, in a one-man bureau in order to get the story, he had to punch-out the story. You know what that means, for the Teletype? But if he did that, while he was doing that, a committee meeting might be going on. So he went, and at his personal expense, hired a man who knew how to punch, but who had been fired by Wheatley. So when Wheatley heard that Hodding had hired this man, and had filed stories when he told him not to, he fired him. Well, that was, I guess, February or March of '32.

JE: Right after you'd married.

BC: Five months, and there were no jobs. It was the depths of the Depression. So we went on down to his father's house in Hammond. Hodding went into New Orleans to see what he could find, but he couldn't find a thing. They were letting everybody off. So we had \$300 or \$500 from our wedding money, and we'd heard that a young man was starting a mimeograph sheet in competition with the Weekly. Hodding said, well, he wasn't going to get involved with a mimeograph sheet. We were going to start a daily in competition with the strongest weekly in Louisiana,

which we did. So we started the Daily Courier in Hammond, Louisiana. We didn't have a Linotype. We didn't have a press. How we worked that, I guess we got a Linotype, right at the beginning we had a Linotype. But then you would take the copy down to Ponchatoula, where it would be--that's not true. How did that work? Maybe we got the press first. We got the press. So you take the copy to Ponchatoula, they put it all into big. . . .

JE: Forms.

BC: Forms, put it all in the forms. Then one morning when we were going over the Illinois Central track, the darn thing pried. The whole paper just, oh, came apart, absolutely. Then we had to buy a Linotype. I don't know how we did any of it, but we did it.

JE: That seems just impossible now, looking back on it, doesn't it?

BC: To start a paper on nothing. We were there four years, and we fought Huey Long tooth and toenail, mostly because Mr. Carter was against Huey Long. We thought that he was a dictator, and that you had to fight back, which we did. So we fought and fought, and they just blocked us. The advertisers were scared to death to advertise with you, but they did. Our area was the heart of the anti-Long, and they never got our judicial district. I don't know if they ever got our congressional district or not.

JE: Then it was in '36 when you came to Greenville?

BC: We sold that paper to some people who had been with the Long administration and paid some money. They had cash. So we

put up half the money, and a group of men and one woman, Mrs. Gamble, put up local money. Matched what we had.

JE: So you could buy this paper?

BC: No. So we started the paper. They were not. . . .

JE: Oh, it was the new paper?

BC: And that's really a problem to ever start a new paper.

JE: Well, now, there was another rival paper that merged into it?

BC: There was a paper called the Greenville Democrat Times. So we had the Delta Star, and the Delta Star came out in the morning, and the Greenville Democrat Times came out in the evening, and we ran that for two years. Then either we were going to go broke or they were going to go broke. Somebody had to give. So Hodding and the young circulation manager got spy glasses and looked at the press run of the Greenville Democrat Times, and as the headline came up on the front page, they counted it. We found out that we had more circulation than they were claiming. So they confronted them with that, and they gave in. So then we had to buy them out, which we did.

JE: What a clever idea, though.

BC: Wasn't that great! John Gibson and Hodding did that. Then we called it the Delta Democrat Times, based on the merger. That was '38, the fall of '38.

JE: Going back just for a second to the beginning of the Roosevelt time, did the Hammond paper, did Hodding always. . . ?

BC: We were for Roosevelt.

JE: Always? Right from the start?

BC: Right.

JE: With a lot of enthusiasm?

BC: Oh, for Roosevelt, absolutely. 'Course, Roosevelt was fighting Huey. So that was another reason for being for Roosevelt. At one point, Hodding ran for the state legislature, simply because nobody else was going to run on the anti-Long ticket. The Roosevelt people by then had either the PWA or the WPA, and people who needed jobs, they would give them a little work slip and then they could go and get a job. And so because Hodding was anti-Long and pro-Roosevelt, he was given a stack of these work slips that he could out to people who were going to vote for him. He said I never could ask a poor soul to vote for me. He needed a job. How could I ask him to vote for me? So I don't think [laughter] he did much with the work slips. And Hodding got as many votes as anybody had ever gotten and won, but the poll tax was over and it was a much larger constituency than had ever been before and he was snowed under. All the anti-Long people had just been given their ballot.

JE: And they voted them?

