

This is an interview with Arthur Ravenel, Treasurer of the Republican Party on February 19, 1974. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries. The transcriber was Susan Hathaway.

J.B.: How did you get involved in the Republican Party?

ARTHUR RAVENEL: I came in with Nixon in his first race in '60. A lot of people were disenchanted with one party rule in South Carolina, and this was an opportunity to get involved with another party. We supported Nixon.

J.B.: You were still a Democrat?

Ravenel: No, no, after the Democratic National Convention, I affiliated with the Republican party.

J.B.: In '60.

Ravenel: In '60, and supported Nixon as a Republican.

J.B.: You had been in the legislature when?

Ravenel: Let's see, I was in there from '52 to '58, three terms, six years.

J.B.: And you didn't run again?

Ravenel: Right. I just quit.

J.B.: So what was your objective in joining the

J.B.: So what was your objective in joining the Republican party?

Ravenel: Well, I thought it was a good and healthy thing to have a second viable political force here in the State so we would be like the rest of the country with two parties.

J.B.: Alright, then what?

Ravenel: Anyhow, we went on down the road and . . .

J.B.: Did you do any active work on the campaign?

Ravenel: Yes, active in the Workman campaign and of course the contest between Workman and what's his name, Chapman really didn't want to build a party to nearly what it is, and everybody was flying around organizing Counties, organizing Precincts, getting delegates to the State convention to support either Chapman or Workman. It was a very healthy thing, and the party at that time was made up mostly by younger enthusiastic people; most of them with no political experience, or very little, and we came on down the road to '64 . . .

J.B.: We've sort of analyzed southern Republicans as basically falling into five groups. Some overlap, some people fit into five categories. Where would you put yourself and where would you see the Republican party in '62?

Ravenel: In '62? Reform crowd.

J.B.: Reform Crowd and also urban conservatives?

Ravenel: Yeah.

J.B.: Alright then what happened. What was the effect of the Goldwater movement in South Carolina?

Ravenel: Well up until the time of the Goldwater campaign, there was a true reform, urban Republican type situation, very enthusiastic; everybody worked very hard, and there was a lot of idealism in the party and of course, Goldwater brought some very powerful and very strong professional politicians into the party and in effect they have taken over. They took the party over and in effect they have maintained control of it.

J.B.: Would you say that it would be fair then that when Strom Thurmond moved in, he in effect took over control of the party?

Ravenel: That's right. He brought his supporters came with him because they were experienced and he was a United States Senator, and at that time except for Tower, he was the only southern Republican United States Senator, very popular and very powerful politically, and he runs the party.

J.B.: You were interested in running for Governor in '68, I mean in '70.

Ravenel: Yeah.

J.B.: In a primary. There was no primary. Do you believe that Strom Thurmond was the main reason there was no primary?

Ravenel: Of course I am a Thurmond supporter. I think the party would do better if Senator Thurmond would not involve himself in party politics, but then I realize that that is very difficult to do. How are you going to be the United States Senator, you know, . . . it's very difficult to keep your hands off of the party machinery, and I think that had he wanted a primary at that time, or if he had really been disinterested, I think we would have had a primary and I think we would have had a very lively primary, and I think that the winner of the primary would have been elected Governor.

J.B.: What is going to be the effect of Watergate? At this time it is hard to say . . .

Ravenel: It's hard to say. Of course, it looks, from the results of what happened in Ford's old district in Michigan, it looks very very bad. Of course we realize, the regular party people, that all those people that perpetrated that Watergate mess, they were all Nixon appointees, and a good many of them didn't have any hard and fast party affiliation. But now whether the public is going to realize that or not, I don't know. I kind of **agree** with what Senator Goldwater said that it is going to cost us 10% of those people who could normally have been expected to vote Republican this fall. Of course, that much of a shift can be disastrous. I know the reluctance on the great number of people who have been active in the party in former years

to be enthusiastically active this year and certainly cast a pall of discouragement on it. A good many of the people that I know who are active party workers . . .

J.B.:

Ravenel: Yes.

J.B.: If the Republicans fare poorly in the South this fall, do you think it will primarily be a direct result of Watergate?

