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interview
with
HARRY ASHMORE
JUNE 16, 1990

By John Egerton
Transcribed by Jackie Gorman

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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INTERVIEWER INFORMATION SHEET

Interviewer: John Egerton

Occupation: author; journalist

Series: Southern Politics

Interviews in this series contain discussions with political leaders, journalists, newspaper editors, party officials, and civil rights activists, from the southern states. The series was originally set up to house interviews done by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries for their study of southern politics. This interview is in a subseries on Southern Liberalism, which includes conversations between author John Egerton and individuals involved in aspects of the civil rights struggle between the 1930s and 1950s.

Purpose of interview:

This interview was conducted by Egerton for his book on southern liberals. The SOHP worked with Egerton in processing and depositing the interviews.

Comments:

The researcher should be aware that the interviewer's style was to go from question to question rather quickly. Topics mentioned in the abstract are sometimes only touched on briefly. Often the interviewer listed names and elicited brief comments from his interviewee. Also, there are sections of long comment by the interviewer about his thesis.

Atlanta, Georgia

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

JUNE 16, 1990

JOHN EGERTON: . . . in a general way the background: you were born in about 1916, in Greenville. You went to Clemson in the mid 30's. You went to the Greenville papers from '37 to '42. Is that right?

HARRY ASHMORE: Well, I went, in the fall of '41, up to Howard.

JE: You went to the Nieman Fellowship.

HA: I never came back to the Greenville paper.

JE: Then you went in the service. Were you in the Army or the Marines?

HA: Army. I went and I had a reserve commission out of Clemson as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry. After Pearl Harbor I was at Cambridge as a Nieman Fellow and shortly thereafter, I got called up. I left Cambridge in about February.

JE: You really went from the Nieman program straight into active duty.

HA: I went straight down to Fort Benning where they took retreat reserve officers. We took the same basic officer training course. Then I went from Benning to Austin, Texas, with the Ninety-fifth Infantry Division, which had just been formed. I stayed with the Ninety-fifth Infantry Division until the end of the war in Europe, from beginning to end. We were in the Third Army, Patton's Army.

JE: You were in a lot of combat and all of that.

HA: Yes. I had about ten or eleven months and at one time we had fifty percent casualties. I saw a lot of that and after V-E Day I suddenly got ordered back to the Pentagon. By that time I was Lieutenant Colonel and I was the Assistant Operations Officer of the Division. I got sent back to the Operations Division at the Pentagon and I stayed there until V-J Day, and as soon as I could get out I went to Charlotte where I became editor of The Charlotte News.

JE: You stayed there for two years until '45 or '47.

HA: Right.

JE: And then at The Gazette from '47 until '57?

HA: No, until '59.

JE: Okay.

HA: The fall of '59.

JE: That's the general outline. My interest is going to stop in May '54. But, going back into this period then, I wanted to ask you in just a general way to talk about a few people who were colleagues of yours in the press at that time. One of them was Virginius Dabney.

HA: Virginius Dabney. I was devoted to him. I met V, I guess, after I went to Charlotte. I then started going to the American Society of Newspaper Editors annual meeting and I met V there. V was very, well, he was a lovely, kind fellow.

Old Douglas Southall Freeman retired in '47 and so they were looking for an editor for the editorial page for The News Leader in Richmond. V, of course, was on the morning paper, The Times

Dispatch. V suggested me, and I went up to Richmond to be interviewed by Tennant Bryan, who was the owner.

I was taken to lunch and they started questioning me. A guy named Jack Wise, who was the general manager, started questioning me about general policy. After about the fourth question I knew damn well this was a case of utter incompatibility and I never could conceivably. . . . So I went back home and Jack Kilpatrick is the one they hired instead of me. He became the father of interposition and so forth.

That's the connection, and then I remained, I would see V after that, and I had a great sympathy for V and I wrote about this in Hearts and Minds. You will see in there where V was just muzzled. Kilpatrick was doing all this outrageous business that outraged V and he said in his own memoir, Across the years, that he had to stay silent, he couldn't criticize.

V was--I characterized him in Hearts and Minds--as saying that he was as liberal as you could get in that day. He would not accept the end of segregation but within the pattern he was probably more advanced than everybody else.

In the war years, for example, he was supporting FEPC, Fair Employment Practices. He came out for the ending of segregation on public transportation way back there, when damn few other people in the South were even bringing that subject up. But V would stop short. This goes to his experience with the Southern Regional Council, where he wouldn't go along, and there finally got to be a real cleavage between him and [Benjamin] Mays and some of the blacks, Dillard [Dent].

JE: Albert Dent.

HA: That was a real showdown, real confrontation. V would not go the whole way. He wouldn't go for the end of segregation. But within that limit, it seems to me, that. . . He wrote this book called Liberalism in the South in 1932, which is interesting to see what was considered to be a southern liberal.

JE: It hardly mentions race.

HA: He hardly mentions it. He just accepted that as a given. It is understandable because it was not an issue. There was no pressure on at that time, and very little on the outside, in the North--you would get some of that pro forma business in Congress. But nobody expected anything to come of it.

JE: I don't want to get off on this and linger on it but I think I would be inclined to say that after about '38, when the Supreme Court had ruled in the Missouri case and then the Southern Conference for Human Welfare had come along, and several books had come out in that period . . .

HA: In that connection The Southern Conference took up the poll tax issue and made a big thing out of that and I remember my reaction to that. But after I got to Charlotte this was still an issue. I would ridicule the whole damn poll tax issue, saying, what the hell difference, what they've really got is the white primary, you don't need the poll tax. No black can vote but the poll tax disenfranchises poor whites.

But in South Carolina it [the tax] wasn't enough money to make any difference. You could have repealed the poll tax in South Carolina and it wouldn't have changed a damn thing. They

had a total white primary and they did throughout the South. That didn't yield until the [1944] Texas case when the Supreme Court knocked out the white primary and then blacks were finally enfranchised.

So, the poll tax was a symbolic irrelevance. It was kind of like the death penalty--it didn't have a hell of a lot to do with the reality--it was important as a symbol.

That was what I remember about that reaction. The other thing that. . . . I said in Charlotte that I could get establishment support for any plea for justice including even the vote for blacks, if it didn't--if it stopped short of what they called the social question. That meant if it stopped short in the schools. But, otherwise, I could crusade for opening up the polls to the blacks, equalizing teachers pay, and all that kind of thing.

JE: With places where physical intermingling became an issue

HA: That's right. That was the one. When the school cases were before the court I knew how it was going to come out because I had done that study [of inequality in education]. That was before the Brown decision; they come into your ken, the Negroes and the schools.

JE: I see that study as being at the end of my book. It came out the day the Brown decision

HA: The concluding paragraph in it was. . . . I was under wraps in writing that because it was really a summary of what these scholars had known. They were being so objective they were

falling over backwards and everybody was sympathetic. I said what I then believed that this was not going to make any great change in attitudes of itself but it would redefine the goal of what people had to see, if the Supreme Court knocked out separate schools.

JE: Did you in point of fact believe at that time that it would in fact profoundly affect attitudes?

AH: I was convinced, there was no other way. If they ever faced it they could weasel around but it seemed to me they had gotten past that--separate but equal was so blatantly unequal. We thought it was possible that they might declare, might require by federal edict the equalization, which no state could afford. They were so goddamn unequal. That would have been almost as much of a blow. And in some ways it might have been better if they had done that, if they had actually left the schools segregated and then approved, generally they approved, and brought the schools up to standard then the integration could have begun on a more equal basis.

JE: But, they didn't have the resources to pay for that.

AH: They didn't.

JE: White schools were so damn poor.

AH: They were so poor and furthermore, you knew damn well when the Supreme Court left it to good faith, there wasn't any good faith, there never had been. They had been lying and fudging those goddamn figures ever since they had a school system.