BC: Oh, they all voted. And they did the endless chain.

JE: Where you just keep. . . .

BC: The only ballot that you have to have is the first ballot. The man who goes through to vote, he gets his ballot but he doesn't vote it. He just palms it, and he comes back to the pay-off man who gives him the money or a bottle of whiskey or whatever. Then that blank ballot is marked the way the Long people want it to be marked. Now, you go in to vote and the

person sitting there gives you a blank ballot. But you vote the one that's already marked. Then you bring the blank ballot back and you get your pay. So that's how they controlled the election.

JE: In the fall of 1938, in November, there was a big meeting in Birmingham of something called the Southern Conference for Human Welfare.

BC: Hodding wouldn't have gone to that.

JE: Do you remember that?

BC: Not a thing about it. We stuck very close to our home knitting. We figured that we had enough to handle right here. Hodding's position was that you didn't know all those people. You didn't have time to know all those people, and it could completely ruin what you were trying to do at home. The people could be identified with something that you weren't identified with. That you didn't want to be identified with. We had our little tightrope that we were walking, not so much in '38.

JE: But later on.

BC: Because our problems were principally survival, and as far as race is concerned, I don't remember that we were involved in race at all.

JE: Didn't really come up for a long time, did it?

BC: No, not really. No, it didn't.

JE: I really think it was into the war years and after the war before anybody really started talking about that very much. Do you know Thomas Sancton?

BC: Tommy, I do.

JE: Is he still living?

BC: I believe, but I don't know where or how or what.

JE: How could I find that out, do you think? Who might know?

BC: I don't know. I'd ask in Jackson. Who would I ask? I don't know who to tell you.

JE: What could you tell me about him?

BC: I can't remember. I just know that we knew Tommy Sancton.

JE: He was a Mississippian, was he not, or Louisiana?

BC: Yes, he was. He was involved with Mississippi. That's all I really remember.

JE: I've been trying to find out. I keep running across articles of his in these old newspapers and magazines. I'd like to know if he's still living. I'd really like to talk to him.

BC: It would be fascinating.

JE: What about some of the people like George McLain in Tupelo and Oliver Immerick?

BC: We saw more of Oliver Immerick. I don't know why, but you see Tupelo is up there.

JE: Way, pretty far up.

BC: And he has a different group of people. Well, so did Immerick, but Immerick was more on our road from here to Hammond and New Orleans. I think that would be one reason that we might have seen more of Oliver.

JE: Could you guess about when Hodding started writing free-lancing pieces for magazines, all the way from the beginning?

BC: Ho, ho, ho, yes, well, after we got to Hammond, and there wasn't any money anywhere, so he wrote one or two articles for the New Republic about Huey B. Long, for which he was paid. Then he wrote an article for the Review of Reviews about Huey B. Long. That was a magazine that had a good name. In fact, that magazine, that article, was voted by the National Library Association as the best magazine article of the month. So then you have a little poster up at the check-out counter to tell you. And we got paid for that. Well, we were betting on that money to pay for little Hodding at the hospital. But the day was approaching and the money didn't come. So Hodding wrote and said we were worrying about it. So they wrote and said that in accordance with their new policy, they gave you like fifty subscriptions to the magazines and fifty packages of Proback razors. I don't think we got a dollar. Then they went broke. Everybody was going broke.

JE: When was Hodding III born?

BC: He was born in '35.

JE: What month?

BC: April.

JE: He's about two months older than I am.

BC: Really?

JE: I've known him a little bit.

BC: Whenever your paths crossed.

JE: Wouldn't say we were really close friends, but he and Pat Derian and I have known off and on down through the years.

BC: Jackson.

JE: Talk a little bit about the Mississippi politicians that you crossed swords with, beginning with [Theodore] Bilbo and [John] Rankin.

BC: Well, Bilbo was a hot issues, of course. Rankin, we didn't have too much with Rankin.

JE: He was pretty much far removed from you.

BC: That was up there, north Mississippi. But Bilbo would come in here. He would campaign in here. And that summer, I guess '46, was the summer for the Bilbo explosion, where, you know, Hodding was saying awful things about Bilbo, and Bilbo was saying awful things about Hodding [laughter]. I never met Bilbo personally, but we went over to hear him in Leland. I remember that big night when he talked and said he was for every Goddamn Jew from Jesus Christ on down. Well, Hodding got two or three affidavits that he'd said it, but he said what he had said was that, "I'm for every good Jew from Jesus Christ on down." But he said Goddamn Jew.