Ravenel: No because we have so many other problems. The economic conditions in this country . . . I'm a businessman . . . are just absolutely chaotic. You've got run-a-way inflation, you've got the energy crisis, shortages in so many of the basic materials, you've got terribly high interest rates, continued enormous federal deficit, which of course is contributing to the inflation, and this is something that the Republicans have always been against, the unbalanced budget. So, we have got all kind of problems. Of course, when you have problems in the country generally the party in power rightly or wrongly so are blamed for the problems.

J.B.: Where do you see the Republican party in South Carolina and blacks at this time, and where do you see it heading? You have played more or less a major role in bringing blacks into the party in South Carolina to the extent that they were brought in.

Ravenel: We are not making any progress with the greatest mass of the blacks. We are just not making any progress. The blacks don't feel at home in the Republican party despite pronouncements of our State Chairman and actions that the Executive Committee has taken and invitations have been issued to them and what have you. We are just not making much progress with them and I think until we do with the percent of black registration we have, it's going to be very difficult for us to make any massive break throughs in this State. You know I made a race for Mayor down here. I did not run as a Republican, I ran in a coalition, a Republican running in a coalition and we put together a coalition of independents, Democrats, and Republicans, and I got some 80% of the black vote. Of course, the Democrats, they hung a Republican label all over me particularly in the black community, but it showed that the . . . One thing that the election proved, because we lost the election by a narrow margin, one thing that it did prove was that the blacks were not afraid of the Republican label when applied to a candidate. They thought that the candidate was fair and would give him a fair shake that they would vote for him regardless of his party affiliation. Of course, we probably lost the election because they've got as high a percent of the black vote as I did. Some Republicans voted against me and others would not actively work in

my behalf.

J.B.: Where do you see the Republican party heading in South Carolina?

Ravenel: I don't believe we are going anywhere this year. Of course, that is not for publication between now and the election because I am a loyal party worker, but I . . .

J.B.: It won't be published before 1976.

Ravenel: Until we have free and open primaries where Republicans can get in there and compete with each other for nominations, I don't believe we will be able to make the breakthrough at the top. I'll tell you, right now we have at least a half dozen top notch individuals who, although they are not well known now, if they ran in the primary, if they actively competed, the winner of the primary would certainly be a well known and established political figure, but every four years you see the party leadership . . . instead of encouraging the Indians to enter a contest in which your chief is going to be chosen, they go out and try to grab a chief from someplace else and coronate us with him, and of course, this has a moralizing effect on the aspiring Indians that we have in the party. It's discouraging. It's discouraging to you. It's discouraging to people like Senator Edwards, for one, who is considering the race for Governor, Warren ~~Giese,~~ <sup>Giese,</sup> a fellow from up in the Columbia area, ~~Wes Morezett~~ <sup>Weld, Morrisette</sup>

has talked to me about making the race in the primary for Governor. We'd have a free and open primary, and the party leadership would quit recruiting and promoting big names to be our nominee, I think we would have a race for Governor with at least five people in it, and if we ever won it, it would certainly be a political figure in his own rank to be reckoned with in the general election.

J.B.: How do you evaluate Roger Milliken's role in the Republican Party? What is his role, is he the daddy war bucks?

Ravenel: He is one of the South's great leaders, certainly one of South Carolina's great industrial leaders, and he is a political stalwart in the Republican party and always has been since I have been affiliated with him, but the Democrats were always able because of his prominence in the Textile Industry and because it is traditional leanness that the textile worker has . . . the textile owner in the State, the Democrats have been able to use him very effectively against us with the textile worker. Of course, he always figures prominently in high level South Carolina Republican political strategy because he has got tremendous economic power, and of course, you get insurance as financial support from the Milliken interest in the party, you can go a long way politically, so far as the funding of this or that campaign is concerned.



J.B.: Would it be fair to categorize him as a major source of funding for major campaigns?