I don't know whether you remember, but I wrote a brief for the governor of Florida when they filed the second Brown, when they argued for implementation. I was retained by the governor of Georgia [Florida], it was before Collins, but I'm not sure. Anyway, I had to deal with the attorney general, a very courtly fellow.

JE: I believe it might have been Collins, he took over in '55.

AH: That's right. I went down there and the assistant attorney general, the young man who dealt with me and I wrote this long memorandum in which I suggested this is what they should put in the brief. They didn't include any of it, they went the other way, they had a preposterous brief before the Supreme Court. Actually, this memorandum did get to Earl Warren. He said he saw it and he also said he'd seen Hearts and Minds--he told me that later.

That didn't have much to do with Brown One but it had a good deal to do with Brown Two. That's why they put in the "all deliberate speed," because they wanted to make an uncompromising stand on principle but avoid having the courts have to enforce it. So, to that extent it had some influence. Certainly it's in Hearts and Minds. In fact, I quote from this memorandum. You may be interested in taking a look at that because this was at the time. . . . It was done in the intervals, Brown One had come down that year before Brown Two came down. That was a quiet time, nothing much was happening.

JE: Some other people I want to really just kind of identify, I'm not really quite sure where they fit. Tarleton Collier.

HA: Tarleton Collier was an editorial writer for the Louisville paper.

JE: Before that he worked in Atlanta at some paper called The Atlanta Georgian.

HA: That's right it was a Hearst paper.

JE: What the hell was that?

HA: It was a Hearst paper, it was an afternoon paper. Very flashy Hearst type paper. I don't know when it expired.

JE: He was writing for that paper in '38 because he wrote .

. . .

HA: I think it ran after the war.

JE: He wrote a piece about The Southern Conference.

HA: Right. Then he went to Louisville, didn't he?

JE: Yes, to The Courier Journal. That's right.

HA: I never knew him too well.

JE: Do you know where he was from?

HA: I don't. Probably Georgia.

JE: And then a guy named Henry Lesesne?

HA: Henry Lesesne was at The Columbia State or The Columbia Record, wasn't he?

JE: The stuff that I find is in The New York Herald Tribune.

HA: was he a correspondent or just a stringer?

JE: It didn't say. Just long pieces in The New York Herald Tribune.

HA: I think he was a stringer and I think Henry Lesesne was on one of the Columbia papers, either The Record or The Estate. He must have been a stringer for The Herald.

JE: I'll be damned.

HA: I remember him. I didn't know him too well.

JE: Is he dead, do you suppose?

HA: I think when I was covering the Legislature he was around.

JE: Would he be dead now? Older than you by a lot?

HA: Probably. I'll inquire, somebody might know him.

JE: Ask when you go, would you? If by some accident he should be alive--these were some really long, thoughtful pieces that he did.

HA: Well, Lesesne is one of those old sacred Charleston names. It's one of those old Huguenot, French names. He was of the old blood. It is very much a old country, Charleston name.

JE: Thomas Sancton, I mentioned earlier.

HA: Tom Sancton may be still alive. The way to find out about that is to call Neil Davis. He would know. He stayed in touch with Tom and sort of helped him dry out.

JE: You said he was from New Orleans.

HA: He was from Louisiana and he wound up back in New Orleans and was married while we were Nieman Fellows. He married, his wife was the daughter of the Chief Justice of Louisiana. A very pretty girl.

So, Tom, I'm sure, grew up in Louisiana. I don't know whether it was New Orleans but that's where he's from.

JE: Who else was in your Nieman class from the South besides Neil Davis and Sancton?

HA: Well, Neil Davis, Sancton, and I and there was a fellow named Henning Heidt, who was the editor of the Miami Herald. He's dead, he's been dead a long time. He was the first one of our contemporaries to die. I think we were the only Southerners. We were the designated provincials.

JE: Hodding Carter.

HA: Hodding was a very close friend of mine.

JE: You were good friends for a long time. You write in Hearts and Minds about the occasion in the summer and fall of '48 when you and he went on a barnstorming tour through the east to kind of debate the . . .

HA: Well, I was just one appearance.

JE: Was it just one?

HA: Yes, we were up there for a forum on the air. It was a Town Hall meeting. Television was in its infancy then, but that was a big program on radio. It was a debate on segregation. This was in '48.

JE: One shot deal?

HA: One shot, and we had Walter White and a man named Ray Sprigle, who had put a black face on, he was a Pittsburgh reporter, and travelled in the South. They were for desegregation and Hodding and I were defending the honor of the South. I have a transcript of that. Would you like that?

JE: you do? Yes, I would like to listen to it.

HA: well, I mean it's printed.

JE: Oh, yes, I would definitely like to read it. ^{HA:} In fact, I think I have several. They put these things out and sent them around. It was ABC, I guess, and Town Hall on the Air it was called. It was done in Town Hall in New York. Actually, we had a big audience.

JE: In '48?

HA: Yes. That's the first time I met Walter White. He was then the head of the NAACP.

I told the story about the time they were putting the make-up on. They had to lighten up Hodding and darken down Walter.

JE: Pink cheeks and blue eyes. [laughter]

HA: Hodding was an interesting fellow. He kind of like McGill. He was very emotional. Hodding was an interesting case. His approach was about like Faulkner's, he was for justice and he knew this was coming, but he didn't want to see the black folks corrupted by the white folks. He was very patrician. I think he came from Hammond, Louisiana. I think that's his home town. As a matter of fact, he had a newspaper there before he went to Greenville.

JE: That's right.

HA: And Betty, his wife . . .

JE: She's still living. I'm going to talk to her.

HA: you should talk to her, her mind is wonderful. She really ran the business. Hodding was like McGill, he was quixotic, he was emotional, but he was on the right side. He

would always do the right thing. For example, when the boycott started against The Gazette, he was defending The Gazette from across the river. Although he didn't entirely agree editorially with our position, the law and order position, he was good. When we were attacked by the Citizens Council he went all out for us.

JE: He was a very honorable man.

HA: Very honorable and an interesting guy. He was very literate. He wrote a hell of a lot of books.

JE: Oh, God, he wrote a lot.

HA: He over-wrote. Hodding the Third said about him once, he said, "they refer to my father as a moderate." He said, "he's the most immoderate moderate I ever knew." [laughter]

He was a great cocksman and he was a great drinking man. He lost the sight of one eye and the other eye was failing.

JE: How did he lose it?

HA: It was in the service. It wasn't a war wound but he was on maneuvers somewhere down in Florida and he ran into a palmetto and punctured one eyeball. They had to take that eye out because it began to infect the other one which frequently happens. So, he was totally blind in one eye.

JE: Like Pitchfork Ben Tillman.

HA: yes, that's right. Hell, he had a glass eye. His eyesight was always worrying him and it was fading and toward the end he was damned near blind. He really needed a seeing-eye dog, but he still traveled and he would still drink a lot. It didn't make much difference if you're blind anyway. [laughter]

He was a cocksman, just a hell of a fellow. He was really sort of the Louisiana patrician type, hunting, fishing. . . .

JE: He and McGill really fascinate me because I see both of them as being much more admirable after Brown than before.

HA: Well, that's true. But they also had a reaction that I didn't have. I was much more detached, I guess. Maybe because I'm an upcountry man. Well, McGill was too, he grew up in the hills. But they had this emotional feeling about it. They got defensive about the South, they knew it was wrong and they say that, but by God, those people can't tell us what to do up there. I kept saying that hasn't got anything to do with it. If this thing is going to be dealt with it has to be dealt with here.

JE: They knew that the day of reckoning was coming.

HA: Yes, they knew it, they accepted it, they all did, but they just couldn't stand it. It didn't bother me, I didn't have that reaction. McGill, as I once described him, he was a political fixer and he was troubadour, as well as everything else, and McGill was defensive. He really had this thing about some symbol of the South.

JE: Was it somehow deep down inside of them essentially racial in the final analysis, that really they could not imagine themselves making an accommodation of this magnitude?