JE: He said that Hodding had said that?

BC: No, Hodding said that Bilbo had said it. Bilbo said, "I'm for every Goddamn Jew from Jesus Christ on down," but Bilbo said that he had said, "I'm for every good Jew from Jesus Christ on down." Hodding thought he had him hooked with the Baptists then, using Goddamn, but couldn't pin it. Not enough people were willing to testify that they'd heard it.

JE: Yeah, but he must have been a terrible person.

BC: Oh, he was awful. He was just sexually a goat, and no woman could go into his office safely. There was a list in Washington of which senators you could go in and shut the door and which you had to leave the door open and which you had to sit on the other side of the desk from him and which you had to stand up on the other side, and he was a stand up on the other side of the desk. There was a girl from Hammond who owned property in Mississippi, and her husband was a German. So comes the war. He is going to be put into whatever the concentration camps were. So she came up to Washington to see what she could do, and she stayed with us. She had to go see Bilbo because the property, and maybe her husband because of the property, was considered a Mississippian. And he chased her around that desk, and she came in. She was absolutely white half an hour after this thing, because she said, "I don't know what to do because there's my husband. I want to get him out of this thing but I don't want to do this with Mr. Bilbo."

JE: That's terrible.

BC: So she didn't, and her husband did come out all right. But Bilbo chased her. So I know that. It didn't happen to me. It happened to someone who came into my house exhausted.

JE: Was that reputation of his widely known?

BC: Widely known.

JE: And then there was Senator Eastland.

BC: Well, I don't remember Eastland at all except that he was terrible, and we wrote against him. I never knew Eastland. I met him once. I don't know what to tell you.

JE: Senator Stennis?

BC: Stennis, we knew better, and we knew Stennis because, later we knew Stennis better, his son John was at Princeton with my son Hodding, and they were friends. So we sort of sat with the Stennises at the graduation dinner and that sort of thing.

JE: Did you think of him--you know, terminology is difficult when you discuss these things, but one descriptive approach that a number of people I've talked to have taken, and Stennis is a good example to apply it to, would be to say, "He was not a racist. He was a very decent man. What he said about race was strictly for his own protection." And they made a distinction between his personal attitudes and his statements, unlike Bilbo and unlike Eastland, who felt it deep down in their bones.

BC: But people who had to deal with Eastland, a lot of them preferred dealing with Eastland to Stennis, because they felt that Eastland told you from the beginning where he stood. Whereas, Stennis gave you a softened version of the same thing.

JE: But basically they ended up at the same place?

BC: Exactly the same vote.

JE: This name I know nothing about except this person, Clarence Hood.

BC: I know that name.

BC: Well, I don't remember Eastland at all except that he was terrible, and we wrote against him. I never knew Eastland. I met him once. I don't know what to tell you.

JE: Senator Stennis?

BC: Stennis, we knew better, and we knew Stennis because,

JE: Was a Democratic loyalist in '48 when the Dixiecrats bolted. He was from Jackson.

BC: I know the name, but I don't remember anything.

JE: What about Percy Green who was the black journalist in Jackson?

BC: Only read him.

JE: Bill Minor?

BC: Loved him.

JE: Bill's still around. I hope to see him.

BC: He'd know a lot.

JE: He's probably going to be a good source. What about McGill?

BC: Hodding and Ralph McGill and the man in Little Rock...

JE: Harry Ashmore.

BC: Those three used to get on the phone. You didn't have conference calls, but one would call the other, and then they'd discuss the same thing.

JE: Did you think of their views, those three men's views as closely coinciding?

BC: Very similar. They gave each other support.

JE: Once in the summer of '48, Hodding and Harry Ashmore went up East to do a series of radio and public appearances, do you recall that?

BC: Yes.

JE: And it was curious, reading about that, because I think of them in the context of here, where they would fight the battles against all kinds of reactionary people. But when they

were there, or when they wrote for the Saturday Evening Post or Collier's or whatnot, they were really trying to explain and even defend the South against the unreasonable and ignorant views of non-southerners.