Ravenel: Well he's got connections, you see. I mean you take here recently they had a big dinner in the Spartanburg area, I think, for Connely, wasn't it? Our national committeeman Mr. Harold Byrd, who either is or was a general purchasing agent for ~~Deering~~- Milliken . . . I think that is his position, I think he sold three hundred tickets out of four hundred sold. I mean, you know, nothing wrong in all this, but if you have a multi-million dollar business empire and you need to raise money, you just put a bunch of people on phones calling your accounts payable, you can raise some money. Just start with "A" and go on down to "Z" and you just say "look here Charlie, we are trying to raise a little bit of money for so and so, certainly would appreciate it if you would buy two tickets." Well you know if you are buying a ton of stuff from these folks, it is very hard for them to refuse them. Now that is not wrong and everybody does it, and of course, this is a big, great thing for us. I mean, I can always raise three or four thousand dollars myself for some Republican cause by just calling my accounts payable, the people I do business with and say "help us." The Democrats do the same thing. Everybody does the same thing.

J.B.: Because of his magnitude and interests he is able to do a little bit more?

Ravenel: He could put Hal <sup>Byrd</sup>~~Burton~~ on the phone . . .  
I don't want to refer that there is anything wrong with  
that, everybody does it, and thank God he is a Republican  
when it comes to raising money, and he has been a party  
stalwart.

J.B.: Was the era when Drake Edens party began, was  
that the time of the greatest growth in the Republican  
party?

Ravenel: Right. When Edens was Chairman during  
that period of time before Thurmond came in, there was  
more enthusiasm, a greater rate of growth, greater promise  
than there has been since.

J.B.: There is a lot of talk of . . . among the  
southern Republicans about realignment, about Democrats  
coming over. Do you see this as the major wave of the  
future for the Republicans?

Ravenel: I don't think there is really going to  
be that many Democrats, people who really consider them-  
selves Democrats coming over. I think that most of those  
who are going to come over have come over, like myself.  
You've got to realize that most of the electorate are  
independents and this is the big resevoir that everybody  
fishes in. I think if we go to the free and open primary  
method of nomination, which people in South Carolina are  
accustomed to, and if we have the primaries, we will have  
the candidates that willfile in them and they are going

to attract an ever increasing share of the independents to vote now, participate now in our nominating process. I think that if we have a future, the future is going to . . . I think we have got to go through some terrible times before we have our . . . we are going to have a primary this year, but it is not going to be a free and open one, because it has already been all screwed up by this phony draft that is going on. I mean if you get the party leadership conspiring to draft, you know, well known retired military personnel to run, it just throws cold water on all those other people who would like to do something.

J.B.: When Ken Powell resigned and stated his inability to get along with the party big wigs, what was he talking about?

Ravenel: Well, he had had some arguments with the Senator over some of the appointments, particularly that Blot appointment and he had had continuing arguments with Harry Dent and with other people. That is a tough job being State Chairman.

J.B.: What has been Harry's role in the Republican party since he has returned from Washington?

Ravenel: I haven't seen him or heard from him. The first thing that I saw was that he came down to the State Committee meeting selling Westmoreland.

J.B.: I assume that your theory is that that idea

idea did not originate with Harry Dent?

Ravenel: Well, I don't think that it would have gotten as far as it has gotten without the cooperation of the Senator and Mr. Milliken and the people who make the decisions for the party.

J.B.: Are you one of those people?

Ravenel: No, I am not one of those people.

J.B.: You are the Treasurer aren't you?

Ravenel: I'm Finance Chairman. The party is in good shape financially. We've got a sustaining membership program, and we have a goodly number of people who contribute on a monthly or annual basis.

J.B.: What do you think the Republican party has to do in South Carolina to progress politically, and what do you think it is going to do?

Ravenel: I think we have a rough time to go through this year, election year in '74. I think we have got to survive the 1974 elections and take stock. It's like sailing . . . being in a boat, we've got some foul weather coming up and we have got to put on our foul weather gear and have got to button down our hatches and hope we can ride out the storm that we are going to have next fall. Nobody knows where they are in the party. Everybody is nervous about it, and we've got party leaders conducting a draft to encourage a well known political personality to be the standard bearer who has never voted

in his life and who really doesn't know if he is independent, Democrat or Republican. A man who has been working hand and glove with the Democrats since he has returned to South Carolina. It's a confused type situation. Maybe they will have apparently a pretty nasty fight between the State Chairman.

J.B.: Why has the Republican party in South Carolina since Drake Edens stepped down failed to further organize in terms of traditional political organization as it had been doing?