HA: No, I don't think so. I think they could imagine. I think that wouldn't bother them at all, but again, it would have been in the old planter's tradition, as if it just involved your butler or something.

JE: It was still going to be on their terms.

HA: In a sense, but I think more than anything else with them was this defensive attitude. "It's them outsiders, goddamn, they aren't going to tell us what to do."

JE: God knows, the outside gave them plenty to be pissed about.

HA: The outside didn't give a damn.

JE: That's right. See, the thing I see looking at it from my prospective is that through this time, through the late 30's and through the War years, and all the way to Brown, there were some fairly courageous journalists, preachers, academics, people here and there and by the time Brown came they had fallen silent. Whereas, McGill and Carter and a few other people who sort of were defensive through that time, they were so goddamned outraged by the absolute defiance of the law that they went out there and took the lightning out.

HA: I think that's true.

JE: And you did too.

HA: I kept saying over and over again that the tragedy of this is the default of the goddamn establishment. And I was quite cynical, as you would see, in Hearts and Minds saying it was going to change because once they figure it's bad for business they are going to come around, but not before that. You can't argue with them on morality, you can't argue with them on tradition, you can't argue with them on noblesse oblige, but the bastards are just going to sit there until the roof falls in and then, of course, they are going to come around. They will come around just as far as they have to and no further.

There was a brief time, it seems to me, when there was kind of a period of goodwill after they finally recognized that they had to do it. That began to diminish when the cost went up and the blacks began. . . .

There's another aspect of this that I have thought about too. But, I will say in defense of both Hodding and McGill, a lot of people said that--this was one of the standard calumnies that were addressed to me--what these southern people really couldn't stand was to have the blacks take over the movement, that they had been running it at their own convenience and they resented the thing.

I think that was totally untrue. I was delighted to see the blacks take over, and I think McGill was too.

JE: Do you think McGill and Carter would have felt that same way?

HA: I think they accepted this. I felt it was really the white man's burden. I mean, there was no way that a black in the South could protest. He had to have somebody like me or McGill or V Dabney speaking out for simple justice. I was just delighted when they began to take it over. I had been wanting to see this all along. Delighted to be relieved of the burdens.

I think that was true of McGill. Once he came around he certainly accepted. . . . I think it is very significant that he died at a black man's home when he had his heart attack.

JE: Where was he?

HA: Well, there was some child who had done something, graduated from high school, and he and his wife--you should talk

to her about it--had gone out to have dinner with this black family because McGill was so impressed by the child--and he was there when he had the heart attack.

This is interesting. McGill would do that, too. I never thought that kind of thing was important, but it was to McGill. He would go eat with black people.

I told the story somewhere about being on Adlai Stevenson's plane with McGill. Do you recall that?

JE: I think I do recall that story.

HA: That's a typical McGill story. I'd been with Stevenson, this was in '52, McGill was traveling with Stevenson and I had been up in Springfield writing some speeches. I got on the press plane, they called it the southern swing, and we started off. We picked them up in St. Louis. We went to Oklahoma City and then New Orleans, then to Miami and then back to Nashville. I had written the Nashville speech.

When I joined up with them in St. Louis, McGill was there. I was at the hotel where all the press was staying. There were two black correspondents, New York correspondents, and they had just gotten word that night that when they got to New Orleans they were not going to be able to stay in the hotel with the rest of the press. New Orleans was segregated and we were going to stay at the Roosevelt Hotel.

That word had circulated and these two guys were saying, "we're going to make a goddamn issue of this when we get there tomorrow night." McGill was so upset about this. I went and told them Harvey Schliesinger [?], who was going to travel with

the candidate, that this was trouble coming up and that they better know about it.

We got on the plane to go to Oklahoma City and these two black men were sitting up front. McGill and me--he took me along--went up to plead with them not to make the issue which was going to hurt Stevenson. They were adamant and they said, "no, if we can't stay at that hotel then we are going to have a press conference and blow the roof off." McGill said, "well, look," . . . I can hear him now. . . They were going to stay with, I guess, Dent. They were going to be put up in some place with the black university president. McGill said, "well, if you can't get into the hotel how would it be if Ashmore and I came out and stayed with you?" [laughter] They said, "no, that wouldn't do either."

So we hit the ground in Oklahoma City, and by that time I realized that the shit was really going to hit the fan when we got to New Orleans. So, McGill and I got off the plane and I was trying to find a telephone. I thought I would call George Chaplain, who was then the editor of the Stem, and see if George can't do something to tell the goddamn hotel to just look the other way. There were going to be two black men turning up with about three hundred people and no one would ever know whether they stayed in the hotel or not.

I was trying to find a telephone and I lost McGill and I couldn't find him. I was looking all around for him and waiting for the cars to go into Oklahoma City. Finally, I saw him way over by the fence. There were a bunch of Indian children who were on the other side of cyclone fence that had come out to see

the candidate. McGill was over there just talking to these little Indian children. He was just amused by children.

I got him and we got into Oklahoma city. I got a telephone and called George Chaplain and said, "Jesus Christ, George, (I told him what was happening) can't you talk with the guy that runs the damn Roosevelt Hotel and tell him that nobody is going to know whether they are in there or not?" He said, "oh, no, no, that son of a bitch is the head of the State's Rights Movement down here and all he needs is an excuse to make an issue out of it."

So, they got down there, they called a press conference and by that time it was about nine o'clock at night, I guess. We were all about to take off for a speech with Stevenson. Stevenson's press man took the rap and said he was totally responsible, of course. They issued a statement and we all went down to the French Quarter and got drunk. I guess it [the story] was filed, and The New York Times ran about a paragraph, and a couple of other New York papers, otherwise, the whole thing was ignored.

But McGill--this was typical of McGill, this was the kind of thing he was willing to do--he would stick his own neck out and say, "yeah, I'll go out there and stay with you." It's hard to tell about him.

JE: Yes, everybody's complicated. I mean, shit, nothing's simple. OK, some academics--Howard Odum, Frank Graham, and W.T. Couch were all together at the University of North Carolina. What I'm beginning to find out is that they did not like one

another. They were very competitive. They did a lot of work behind one another's back.

HA: Odum, I got to know him after I got to Charlotte. I hadn't known him before. Then when I was doing The Negro in the Schools, by that time Alex Heard had succeeded Odum as the head of that Institute. I saw a lot of them down there. The University of North Carolina Press bought the book.

Couch, I think, was still there. No, he had been in Chicago. Couch had this reputation when I at The Charlotte News of being somewhat of a liberal. But, I found that most of people down there at Chapel Hill didn't buy this.

Couch got into some kind of hassle with Hutchens. He was apparently a very difficult son of a bitch. I never met him.

JE: He's still alive.

HA: Is he? He was basically one of these contentious people who makes an issue out of everything. Odum was very reluctant to endorse desegregation because he wrote that thing originally for Life and it became a book. It talked about the secret poll of southern people, their attitudes. But, he came around, of course. He was probably, it seems to me in that period, the most influential academic in the region. He was preaching regionalism and all that kind of thing which really didn't have a lot to do with race, but it put a more broader view, it really attacked the old southern myth.

JE: He wanted to use it as the way to get to eventual racial change.

HA: He kept bringing out charts and graphs to prove that there was a middle class farm element in the South. It was comparable to that in New England. It might have had one or two slaves but these were the people that really created the New South. It wasn't the planters, too damn few; these were not the people in the plantation economy, they were in the self subsistence. He made a great point out of this. I think he was as influential as any academic. . . . I can't think of any other academic that had really much influence in this area.

Frank Graham did. He had this country preacher manner. He was one hundred percent for academic freedom. He could fight off these goddamn Bourbons in North Carolina.

JE: He managed some how to really hold his own with them.

HA: He was responsible for the university of North Carolina being what it is.

JE: Would it be safe to say what it was? One of the points that I think needs to be made is that if you measure from '50 on when he's gone, it had never been what it was then. Certainly not as far as these social issues go are concerned.

