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This is an interview with Charles Kirbo, chairman of the Georgia Democratic party, conducted in Atlanta, Georgia on May 1, 1974 by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries. Transcribed by Sarah Geer.

Walter De Vries: . . . the change that you've observed in Georgia politics in the last twenty-five years?

Charles Kirbo: Well, I expect it has to do with the race question. I think there's been a bigger. . . big change in the attitudes of the people about the part of black people in the school system, and participating in government. And their part in the life of Georgia. It's been a slow but steady firm change in peoples' attitudes. It's been rather painful, but it's changed. I think, just in politics itself, I think it's had the biggest effect in the way people campaign, what they say, and how they get elected. Along a somewhat prior with that, there's been a big change on the part of the state government in the area of sort of compassionate areas, in trying to help people with their problems more now. Much more than they had prior to 1940. That's come about mostly, I think, in the sixties, and it has been accelerated in the seventies. (Interruption for coffee.)

J.B.: Mr. Kirbo, what do you think has been the prime reason for that change? And how do you account for the accommodation of whites to the changing conditions, and also what do you think caused the change in attitude?

Kirbo: Well, some of it, of course, has been compulsory, in action of the courts. But I think, really, that there's always been latent in the average Georgian a desire to get along with everybody and treat everybody fair. But everything has to be accomplished in a climate, [the right kind of climate], we got off into a climate where you just couldn't do things and say things that helped develop peoples' attitude toward blacks. It was just demagogues, nigger-loving type of talk that many people - and really the majority of the people, that didn't want to mistreat people - it prevented them from speaking out. And one of the great things, I think, that Jimmy Carter has done, he's brought that out in the areas where it was thought to be the worst, in south Georgia. Rural areas. And he can do it because he came out from down there and he understood it. And he's done a hell of a lot toward bringing that out. There's a lot of other factors about it. One has been the change in the economy. To some extent, people are just as good as they can afford to be. And it's easier to be a good climate to have good change when you have plenty. When I was a boy, the best jobs in the community would be government jobs, working for the city, working for the county. And the leaders of the city and the counties had the problem, of course, people wanted those jobs. Hell, now they can't get people to take them. Nobody wants the damn jobs. And people are able to feel and act and do like they please, to some extent. And I think, to some extent, it reflects people being themselves rather than following leaders that stirred up this problem. You take the young people - here's another reason for it. They grow up. . .

I was. . . felt differently about it than my father, not so much my father, but his contemporaries. And my children feel a little differently about it, about the question of. . . not the question of integration or the question of social contact so much as they. . . people feel like they ought to have their share of everything. They ought to be permitted to participate in things. I don't think they're as far as the mingling of the races, and socially. I don't think. . . . There's been a, much of the change in that acceptance. People recognize that somebody wants to do that, they got a right to do that. And they don't try to interfere with it. I saw them down at the railroad [station] an incomplete mingling, amalgamation of the blacks and whites. But as far as their participation in the economy, well, I think it's coming along fine.

J.B.: Mr. Kirbo, could you give us just a little bit of background about yourself, where you grew up, and also your political background?

Kirbo: I was born in Bainbridge, Georgia, which is down in the southwest corner of the state. It's nothing but a small town, and my father was a bookkeeper at the sawmill at that time. He later studied law and was a county officer there at Bainbridge. He was clerk of the court. And I went through the school system there, went to the University of Georgia, University of Georgia Law School. And I was in the army five years during World War Two. Came back to Bainbridge and practiced law until 1960, when I joined this firm in Atlanta as I nearly run for public office (?). I've had a mild interest in politics up until 1966 when I got tangled up with Jimmy Carter and I represented him in an election contest. And then I managed his campaign and election in '66, and when he. . . . And then I managed

just in the metropolitan area where he's got beat here in the election. He's not as popular out in south Georgia as he was during the election, and it has to do with the race question, to some extent. And more than anything I think it's Maddox going around pumping on the damn subject all the time.

J.B.: How big a factor has race remained politically in Georgia?

Kirbo: Big factor all over the United State. Still a big factor. It's more. . . I go to these national meetings of state chairmen is the reason I think it's probably as big a factor in the north and in the west now as it is in Georgia. You see that rural areas are integrated. South Georgia is integrated. But metropolitan areas are the ones that are not integrated, and they're not going to be integrated.

J.B.: Suburbs?

Kirbo: And that's true all over the country. And it's sort of ironic that the pressure to integrate has been coming from the metropolitan areas. You go right now to I think it's more complex and you've got more cause for busing problems and traffic problems and all that to make it more difficult. But they're not going. . . that thing's tied in that area any other way I think hardly. You don't hear a hell of a lot about busing in my home. some sort of . But it's still a factor. But it's not a factor in the sense that it was in 1948 or 1930. There's so much now that everybody acknowledges black people can do. So much that's not in dispute. It's getting up on a more refined and a near of a social area, except in the job areas where - and the unions, especially -