Ravenel: Well, I think '64 was a high water mark of the Missionary type zeal with which the party was organized, and of course, Edens was behind that, he was the moving spirit in it, and then after that we just kind of went into a recession. Some people might tell you that Senator Thurmond coming into the party was responsible for that, but that is just not so. Other people took over the direction of the party as State Chairman and people as Executive Directors and what have you and they just weren't like Edens. He devoted full time to it and while his health was good, he was just a real work horse, and he was able to get all over the State and just fire people up to organizational activities. He had me fired up. I ran all over this State at my own expense organizing precincts and counties and what have you. I don't know, maybe after Senator Thurmond came in, a lot of people

just figured that we have arrived that we have got it made and they relaxed, and the Chairmen that followed Edens, they just weren't organizationally oriented like he was, and weren't able to inspire.

J.B.: Alright. Harry Dent certainly has zeal and energy. What were his efforts direct to that?

Ravenel: He was the Chairman and Ray Harris was the Executive Director, and I don't know, I can't fault those guys, they did the best they could, but I am just saying that for a period of about . . . well, from '60 to '64. From '60 through to Goldwater's election through election day, Edens just had this, people in the party, just working like beavers. He just had a mystic about him that he was just able to instill this zeal into people, and he had everybody just running around.

J.B.: Would it be fair to say then that it was just a change in the quality of leadership?

Ravenel: No I wouldn't say quality. I think it was just a question of personality. All of our State Chairman, with one or two exceptions, have been eminently qualified people. He was just a type. He was just the organizational type. He was just great at it. This was his specialty, the thing that he excelled in best of all, and he was just great.

J.B.: Where do you see the Wallace vote heading in South Carolina?

Ravenel: I think that if Dorn wins the Democratic primary, he'll get most of them. He's able to very effectively wrap himself in the flag and say and do those type of things that Wallace people like. It attracts them.

J.B.: What were some of the experiences that you had in trying to bring blacks into the party?

Ravenel: Well, here in Charleston County we made a decision to organize the black precincts and with the help of other people we set up some black organizations in the black wards. I got a lot of flack from the party people for doing this. Some of them felt, and were quite sincere in their beliefs, that the Democrat party would become the party of the black people and the Republican party the party of the white people. That is how it would wind up, and it was their thinking and their sincere thinking that by bringing blacks into the Republican party, this realignment would not come off, and I was doing a dis-service to the Republican party and the goals that they had in the party and doing it a dis-service by bringing blacks into the Republican party.

J.B.: What were your views?

Ravenel: Well my views were and still are that everything is changing. There are so many things that you can count on in this world and political attitudes are changing and the hard lines that are drawn in this

country, white versus black were getting softer and softer, and that as time went on that people would be interested in other things beside segregation. It would become something that would become passay and be interested in better opportunities, better jobs, and other issues ecology, things like that and that as the years wore on that this black versus white business would . . . as a political issue would diminish, and my thinking was and still is that when you have 40% of the registration, I think that is about it, black, but when you go into an election, you concede that 40% to your opposition, and what you happen to do is you try for the 80% of the 60% that is left to win makes it pretty tough, and if we couldn't get blacks in the party and working with us, then our candidates couldn't appeal to them with some reasonable expectation of success. It would be very difficult ever to make any broad break through politically in hopes of capturing say control of either the House or the Senate or electing a Governor or a second United States Senator.

J.B.: At this time, how much support within the party would you say that your position has?

Ravenel: A whole lot more than they had say five or six years ago. Most Republicans, if you ask them, will agree with you. They will tell you that they agree with me. I think most of them will. I think



maybe 50% or 60% of them agree with me now.

J.B.: Realistically, projecting ten years in the future. What percentage of the black vote in South Carolina do you expect to vote Republican?

Ravenel: Ten years from now? It depends on the candidates that we field. If Drake Edens were to run for Governor, because he has always been a moderate on the race question. If he were to run for Governor, I think that he could expect in the general election to get 25% of the black vote, which would elect him.

J.B.: How about General Westmoreland?

Ravenel: He is an unknown quantity. Nobody knows anything about him.

J.B.: Is race still a political issue? Or let me rephrase it, how significant an issue, political issue does race remain?

Ravenel: It is still significant, still significant. It's not as significant as it was, but it is still significant. It's getting less and less each year.

(End interview.)