HA: I think that's true. I'm not sure about the history but I think it probably had a pretty good reputation before Frank came along. **B**ut he protected it during the period when it was really being attacked by all kinds, the McCarthy business. Old Frank was out there one hundred percent. He could go down and with an old shoe manner and he tell the country people that we have got to be freed.

JE: Do you think there was any university in the South that was in any remote sense like that?

HA: Not at all. It was the only university in the South, aside from the racial thing, that you could really call distinguished. It had a faculty, it had a very distinguished faculty. It had real influence, and great influence in North Carolina. And they attracted the best Southerners that were in the teaching business.

The University of Virginia was a goddamn gentlemen's finishing school. Private universities, there were Tulane, Vanderbilt, Emory, Duke and they were nothing in those days. They didn't have any influence whatever on this segregation thing.

JE: Then if you take sort of the flagship state universities like Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, they were, hell, they were under the thumb of all these political demagogues.

HA: And South Carolina, for God's sake. Clemson, God knows, was hardly a distinguished school. I went to school there but it had the great good fortune of having let old John C. Calhoun's son-in-law, Clemson, leave the plantation to the state. His will provided, which the state accepted, half the trustees were life trustees. The other half were elected by the legislature. So they had these independent trustees on there who served until they died and named their successors and still do. I think it gave them a degree of independence that the poor University of South Carolina, right next door to the State House, didn't have. They were just leaned on.

JE: Even so, it didn't translate into any kind of enlightened social prospective like Chapel Hill had.

HA: Not at all. As a matter of fact, Clemson, that wasn't its business. It was a technical school much like Georgia Tech, it was turning out engineers.

JE: If we took the time to look we could probably identify some lawyers and some preachers and some other professional people who were progressive, southern, enlightened folks of that time who at least would give lip service to. . . .

HA: Well, for example, when the Fund for the Advancement of Education put together the Ashmore Project, we assembled forty scholars off the southern campuses. Every one of those accepted the fact that change was coming. They weren't out crusading but they were columnist and educationist and whatever. They basically all accepted the fact that we would be better off if we got rid of the dual school system.

JE: It wasn't exactly a litmus test for them but you . . .

HA: They recognized . . .

JE: You couldn't have gotten their cooperation unless they had that view of things.

HA: That's right. In the first place, the fund went to every damn university, private and public, in the South before we assembled this thing and offered them a blank check. We said, "all we want you to do is use your resources to go out and find out what's the case."

JE: How's this, and let your name be associated with.

HA: Right, and not a damn university would touch it with a ten foot pole.

JE: Including Chapel Hill.

HA: Including Chapel Hill. They went to all of them, Tulane, Emory, and finally they said . . . In the meantime they found that these people were around who wanted to do it as individuals. So then they asked me to head it because they couldn't get an educator to touch the goddamn subject. That's a very telling point. But on every campus, I think even the small ones--there are few distinguished little schools, to some extent it's like Davidson and like Hendricks in Arkansas, which were religious-oriented and they had enough independence and they had a few good people, not a hell of a lot, and they protected them. They really believed in academic freedom. So you would find some people there who would even speak out on this and weren't run out of town. But that's the only place you would find them. At a state university I don't think you find them at all.

JE: You can just forget it. And yet, you know, at that southern conference Auburn University and the University of Alabama proudly announced that they had delegations of twenty-five people there.

HA: You could do that because race wasn't an issue. It was just justice, poverty and . . .

JE: And a little while later on they wouldn't have dared . . .

HA: Everybody ran like hell.

JE: Let's talk about some blacks for a minute. There's a fascinating book that came out in '44 called What the Negro Wants. It was published at Chapel Hill and edited by Rayford Logan. Do you remember that name?

HA: I don't remember it.

JE: Rayford Logan was an academic. The book had thirteen essays in it by black people from all over the country, not just Southerners. The book was invited by W.I. Couch, he asked for this book, and when he saw the manuscript he told Rayford Logan there was no way he could publish it because it was way too radical. Rayford Logan said, "If you don't publish it, I'm going to sue you." Couch thought this over and said, "Alright, I'll publish it but I'm going to write a preface, I'm going to write an introductory piece."

HA: Disavowing it. [laughter]

JE: That's exactly what he did. It is an extremely important book because it not only has Couch's position, which does not stand up well in the face of history, but it has also these thirteen writers' positions. They were identified as being a diverse group from radical to . . .

HA: you don't have their names?

JE: That's what I'm looking for. I've got all their names and I wanted to ask you if you knew some of these people because . . .

HA: I'd almost bet you that I wouldn't recognize a single name.

JE: No, you're going to know some of them. Some of them were identified as radicals and some were identified as moderates and some were identified as conservatives. But they all came down the same damn way. They all said, "The evil here is segregation and if we don't face up to that evil then we are never going to be able to solve this other problem."

HA: The reason I say that is I've been struck by the fact that I knew so few native black leaders as such, even the academics. I knew a few university . . . I knew Charles Johnson, for example. I knew Dillard, Dent down at Dillard, and I knew Thurgood Marshall and Walter White, but if you think about a black college professor, there was no occasion where I would ever see one even as a sympathetic editor. These people were under the table.

JE: It's going to be interesting then to read this list to you. These are the thirteen people: Rayford Logan, W. E. B. DuBois, Leslie P. Hill, Charles W. Wesley, a newspaperman from Houston, Roy Wilkins, Phillip Randolph, Willard S. Townsend, head of the Red Cap Quarters, Doxie Wilkerson, Gordon Hancock, he was from Norfolk and he turned out to be a fairly significant person, Mary McCloud Bethune, Frederick D. Patterson, President of Tuskegee College, George Shuyler, Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown, a novelist.

HA: I didn't know any of those personally except Walter White and DuBois, I met him once. They were national names, they were not black Southerners.

JE: They published this book and I think of it as a sort of a benchmark book.

HA: It sure is. Not to mention the fact that Couch would not publish it.

JE: He just said, "Hell, I can't do this."

HA: What they were saying and this is significant. I would say back in the days when I was editor in Charlotte, I would say to everybody, "Look, there's no black any longer who is going to support segregation. Now, you can deal with them on lesser questions but you can't expect any of these people, if they are worth a damn, to take a public position. This is what happened inside the Southern Regional Council. They kept trying to straddle the damn thing and finally the blacks wouldn't take it. Even Charles Johnson, who was the most compromising, said, "No, there is no way. Separate but equal is not acceptable to blacks."

JE: It took seven years.

HA: I used the line in ~~an~~ Epitaph and used it over and over again. I recognized and kept trying to say to the white establishment, "You have got to accept the fact that what we are up against is a situation in which segregation is not acceptable to the blacks and desegregation is not acceptable to whites. Now, that's practically where we are and how the hell are we going to deal with this." Even in Little Rock they trotted out some kind of damn Uncle Tom.

JE: They wanted to create this sort of mythology that there were plenty of black people who were perfectly happy with the way things were.

HA: That's right. A lot of them wouldn't speak out but you knew damn well. . . . How could anybody expect them to accept segregation? I said, "Nobody in his right mind would have accepted segregation willingly." It was accepted before that because they couldn't do anything about it.

JE: Charles Johnson and Benny Mays and Albert Dent and a handful of those people look now, sort of with the hindsight of history, like a fairly prophetic figures.

HA: Right. Johnson is the only one I knew. I knew him fairly well. I was in a number of meetings with him and once I was on a platform with him at a National Urban League Convention in Kansas City. I was very fond of him. He was an elder statesman, an old man and sort of mellow. He kept saying, "I'm not concerned about mixing the races, I'm just trying to get justice. That's what I'm after. I don't care whether the races mix or not, that's incidental."

He was really the elder statesman. He was a pretty good scholar. He had written several books. He was for a period there, I think, actually the key figure in putting the Southern Regional Council together.

JE: He absolutely was. As a matter of fact, there was a little bit of intrigue that went with that whole thing.

HA: That's right.

JE: That Durham meeting where the blacks and . . .

HA: Sure, and there's this old woman down here is the one who set the whole thing up.

JE: Yes, Jessie Daniel Ames. She set it up, and I think she was trying to cut Odum off.

HA: Well, she was.

JE: She saw Odum taking it in a different direction. But anyway, Charles Johnson wrote that document, the Durham Statement.

HA: It tried to make to room without accepting segregation to make room for everybody. McGill was wavering back and forth around that time period. I wasn't involved with any of that. I guess I was still in the Army.

JE: This was in '44. You were still in the Army. McGill was instrumental in that meeting and the subsequent meeting in Atlanta and the meeting in Richmond but then he disappeared and never darkened the door of the SKC.

HA: That's right, I know it.

JE: What do you think that was about?

HA: Well, apparently what happened was that, I guess V Dabney was then head of the Southern Regional Council, chairman . . .

JE: No, they asked him to be and he never would do it. Dabney never would do it.

HA: Fleming would know the details about this, but my impression is that this Jessie Daniel Ames woman saw what was happening and so she promoted Johnson and these people to have an all black meeting and come out with a relatively moderately

program, and she wanted to put them together with the Old Commission on Interracial Cooperation.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

John Egerton: it was already gone.

Harry Ashmore: I think he [McGill] disappeared somewhere in there. I don't know why and it may be because he was out of the country. He got a traveling fellowship. He spent about a year. . . I know during the war he traveled a lot. I don't know. I never talked to him about it, but I know the fact was that McGill fell out fairly early [with the Southern Regional Council], and Odum said at one point when they were putting all this together, he said, "Where are all of those splendid liberal journalists who were supporting us in the beginning? They all seemed to have disappeared." Why he did it I don't know.

JE: Jonathan Daniels never had much to do with SRC.

HA: No, Jonathan was again, one of these weird kind of people. Jonathan was mainly a literary man. I liked John and all of his instincts were good. But, he didn't work hard. He was a rich man's son and he drank a lot of whiskey. He had the newspaper. He was under the shadow of old Joe Seeford [?]. It was such a long shadow. He wrote the book, A Southerner Discovers the South. Jonathan would always come out on the right side on these issues, but, he was no crusader.

JE: Carter didn't have anything to do with SRC during that formative time?

HA: I don't think so. I don't know where Carter was. Carter was out of Hammond and he was a very small time operator.

JE: He was in Greenville, I guess, by then.

HA: Greenville and then he was in the Army for a long time.

JE: I'm thinking about from '45 to '50. I don't find McGill, or Carter, or you or Jonathan Daniels really engaged there.

HA: No. What we were trying to do was tell them it's coming. I said in Charlotte and later in Little Rock that you could support--anything that supports the name of justice that didn't involve race mixing you could get away with. You couldn't get support but you wouldn't get drummed out of the community.

JE: You wouldn't get shot.

HA: If you went over that line then you were going to catch it. The Brown decision blew that out of the water and from then on it was on the tables, you couldn't avoid it anymore once it got to the school thing. That was really the situation. I think there was nobody in politics or in public life, minister or whatever was preaching for desegregation until the Brown decision. There were a few radicals but they had no audience. That's when the Southern Conference for Human Welfare . . .

JE: It took them, hell, it took them till '48.

HA: Then they weren't talking to anybody except each other.

JE: Yes and nobody was listening. Lillian Smith didn't have any . . .

HA: Lillian Smith was out there beating her breasts with a few blacks. I wrote about her. I had great sympathy for her. She had the artist approach, that's very emotional, very deep-seated feeling of right and wrong. I have the same general

conclusion but my problem was how the hell do you hold a community together so you can begin to deal with the problem?

JE: So, really when you come down to it it's pretty hard to imagine, even in retrospect, this South coming voluntarily to social reform without the pressure of the Federal Courts and the black uprisings.

HA: Never would have done it without those two. It took both of them.

JE: It took both of them.

HA: Both of them. First of all, it took the federal decision, the Brown decision, to liberate the black movement. I have been saying over and over again that you could take the streets in Montgomery only after Brown. Before that the goddamn state troopers and police would . . .

JE: Would kill you dead.

HA: No black man in his right mind would have tried to do a bus boycott until after that. What that did, it committed the Federal Government, which didn't want to be there, on the side of the blacks for the first time. That meant that all the power in the South, political, law enforcement in the white hands, was for the first time not a reactionary force.

Martin Luther King's whole movement was to pressure the Kennedys in Washington to come in. That's what it was all about. Without them there was certainly no indigenous support in the South. I would say, weaseling, even after Brown, that my defense out there fighting for this was that the question is not desegregation it's law and order.

JE: We still had to equivocate on that.

HA: Actually, it was a true statement. The question is, you're going to have rioting in the streets or you're not. I knew damn well that the South wasn't going to put up with rioting in the streets. They had put up with desegregation rather bad.

JE: So, even if people knew in their minds in 1950 that segregation was doomed, they couldn't know in their hearts. The minds and hearts here really were separated until reality got drummed into them.

HA: They were. You also have to look at all of us as growing up having never known anything except a totally segregated society. This is asking for a social change of a magnitude that's leaving out all justice. Everybody had grown up assuming that this was the way the world was and that we've been through this very bad experience getting rid of slavery. The question, I would say, even the most enlightened best educated white person at that time, the question of justice wasn't really involved.

This is very important, I think, trying to explain that. All of these books of mine, with all the examining, I'm trying to examine my own attitude. How did I get to this point from where I started? What changed my mind? I think in my own case it was largely a rational rather than emotional response. It wasn't a response to injustice, which I could see, but it was the fact that none of this made any sense what we were trying to do.

But, if you think about the most enlightened white Southerners at that time, who would move out and stand up with

the question of really injustice which you could see against the blacks collectively, the notion of simply admitting them into his own society was something that was so foreign to him he would say, "I'm not going to object."

The truth of the matter is that the only people who had the really tolerant attitude--this is really true, it's always been a kind of cliché where the upper class people who knew damn well instinctively that if the blacks all started intermingling it wasn't going to affect them much anyway--they might accept a few blacks. They were in charge of the community and that wasn't going to change. You could let those folks down there get all intermingled. This is hardly a noble attitude.

I get increasingly obsessed with a notion. One of the tests I put to myself a long time ago was saying, "I know goddamn well the Civil war was a terrible mistake. We were on the wrong side of the moral issue. It's regrettable that we couldn't win the damn thing." I also know that had I been alive in that day, in my two grandfathers day, I would have been in the Confederate army. I don't know what I would have thought then but I know damn well the strong feeling I have now would not have been affected.

You can't go back and project backwards and what people should have done on a moral issue. I think that's the problem you face to some extent trying to figure out why the South never voluntarily moved to end the injustice that a lot of southerners recognized.

JE: I think I'm coming to see that it was just impossible.

HA: It's expecting too much. You see it now in South Africa. I read a review the other day, there's a new book called The Mind of South Africa and the author says his inspiration was W. J. Cash's book, The Mind of the South. He says the parallels are very great. Well, I think that is true except the situation is so basically different.

Here we were with about a one third minority and there they are with about a third or less than that of white people surrounded by blacks. So I always said, "I can't pass a judgement on what the hell a white South African would do because really their society as they've now created it, it ain't going to exist once they get through."

This was not true in the South. The South's society was not going to be changed, hadn't been changed much. It has been changed some and for the good.

JE: Some black press people, there was a guy named John McCray in Columbia. He became rather noted.

HA: I remember the name. There was no black newspaper in South Carolina in my day of any significance. Every town had one and mostly they were shakedown situations, I mean, they would shakedown the white folks for some reason and take an ad.

I don't remember anybody and one of the myths of this whole thing is about how influential Daisy Bates' paper was. Well, Daisy Bates' paper was not influential at all in the black community or anywhere else.

JE: This guy, John McCray, wrote a weekly column called The Need For Changing. If you read that column now it was probably

talking to nobody. Nobody heard him. If they had been listening they would have been wondering how in the hell they were going to dispose of this guy because he really was looking down the road and the significant thing he did in South Carolina is that he was the founder of the Progressive Democratic Party. It was a black group that was formed after the white primary thing. He remained the titular head of it right on through. They eventually put him on a chain gang for a libel conviction. He needs to be recognized, I think.

HA: He should be. Of course, you find, I think, in almost all these black newspapers--I said they had no influence--they usually were quite outspoken. They had radical views and were urging black rights. They had so little influence the white establishment paid no attention to them. The blacks weren't influenced by them.

Individually, like Daisy's husband, old L.C. Bates, was absolutely outspoken. He was for his peoples' rights and Daisy was too. She was a very brave woman. But, the newspaper itself was of little consequence, that's all I'm saying, the individuals were, like McCray, no doubt.

I couldn't think of a black leader in my time in South Carolina that was a visible presence as far as the overall white community was concerned. The only ones that you ever heard of, whether they were basically Uncle Toms or not, were the black preachers or the black college presidents.

One of the things that always amazed me were the courtesy titles. I think only in the south, a black attorney was always

addressed as lawyer, Lawyer Smith. You'd give him a title, he didn't have one really, but Lawyer Smith or Attorney Smith.

JE: Do you remember the case where the black serviceman passing through South Carolina on a bus right after the War got into a fracas in some little town and the cops punched his eyes out and he was blind and became a big national . . .

HA: Vaguely I remember it. I think I was gone by that time. It was after the war and I never got back there after the war.

JE: That's right. You were in North Carolina.

HA: I was in Charlotte.

JE: I can't remember his name.

HA: There was another famous case that came along later, but this was a matter of trying to bury a black veteran in a veterans cemetery. Where was that?

JE: I can't remember now.

HA: It was somewhere in the South. That was a big issue.

JE: Then there was some black journalists from the North who toward the latter part of this period came South, Carl Rowan, Roi Ottley and Ted Poston and James Booker.

HA: I knew Jim Booker.

JE: Who was he with?

HA: He was with the Amsterdam News, I think. Ted Poston was the only one, I think, from a white newspaper. He wrote for The New York Post.

JE: That's right. He was a Southerner, he was from Kentucky.

HA: Carl Rowan was . . .

JE: He was with The Minneapolis Star.

HA: Carl has become one of the real reactionaries of our time and he's . . .

JE: Did you have any contact with any those guys back then?

HA: Yes, I met almost all of them, particularly after Little Rock. When they all got there they moved around The Gazette.

JE: Up until Little Rock you probably didn't see them?

HA: I think I saw Carl Rowan once when he came through doing something. Any of them that got down there he usually would come around the newspaper. By that time I was out in Little Rock. I don't remember. Maybe when I was in Charlotte I saw some.

I must say that they were given the usual courtesy of the house as you would any out-of-town reporter. It was a custom on every newspaper. Even in Greenville, I'm sure we were courteous--probably couldn't take them to lunch.

JE: But you would let them come in to visit. The Dixiecrat convention in '48, did you go over there to Birmingham?

HA: I didn't go, I was at the Democratic Convention when they walked out. I had a lot of familiarity with it because Ben Laney was the first head of it and then Strom Thurmond succeeded him. He was elected at the convention in Mississippi which they adjourned and said they were going to Philadelphia and they might have to walk out. Then they came back and actually set up the States' Rights Democratic Party and elected Strom.

Old Ben would have headed it up but he couldn't walk out on the convention because Bill Fulbright had him locked in. Bill Fulbright forced a unit rule in the Arkansas delegation. I was up there with them.

JE: They wouldn't let him vote.

HA: No, they wouldn't let him go and he couldn't take the Arkansas delegation with him. But, normally, he would have controlled. The governor usually controls the delegation but Fulbright, who didn't want to do bolting, got started early enough to load the delegation with a bunch of his people.

JE: What did you think of Fulbright's role in all of this?

HA: Well, Bill Fulbright was an ornament, I think, in the Senate. He was wrong on the segregation thing as I've said. I told a story, I guess I put it in Hearts and Minds, about the call from Oxford, remember that? I told them they might as well enroll for the second semester.

Well, Fulbright was quite candid about this in his own book writing about this later. He said that he concluded that there was no way that he could be reelected and not sign the southern Manifesto. He did more than that, he actually entered a brief that was inexcusable.

I've always said, I don't know whether that's true or not, but I point out that Estes Kefauver made it in Tennessee and I'm not a damn bit sure that Fulbright couldn't have survived in Arkansas. He made a conscious decision, he was not going to deal with this.

He's interesting because he grew up there in Fayetteville and there are no blacks up there and that's way up in the corner and the whole damn thing was an annoyance to him. He didn't have any racial prejudice, he would deal with all these black diplomats. He just wanted the goddamn thing to go away, it wasn't important. He didn't have any gut feeling about it. I have said this over and over again that I did. Other people that weren't around blacks it might be bigotry, if might be the other way, but you had some feeling about these people. I don't think he did. I said the whole thing to him was just a goddamn annoyance that wouldn't just go away.

I think the greatest tribute to Fulbright was that he had been a university president and a pretty good one. He had been president here at the University of Arkansas and the governor ran him out of office because he was too liberal. That's when he ran for Congress. That started his political career.

JE: In other words, he sort of got bumped out of his presidency?

HA: He got absolutely run out by the governor. He supported the guy who lost and the fellow who won, Homer Adkins, booted his ass right out.

JE: What year would that have been?

HA: It was before the war because Fulbright was in Congress during the war. He went to the Senate after the war. But, the tribute to Fulbright, I remember that after he finally got defeated in Arkansas--he shouldn't have run, but he did--I remember going in and talking to Bob Hutchens the next day, he,

of course, knew Fulbright. We were speculating about this and I said, "you can say whatever you want about Fulbright. If you look back over the period," he was there fighting McCarthy, he cast one of the few votes--only two votes against McCarthy--and I said, " what a different history this country would have had if we had had a hundred Fulbrights in the Senate during these years." Hutchens said, "I would have settled for fifty-one."

He lead the opposition for the vietnam war. Fulbright is an interesting guy. He's still alive incidentally. If you get to Washington you ought to talk with him. I think he would say about that. . . . He's just recently gotten another book out. You could find almost all these. . . . He's very candid about it.

I don't know if he may have been damn right about that, but he might have been wrong.

JE: It was just wasn't something he was willing to take a chance at.

HA: If he had taken the chance, I say the fact that Gore and Kefauver both survived in Tennessee, and Arkansas and Tennessee are very much alike.

JE: Right, they are.

HA: I think even if he had been able to he would have been Kennedy's Secretary of State. It just ended his career. He had this goddamn manifesto hung around his neck . . .

JE: He ended up paying a pretty heavy price.

HA: He sure did. He wanted to be Secretary of State. Kennedy wanted him.

JE: You don't think he was a racist the way Jimmy Byrnes was.

HA: No, not at all. I think I say, I think he was indifferent to that. His only reaction was one of irritation, he wanted it to go away. It would have been perfectly suitable to him to be segregated and he didn't give a damn whether they did or didn't.

JE: It's kind of curious, you know, right in that period around the time of the War or right after the War, you had Ellis Arnall, you had Sid McMath, you had Jim Folsom, you had Fulbright and you had Claude Pepper, of course. A number of people who really could have been the leaders of a real social movement, but they never got very far with it and they never really got even far enough to talk among themselves about leading such a movement.

HA: They all knew they couldn't deal with the black problem, they set that aside. Then you get the liberal. . . . talk about that whole category of people, Kefauver, Fulbright and Ellis Arnall. Their big pitch was, "we've been discriminated against on freight rates," which is true.

JE: Yes, they were hammered.

HA: The other thing was resource development, Tennessee Valley and building the dams and this is to get some prosperity down here. Everybody is for prosperity, everybody knew we were poor. So, they were really off on the Henry Grady kick basically.