BC: Absolutely.

JE: And that's a real tightrope, isn't it?

BC: It was a real tightrope. And it finally was a rope around their necks, because if they went too far, the rope got pulled. You see, they never wanted to be anything but loyal sons of the South. But the South wasn't going to be what they wanted they wanted the South to be. So they struggled to try to make the South be what they wanted it to be. And the South wouldn't come along. It really took the Voting Rights Act.

JE: Well, you're anticipating one of my questions. You know, many times I've read in his speeches and magazine pieces and books statements to the effect that if people would just. .

BC: Leave us alone.

JE: Leave us alone, we can work this out. He really believed that, didn't he?

BC: He hoped it. He really hoped it. Faith, hope, and charity, and the greatest of these is charity. All those people who weren't paying any attention.

JE: Looking back on it now, do you think the South ever would have done it without the force of federal law?

BC: No, no, no.

JE: And the black protest movement?

BC: No, you had to have that.

JE: Do you think that Hodding felt that too by the time. .

BC: At the end. I don't know, maybe. You see, eventually he just saw that they weren't going to come along. I don't remember his even sitting up and saying that. But you must remember that Hodding was not well from '64 on.

JE: So really he wasn't able to really look at. . . .

BC: He wasn't able to really throw ()

JE: And my God, look at all that's happened since '64.

BC: Absolutely.

JE: So we have a perspective that's much longer than he had.

BC: And you see, young Hodding was taking over by then, which was so lucky for us. In '64, Hodding lost his reading vision. He couldn't read from then on, and also Tommy Carter died, and the two things happened within a week. And that was the end. It killed him. Well, he lived. He did a lot of things. He spoke. He wrote several books. But. . . .

JE: He was a different. . . .

BC: He was very different.

JE: Tell me about his eye injury. How did that happen?

BC: Well, I'm trying to think which eye, right eye, down at Camp Blanding on the night maneuvers, he did something to it. So after that, he had partial vision or peripheral vision in his right eye. Then when he had the retinal detachment, it was in his left eye. He had no reading vision with the right, and now he had the retinal detachment, and no reading vision at all. So that was that.

JE: By when, about '64?

BC: '64, April.

JE: He was not able to read?

BC: No. The only thing that saved his sanity was that he was supposed to be, he had an article to do, or a book, called-- it was about small towns in America that are still alive. This one was about Holly Springs. We had gone over and done all the research. We had all the material. And we'd gotten the advance. But that was not as important as the fact that the deadline arrived. So they telephoned and said, "We have got to have that piece. We have got to have it." Well, it gave Hodding something else to do, and I really think it saved his sanity. I think he would have jumped into the Mississippi River if it hadn't been for that.

JE: It had to have been really tough. For a writer not to be able to see.

BC: Not to be able to see.

JE: Just the worst.

BC: Terrible. I guess it would be terrible for a carpenter or a lawyer, doctor, anybody. But terrible.

JE: Also another thing that he talked about a lot before Brown, was that if the South was going to have separate but equal. . . .

BC: It had to make it equal. Absolutely.

JE: The separate truly equal.

BC: He couldn't believe that this town was spending five times as much on education on a white child as it was on the

education of a black child. That was just the accepted standard. I went over once and did a feature on a woman who had 75 children in her classroom. Well, how can you teach with 75 children in your classroom? They weren't all there every day. No air conditioning. The kids were sitting in the windows, on the floor. They didn't even have chairs for them all if they all came. So the story came out in the paper--and I didn't know this until long afterward--she never was able to have a job with the Greenville school board after that.

JE: Because of the story?

BC: Because she had cooperated. So she was teaching out in the county schools. An able woman.

JE: Did you ever know Lillian Smith?

BC: No, and her book, Strange Fruit, came out at the same time as Hodding's Winds of Fear, and in England Winds of Fear beat Strange Fruit. She was ahead of our thinking, considerably.

JE: I kind of look at her now as being almost a prophet in a way.

BC: She was.

JE: She believed and said, earlier in the '40s, that the real problem here was segregation, and that if we didn't deal with segregation, we never would be able to work the other problems out. Now, we can look at that and see that that was true, but back then, I mean, you had to be crazy to make a statement like that.

BC: Very radical. Very nuts.