JE: Yes, that's what it came down to.

HA: That was progressive and they were big Roosevelt people because Roosevelt was for the resource development and this kind of thing. TVA was a very critical issue and in Arkansas it spilled over there, because the original proposal was to develop the Arkansas River instead of the Tennessee River.

Old Joe T. Robinson, who was the majority leader in the Senate and later was the vice-presidential nominee, blocked the Arkansas thing for the Arkansas Power and Light Company. He also happened to be counsel for the Arkansas Power and Light Company.

The big issue with all of that out there, this was very much an issue, was to stop creeping socialism, which was TVA, from crossing the Mississippi River. Everybody in the mid South utilities, which merged up Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, they got all these political hacks to stand against any resource development out there. Fulbright was on their side, he was for. REA was a big issue too, Rural Electrification Administration.

JE: Did Fulbright want a TVA on the Arkansas River?

HA: Yes, he supported all that. He supported TVA, he supported the REA. That's where he got his big rural support. That was a way for the country people to get those goddamn power lines. In fact, the REA corps movement in Arkansas is still a very powerful political force to this day. A congressman later became the head of it. What the hell is his name? He's dead now. I think he was the congressman from the mountain district up there.

JE: Do you remember the book that Annaïl wrote, The Shore Dimly Seen?

HA: Yes, I do.

JE: Do you know anything about how that book came to be written?

HA: Not really. I remember when it came out. My only connection with Arnall was that I had gone to Charlotte at the time of the two governor crisis down here. The first time I ever saw McGill was when I came down to write some stuff for The Charlotte News. I wanted to see this confrontation, Herman Talmadge and poor Ellis was still trying to hold onto office. I went out to see him at that time and, of course, it was a very distracting kind of interview. The book was already out and I don't remember any of the circumstances.

JE: Would you be inclined to think that he wrote that book himself or had it written?

HA: I think it is entirely possible. I don't have any idea whether he did or not.

JE: Did you ever hear of a guy named Dewitt Roberts, a journalist here in town in Atlanta?

HA: He may have had a ghost writer. It wouldn't surprise me either way. I think Ellis Arnall was . . .

JE: He was capable of writing it?

HA: I had an idea that the damn thing was really a collection of speeches, pretty much.

JE: It holds together surprisingly well and it's well written. I think this guy Roberts wrote it.

HA: Arnall was intelligent and, I think, a fairly literate fellow. I never heard that either way, it wouldn't have made any difference, I don't think.

JE: There again, here's a guy who was writing articles for national magazines saying a day of liberalism is dawning in the south but he wasn't talking about race.

HA: No. Race was off limits. You could talk about anything else, you could talk about the poor folks, about . . .

JE: It was not the subject. It's hard to get that point across, but it's true.

HA: Not the subject and they knew it.

JE: It's hard to get that point across, but it is true.

J. Waites Waring?

HA: I never met the Judge. I knew Tom Waring, who was his nephew. The Judge came along after my time in South Carolina. I read a lot about him and I met his wife once somewhere years later. He was interesting because he seems to be in rebellion against the Charleston establishment because he married this divorcee. They wouldn't take her in and she was apparently a pretty sprightly lady.

So, I never knew where justice lay in that, whether that really accounted for his attitude and he always said, even before he got married, he had begun to change his view. He began to see the real injustices. In that opinion of his, he stated what the Supreme Court finally ruled, segregation, per se, is unequal.

JE: Right, that's where that phrase came from.

HA: He also blew up before that. He issued a couple of court opinions that. . . Well, when South Carolina tried to repeal the Democratic Party and have it entirely private, he blew that. He also lectured the leadership, saying that this is ridiculous. It's a preamble to that.

JE: He sure did. That was ahead of all this other stuff.

HA: He had begun to take this position. He always said that his opinion began to change when he recognized what was happening. I think he had been "Cotton Ed" Smith's campaign manager, he had been the counsel of ().

JE: He was in the establishment then.

HA: Yes, and he was a member of the Saint Cecilia's Society. I think he got thrown out when he married the widow.

JE: Do you think there were ever any Communists in the South in positions of any authority?

HA: I don't think. . . I'm sure there were a few, but I never met a Communist.

JE: Isn't this more of a damn joke than anything serious?

HA: Of course it is. What you had were people like Arnold () father, who were old populist or old Eugene V. Dabbs socialists. You had some of these who were more or less Marxists. But, Christ, a Communist Party member. . . In Arkansas the Communist Party, when they finally got somebody on the ballot, Henry Wallace on the ballot, there were so few Communists in Arkansas that the headquarters of the Arkansas Communist Party was in Oklahoma City. They didn't have enough to have an office in Little Rock.

I've thought about this and I don't remember seeing any known card carrying member of the Communist Party in all my years of practicing journalism. If they were around you would have seen them. They just were not around. The blacks were never taken in by them.

JE: They never went for it.

HA: They were absolutely hostile to it. The whole thing must have seemed amusing to them. These goddamned doctrinaire people talking Marx, who the hell could read Marx? That wasn't ever it.

I had a deep-seated theory, which is a very unpopular one, I suppose, that the only justification for democracy. . . . You've got to understand that I get this out of my having to deal with populism in the South. Populism is inherently conservative, it's never liberal because it's based on self-interest, whatever the self-interest may be. Reagan was, for Christ's sake, a populist. He would get the field of all the people who were against government and didn't want to pay taxes and whatever.

I think the only justification for the popular vote is that influence is negative, it puts a constraint on the elitist who are going to run the damn government anyway. But, as far as effecting a policy change, it won't do that. It will probably go the other way. The best you can hope for is when they are quiescent, when they let a little progress happen, which is what happened in the South.

It was not that anybody wanted to desegregate but they quit opposing it. It wasn't worth it anymore. This is perhaps a

cynical view, but I feel very strongly about this. If you appeal on a moral basis of doing what's right and just, it seems to me, . . . I can't think of an occasion when that ever carried as such, unless it was backed by an involved sense of self-interest.

For example, at one time, all the liberals in the country supported the union movement. Well, this was a good social movement because it removed some authority from the establishment and put it in the hands of people. But, of course, once the unions got established they became just as reactionary and self-interested as any other part of society.

I think this is what the southern experience shows. Populism in the South, it might have the highest motives, it might attract people of very high principles; but once it got to be a genuine majority movement it turned on self-interest. That's why the old original populist couldn't keep the blacks and whites together. Tom Watson tried it down here and he reversed himself. It became a very white thing, demagogues. North Carolina, they had again a fusion for awhile. Arkansas and most of the states had never even attempted it. South Carolina never even had a Populist movement as such. It was Ben Tillman with his own, I mean, he had a populist appeal which was against the trust.

JE: How did he lose his eye?

HA: I think it was a childhood accident. He was too young to have been in the Confederate Army. No, I think it was a childhood accident. I think he always had one eye, Pitchfork

Ben. He was a very aristocratic fellow. He went out for the red necks and rallied them but . . .

JE: He wasn't one of them?

HA: Oh, no, not at all. He had a very distinguished library. He was a very learned kind of fellow. He was a lawyer and I don't know where he went to college. Who was that Arkansas demagogue?

JE: Jeff Davis?

HA: Jeff Davis, he was a graduate of Vanderbilt. Now, these guys, most of them, were called boogies. These were old establishment people who went out there and demagogued it up. Segregation, that was what they needed and whatever the hell it was. Run against Wall Street, that was the big thing in the South, run against the trust.

JE: Did labor have any impact at all in the 30's and 40's?

HA: Damn little. It was beginning to have some and in some places it did. Those were the days of the Textile Workers Organizing Committee. The big drive was to organize the cotton mills and it just fell flat on its ass. It was turned back.

I remember when they came down. What the hell was her name? She was in Greenville organizing it.

JE: Lucy Mason?

HA: No, her name was, she was a fashion writer, a very familiar name, Hallis, or something like that.

Lucy Randolph Mason was down here and Dr. Weatherspoon, he was a Methodist preacher. I knew all those but they were simply getting nowhere. They didn't get into the segregation thing in

those early days. They avoided that. They were trying to organize the goddamn lint heads. The last thing you want to do was . . .

After the war they couldn't avoid it and then some of the unions like the Auto Workers, who were fairly big in Arkansas because they had organized an aluminum plant down there, had Walter Reuther and he was pressing a lot of liberal colleges, really socialists almost. So, they had to go along with that.

The teamsters were fairly progressive because they had a lot of black members in various capacities. In fact, in Arkansas, at the time of the troubles of (), he had said, "we are really representing the unions." The unions were going through the motions but the old Smith, who was head of the teamsters, was really the most effective one. He was an old bandit--they all were stealing a little money--but, I would say, overall it wasn't until late in the day that the unions became any kind of a factor in desegregation. Mostly, they were pretty well handicapped.

Our craft unions of the newspaper were absolutely adamant. They were scared to death that some black was going to come in there.

JE: The unions, to generalize, were far more visible on the side of segregation than on the side of desegregation.

HA: Oh, they were. I don't think there was any really conspicuous exceptions. There were a few individuals. But later the internationals became really an issue. But the locals, giving lip service, probably wouldn't do a goddamn thing about supporting it.

JE: Were you in a veterans' organization?

HA: No, I avoided all of them.

JE: American Veterans Committee . . .

HA: No, I had some sympathy for that and then there was Amvets. The American Legion, I had nothing but contempt for. I wasn't going to touch it. The only reason for really joining any of those veterans organizations was that back in those days most of the states were dry and they almost always had a bar if you went into a small town. It was the only place you could get a drink.

I never joined any of them and I never had any sympathy for them. I still don't. A professional veteran it seemed to me was absolutely . . . I never even talked much about my own war record. Bob Hutchens made a great joke out of this. I said to him once, "I have a strange circumstance and as far as I know I'm the only southern newspaper editor who has the title of Colonel and nobody ever calls me that." From then on he always called me Colonel Ashmore. Everybody was a Colonel or Major. Captain was the lowest rank anybody had.

JE: Let's talk for a few minutes about the book, about Epitaph for Dixie, and then I'm going to stop on that. I'm going to save until another time a long conversation about Hearts and Minds. There's just so much there.

Part of what I want to do is to sort of give you some feed back on the book because you asked me for that. And secondly, to ask you some questions out of it.

One of the great strengths of it and also of Hearts and Minds, as far as I've gotten the second time reading it, is the great synthesis of southern racial history that you put in to both of those books. You were very () and very nicely structured synthesis of how we got into the shape that we were in the period that you were writing about.

In the Epitaph you talk about the three institutions of the equal peculiarity in the post-labor period: sharecropping, one-party politics, and segregation. Sharecropping was a way-station on the way to God knows where.

HA: Not just sharecropping, it was a one-crop economy which got everybody, planters and the small farmers, committed to this interest whether it was in their interest or not.

JE: Yes, and that got changed and the party politics got changed, but the segregation thing remained the problem and in essence the subject of the book.

HA: The point I think I was trying to make was that these were interrelated. You had slavery and slavery made possible the one crop economy. Also, the one crop economy required slavery. The plantation system couldn't operate without it. You didn't have sharecropping of any significance when slavery was still there.

The one-party politics came into being to disfranchise the blacks. It had the effect of keeping, once they were disfranchised, they couldn't hold them in bondage anymore but it maintained this pool of substandard cheap labor that the plantation system had to have. It had it under slavery and as

long as these institutions held. . . . But when they began decaying for reasons of demography and economics then it seemed, the case I was trying to make, that segregation couldn't stand without them. The only thing it really buttressed it was the practical argument and the fact if you are going to have a plantation system you had to have cheap labor.

Then we reached the time, by the time I got to Arkansas you could look around and see this, we were losing population at a hell of a rate. The fact was that blacks had become surplus. The plantations were all mechanizing.

Incidentally, I meant to mention this to you, there was a fellow who was a Nieman Fellow ahead of me, he was on The Tennessean, who was one of the few people who really wrote about whole sharecropping business. His name was Ed. . . . He became really an expert. They sent him all over the South.

JE: Nat Caldwell?

HA: Nat Caldwell.

JE: was ahead of your class?

HA: Yes, he was a Nieman before me.

JE: Is that right?

HA: Maybe he was after me, he wasn't in my class.

JE: I had some idea he had come considerably later.

HA: Is he still alive?

JE: No, he's dead.

HA: Well, Nat. . . . I was talking to John () not long ago and it was because this book, well, these two guys from

California went back and revisited Let Us Now Praise (). Have you seen the book?

JE: Yes, I have.

HA: They went back and looked to see what had happened to the sharecroppers, whites as well as the blacks, the continuation of that denial. I said to John (), "This story was going on, it was the biggest economic story in the South." None of us were really covering it. I said, "The only exception I can think of is Caldwell." McGill did some of this before he became editor.

Caldwell went all over the South and he wrote about this basic fundamental change and what the hell was going to happen to all these displaced people. The blacks and a lot of the whites went North. They were leaving Arkansas. We actually had a net loss, a real loss of population. They were streaming out. The ones that are left now are struck by this and this follow-up on Agee's book that these white sharecroppers have remained surplus population. A few of them got out but the ones stayed back are just marginal still. They are not on the land anymore and they can't even do that.

JE: Nat Caldwell was a hell of a good reporter.

HA: Did he ever publish any books?

JE: Never did. He should have.

HA: I guess his stuff was just in the Tennesseean.

JE: Yes, that's the only place you would have seen it, I think.

You said when you wrote this book that the declining black population in number and percentage was really profound. It was happening fast, of course, that's turned around since then. I don't think the black population is declining in the South now.

HA: It continued to decline until after Brown and then that stopped it pretty much. Now there is some in-migration.

JE: Yes, I think there is some.

HA: I think the demographic changes are still going on because of the white suburb, white ring votes so that the cities are still locked in, they have an increasing percentage of black population which does not reflect an overall increase in black population.

The Negro and the Schools, the background of that, is the demographic charts showing the change that was taking place. In fact, we did county by county. We did all the counties in the South and showed how they were changing and how few of them were remaining really black. Only in Alabama, Mississippi . . .

JE: That's pretty much stayed that way.

HA: In Arkansas there are still a few counties over there along the river and the delta that are still black poverty . . .

JE: Mississippi is that way too.

HA: These people have nothing to do. They're just sitting there.

JE: At the time you wrote Epitaph there was no significant movement of blacks into elected public office.

HA: No.

JE: And, of course, that's been a dramatic change.

HA: Fairly recently, I've forgotten when the Texas Decision was, 1948 or '49, but it ended the white primary. Harold was mixed up in it at the big voter registration drive of blacks that was throughout the South that fell far short of expectations. I think I suggested in epitaph that it seemed to me what happened was that all the middle class, fairly literate blacks, flocked in and registered and the poor folks didn't show up. They weren't interested and nobody leading them and they didn't think it made any difference whether they voted or not. In fact, it probably didn't.

JE: You also point out in here that even in '56, '57, when you wrote this, right in there, that to the extent that Negroes had regained the franchise at that point and other legal constitutional rights, they had won most of those rights for themselves on the field of legal battle and as it turned out been subsequently out in the streets.

HA: This was before that.

JE: That was before the streets but you already perceived that legal thrust was what was carrying and it was not leadership. In fact, you go on to make the real strong indictment of the leadership. I love this statement you said, "Over much of the region a considerable majority are looking for a way out of the impasse." you describe them as, "bewildered, disorganized," deploring a necessity but nevertheless willing to move if led--if only, goddamnit, somebody would lead them. What they lack is public and private leadership.

HA: There's one part that they made about the black vote. Before it got numerous enough to elect any blacks it began to have a visible effect in cities. . . .

END OF INTERVIEW