JE: I think one reason she was able to do it was that she really didn't have an institutional tie that restrained her in any way.

BC: Right.

JE: I mean, even if you own a newspaper, you don't want to toss it in the Mississippi River.

BC: You don't own it. The public owns it.

JE: That's right. If people won't buy the papers or buy advertising, you're just. . . .

BC: You're over. And she was able to put all of her energy into that statement, but we also were putting out a paper, where you had to talk about the fire hazard and this and that. . . .

JE: Right, all the other things.

BC: Yeah, and what are you going to do about syphilis, you know.

JE: I don't mention her to suggest that she was any more courageous at all. It was just that her position was different.

BC: It was, very different.

JE: But she was a courageous woman. She was very outspoken.

BC: I agree. Very good.

JE: I thought that was kind of interesting. Can you think of anybody that you all have known from that period of the '30s and '40s, anybody, white or black, southern, who took a position on the racial thing similar to that?

BC: You mean '30s and '40s? Forget the '30s. Let's go on to the '40s.

JE: Yes, prior to Brown. Just forget the '30s, yeah.

BC: Let's go right up to '54.

JE: Yeah, prior to '54. Can you think of anybody that you all knew who you thought was really. . . ?

BC: Well, they were in the East, lots of people in the East on the cocktail circuit.

JE: But nobody down here?

BC: I'm trying to think who could have been down here. I'm sure they existed, and I'm sure my brain ought to give me an answer to that.

JE: Well, see, I guess I'm not really sure they did. I guess I'm thinking that also everybody had to pull their punches on this a little bit, some more than others. Now, the exceptions that I have found are black, whose circumstances were all different. They were, after all, the oppressed people in that circumstance, and yet, nobody heard them.

BC: Oh no, nobody. . . .

JE: It made absolutely no--I read a thing, and I've been over reading newspapers and microfilm, and Thurgood Marshall came to Mount Bayou in, oh, let's say, April of '54, before Brown, and made a speech.

BC: What was Brown, May?

JE: Brown was in May.

BC: First Monday.

JE: He made a speech to a large gathering at Mount Bayou in which he said, "We're going to sue Ole Miss, to open up Ole Miss. They're not going to get to be segregated any longer up there."

I mean, he just hammered away at it. Well, nobody white [laughter] is going to, they can't do that, you see. It is just not possible. And my feeling coming into all this was, well, there were lots of people, you know, there were Carters and McGills and Ashmores. . . .

BC: But they all had their own. . . .

JE: Even some politicians, like Ellis Arnall and Jim Folsom and whatnot. But when I go back and look at what they were actually saying and actually doing, nobody was saying, "Look, the problem here is segregation. We've got to get rid of the problem first." You just couldn't do it. It was an unthinkable thought.

BC: No, you didn't dare say that. What you did was you hammered away, you chiseled around the edge.

JE: On the separate but equal thing and all of the others.

BC: Exactly. You chiseled around, eating little bites out of it, which you hoped would lead to equality before the law and equal education and the vote, but you didn't want to attack segregation as such. Because then they would say, along with Bilbo, that you're for mongrelization of the race. And when you get into a sex issue, look at the abortion thing right now. It's going to split the United States.

JE: We're totally immobilized by the emotionalism of it. And it would have been a dangerous thing, too. You know, beyond the emotionalism, I think it would have been physically dangerous for people to really be that outspoken.

BC: You mean, mobs would get you?

JE: Yeah, I do.

BC: Oh, I think they would have lynched you.

JE: I think it could easily have happened, yeah.

BC: Maybe not in Greenville, but backwater, country towns. Because the very thought that you might be for integration was enough to make people furious.

JE: Yeah, that was enough to set people wild.

BC: But who were these people? These people that we're talking about are the old reactionary leadership, and we kept hoping that these other people would come up somehow and have other ideas and speak up for them. Maybe not for integration, but speak more loudly on the nibbling side, but they wouldn't even do that.

JE: What about the Mississippi governors of this period? Governor White, first of all, was in office.

BC: Well, I don't we were into race then, were we?

JE: He was in office when Brown came down.

BC: Really?

JE: Yeah, in '54.

BC: Well, then he's bound to have had a good, strong statement against it.

JE: Compared to Eastland, he sounded right reasonable.

BC: Did he?

JE: He said, we ought not to make rash statements. We ought to think about this. Of course, his thoughts didn't get him very far [laughter], but at least. . . .

BC: I didn't know. That's good.

JE: It was a little bit. What about James Coleman? This was a little later.

BC: Well, we thought he was pretty good. We thought he was willing to think of things.

JE: I spoke to him yesterday. Had a really interesting conversation with him for about an hour and a half.

BC: Is he in Jackson?

JE: He's at Ackerman.

BC: His old home.

JE: His old home. I enjoyed the conversation very much. He's a great raconteur, and he talks pretty reasonably.

BC: Well, you know, Earl Johnson has that book coming out. You know about that?

JE: I heard about that.

BC: And young Hodding said it was a good book, and a lot of people. I've even ordered it. I never would have thought I would do such a thing. But I think it'll be interesting to see what he has to say on his side, his history, his memories of what was happening during those days. You know, I went down and talked to Anita Blackwell down at Meyersville. She's the gal, black woman, now the mayor of Meyersville, who led the group that went in and took one of the buildings at the Greenville Air Base to dramatize the fact that people were being put off of the plantations and had no place to go.

JE: What year was that, do you know?

BC: About '62, probably. Later than what you're after.

JE: The other governor that I wanted to ask you about is Fielding Wright.

BC: He was a lawyer.

JE: He was the guy who in '48 went on the Dixiecrat ticket with Strom Thurmond.

BC: Terrible. Right, now he ^{would} ~~was~~ be an intransigent.

JE: They ^{were} almost successful in taking Mississippi out of the Democratic Party, didn't they?

BC: Sure.

JE: One of the things that James Coleman said yesterday was that if there was any ironclad rule in politics, it is you don't desert your party. And it was that position that made a moderate out of him, rather than a reactionary like Wright.

BC: Ah ha!

JE: He just said under no circumstances--I'll make a flat statement, "I will never, never leave my party over an ideological or other issue." So by his explanation, he was able to stand on that position and kind of be a cut above. . . .

BC: He was a "yellow dog" Democrat.

JE: Yeah, right. Instead of letting it swing on race or something else, he would just say, "It's my party." But Wright and the others. . . .

BC: The thing is that I'm not too good a person to interview on this, because I was running a house, I was working on the paper, and I was running ladies' clubs. So I was. . . .

JE: You had your hands full with a lot of other things.

BC: Without keeping up entirely, except at dinner and in the evening here, and on trips.

JE: Let me ask you this, Mrs. Carter, again with the advantage of hindsight. Looking back to those years, could you give me an idea of about when, in terms of a year, you think you and your husband would have reached the conclusion that segregation had to go? Would it have been when Brown came down or before Brown?

BC: I couldn't have been before Brown.

JE: Even up to Brown, you were still. . . .

BC: Hodding never permitted himself to think of himself as an integrationist. There was a book that he wrote--I can't remember whether it was First Person Rural. They sent us copies of the book before they were all distributed, and on it, it had the book jacket, and the book jacket said that Hodding Carter was the foremost integrationist in the South. Hodding got on the phone and phoned the publisher, and he said, "Look, if you let that stand, I'm going to sue you for everything that you've got because I am not an integrationist." If you admitted you were integrationist, everything we had in the world was gone. So they had to call in all those books with the book jackets and change the book jackets.

JE: And that was after '54, wasn't it?

BC: Yes. Now, I can't be sure which book it was or what date, but I'm sure it was after then. Well, we could easily check that.

JE: You think it was First Person Rural?

BC: I think it was. I'm not positive.

JE: By the end of his life, do you think he would have considered himself an integrationist?

BC: You mean secretly? [Pause] I don't know the answer to that. If I did, I'm not sure I would tell you, because I don't think it would be fair. We never discussed that, and I don't think it would be fair for me to say, to put him in a position maybe he was not in. And it would have implied that from '64 to '72 when he died, that he had made this step, and I don't know if he had.

JE: Well, let me ask it a different way. If he could see what has happened here, do you think he'd be pleased or not?

BC: I think he would be thrilled.

JE: You do?

BC: Yes, because this is the way it had to go. This country has to be one, and people have to be one.

JE: That's an interesting. . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW