

This is an interview with James P. Coleman, former Governor of Mississippi and current member of the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in Hackerman, Mississippi, March 30, 1974. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries and transcribed by Susan Hathaway.

JACK BASS: The book is scheduled for publication in the Spring of 1976.

WALTER DEVRIES: As you look back over the last 25 years, what are the major political changes in this state.

JAMES COLEMAN: Well Mississippi throughout its entire history has been pretty much *Democratic* politically. In 1851 when Jefferson Davis was defeated for Governor in Mississippi by Henry S. Foot. Foot was running on the Unionist platform. Then the very next year, of course, the state turned right around and overwhelmingly supported Franklin Pierce for the Presidency, ~~over the~~ ~~candidate.~~ In 1861 where South Carolina had voted unanimously for the ordinance of cession, the delegates in Mississippi . . . there were 26 opposed, although they ultimately signed it, all except two. Mississippi had a very strong populist movement in the 1890's. They were never able to elect any state or national officers, but they elected many many on the local level . . .

Legislators, for example. This county, the populists took over the Court House almost and they did send a representative to the Legislature. Senator Gore of Oklahoma, later of Oklahoma was then living in the adjoining county of Wister and was a very strong candidate to the legislature on the populists ticket although he got beat. In 1932, 1936, 1940, and 1944, of course the Democrat, the National Democratic ticket in this state was untouchable. Mississippi had its would be revolt. Some of the men named as Presidential elector by the State Democratic Convention in 1944 announced they were not going to vote for Roosevelt and Truman, whereupon Governor Bailey convened a special session of the legislature and amended the election laws, and put out a slate of Presidential electors for Roosevelt and Truman nominated by the legislature, which I was one. I was only 30 years old but . . . and we overwhelmingly carried the State. In 1948, I was a State Circuit Judge, so I did not participate in that business, but we turned right around in 1952 when Governor White was the Governor and I was the Attorney General, and carried the state against General Eisenhower. In 1956, when I was Governor we carried it by an even larger majority of the *vote*. Then in 1960, by an 8,000 vote margin we went for the Byrd electors, and the National Democratic ticket has not carried Mississippi since 1956. So, we've had a history of alternating

lights and shadows, I'd say, and that which has happened in the last 25 years in many respects is the product of what went on in the years before. Tradition doesn't die very easy in Mississippi. I think there is an explanation for that. Up until recent years when we came to be heavily industrialized, the population went from grandfather to son to grandson on down the line, and chiefly in the same areas. My father, my grandfather, and my great-grandfather all died at the same house. We've been living on the same farm down here since 1835, although and before that of course, we were in South Carolina for about 60 years. So, and that is largely true of this area. It was settled chiefly by the people of the Carolinas and Georgia. I must say in the overall context by far the most tremendous change has occurred since 1948, with that statement, I think I will leave it open to questions.

W.D.: What is the most specific change though that occurred during that period in state politics?

J.C.: Well, you gentlemen have no doubt made a considerable study in Mississippi, and you know what has been going on. For example, in 1951, when Governor White was elected Governor of this state on a platform really of not rocking the boat and of pursuing our advantages and minimizing the race question, and so forth and so on. He won, I believe, by only 8,000 votes. I came along generally on the same approach in 1956, was elected by a 46,000 votes, carried 66 out of the 82 counties, to defeat the man that had

been Governor and two men who later were to be Governor . . . Ross Barnett and Paul Johnson. Of course, in 1959, Barnett got elected Governor on the argument that we had been weak kneed and vacillating and milk toast on the question of southern rights and states rights, the race question and everything else. They defeated Lt. Governor Carol Garden, who I think could have won easily if he had made a more two fisted campaign. That is not said in any way to deprecate him because he was an unusually fine man and was certainly a most satisfactory Lieutenant Governor. In 1963 I was defeated in the run-off for Governor because I had campaigned actively and strenuously for Kennedy and Johnson in 1960, and of course the Oxford episode had intervened in 1962, which pretty well reflects what was going on in Mississippi in that year without my elaborating upon it. However, Johnson, once he was elected, pursued I thought a very satisfactory policy in general. He certainly didn't go about enflaming the populists or making empty threats or insupportable boasts. It was John Bill Williams was elected in 1968 over William Werner, who was considered "Seymore Reeves man." But, he himself did very little I thought to exasperate the situation. Waller, since he was elected in 1971 has pursued, I think, a very acceptable policy. He has not been a race bater, and he has not been one to defy the United States Government, and things are certainly far quieter and more tranquil in Mississippi now than they have been for several years, and ever before. We have a good many federal law suits

but we don't begin to have the things that went on . . . such as in the Philadelphia episode, I have forgotten right now what year that was. Three men were killed and buried under the dam, and other such incidents. I think the most complete change has been the now really unquestioned admission of the black people to the ballot which certainly did not exist prior to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, plus their participation without any intimidation or trouble in the electoral process and their election to many local offices. Plus the fact that in most places nearly all the integration of public schools has been brought about with a minimum of trouble. There has been a great deal of disruption of the educational process in a few places, and the public school system has been abandoned in a few counties because people all fled to the private schools, but I would say that Mississippi is an altogether different place than it was in 1948. I suppose it had some distance to travel, but it would be my considered opinion that it has traveled most of it.

J.B.: What do you think would have to happen for Mississippi to go Democratic again in the Presidential election?

J.C.: I think Mississippi . . . I think the people in Mississippi have been very very unhappy outside the Democratic party since they quit going Democrat. I think the explanation has been that they thought the party was nominating a wholly unacceptable man as a

general proposition. Of course some of it has taken place under the impact of recently more or less inflammatory events but I think the proof of it all is that they are going right on speaking with the Democratic nominees as a general rule in all state and local elections. We have got . . . I don't know how many Republican members we have in the legislature, but not many.

J.B.: Four.

J.C.: That is four out of a total of 120 in the House and 52 in the Senate, so that is four out of 172 then. We have elected a Republican Congressman from the Meridian District in the Goldwater landslide of 1964, and they elected two this last year. One from Jackson and one from Pascagoula. My own analysis of it is that the young man from Pascagoula, Lott, was elected in spite of the fact that he was a Republican, but on account of the fact that he is a very personable very able young man with a lot of promise. He had worked for Congressman Carlman, he knew where all the votes were and how to get them. That is a very able Democratic area on the seacoast, a highly organized labor union, and so forth and so on. I think that the young man in Jackson who happens to be the son-in-law of one of my close personal friends and a former National Committeeman, Clayton got elected probably because Senator Boatran(?) and Representative Brown had been in a total blood letting primary and obviously Brown's people just voted for . . . what's his name?

. . . Thad Cochran in the general election. I would say that Mississippi is still basically Democratic. Of course, when you throw a delegation out as they did in Miami in 1972, you are not going to carry the state and it is futile to attempt it. I believe that Mississippi would get get back into the Democratic party pronto, if for example, they could get the law passed, which I think they have been trying to pass in the legislature, I don't know whether they have passed it or not of allowing the delegates to the National Convention to be elected by the people just like other people are . . . just like they do in Alabama, and eliminating this argument about racial discrimination. They claim, you know, we still adhere to the old precinct, county, state convention method of selecting delegates to the national convention, but I think it is as much a question of the national Democratic party taking Mississippi back as it is Mississippi taking the party back. They are obviously Democratic in belief, and in principal, and in background. In 1964 they went for Goldwater. In 1968 and in 1972 they went for Nixon. I believe that in 1972 they went more overwhelmingly for Nixon than any other state in the union percentage wise. But most of that . . . well, you remember they had a rial at the convention in 1968 too in which they . . . maybe in '64, in which they just seated really pretenders, people who really had no political influence in this state and were not going to have any. Of course,

we had that in 1952. I was at the Democratic National Convention in 1952, and a bunch of people went up and contested at that time. I was not a delegate to that convention by choice. I really didn't want to be a delegate, but I wound up acting as the spokesman for the so called regulars, and they were received by an overwhelming majority and we carried the state even with Kefauver on the ticket who was highly unpopular in Mississippi individually. I remember they had a rally in Knoxville, Tennessee in the fall of '72, and Governor White and I went up there and Kefauver said "I think if you people in Mississippi knew me better you wouldn't hate me so badly," I said "Senator, they don't hate you, they just disagree with some of your political beliefs, your governmental principals, and hatred or not, I think you may need more of it because you are going to carry Mississippi" and he did. He and Stevenson and Kefauver together did. It has been the product of political maneuvering and political grabbing for individual power rather than a disagreement, I think, of the principals of the two parties or the identity of the two parties. I remember in 1952, our challenge was led by a man who had run for the Governor the year before, and who got 8,000 votes. Governor White had walked out in '48. Of course, I know personally from knowing and talking to him that a lot of those who walked out in 1948 did it but still they were opposed to it. They didn't want to do it but the majority

voted to do it so when Governor White ran he was selected for his second term in '51. Well he put up the big posters "I walked out in 1948 and I will walk out again if necessary so they accused him in the '52 convention of being the walking delegate. They said that they were just up there as observers, that they would stay as long as long as things soothed them and when it displeased them, they would leave. I remember in my argument to the credentials committee, I said "well, maybe Governor White is the walking delegate, or rather the walking candidate, but my good friend over here". . . and he was my good personal friend . . ."is really the walking candidate because he ran for Governor last year and out of about 500,000 votes he got 8,000 of them. If you think you can build any strength of Mississippi on him . . . seating people or no more clouds than that, why that is your prerogative, they didn't do it. The so called national Democrats of Mississippi now are led by a man by the name of Aaron Henry and a lady in Jackson whom I don't know. I believe that her husband is a professor at the University of Mississippi Medical School, Mrs. . . .

W.D.: Patt ^{Patten} Deridian.

J.C.: Yeah, Mrs. ^{Patten} Deridian. Well Henry never overlooks an opportunity to say things that are not about to be accepted in Mississippi, and the result is they don't have any real base or support. I don't know if they were to start electing

the delegates, it might be that a lot of other people who otherwise were in position to influence many many votes wouldn't bother to run for delegate, but I think it would be worth a try and because we are not going to get anywhere in Mississippi operating as we have been in the last 12 years, that's for sure. I think a strong Governor could change it but . . . I mean a Governor with strong convictions in that area but none of them have really seen fit to make the effort. Waller made an effort to get Mississippi seated in '72 because I recall he didn't go himself and turn his influence in on it or enlist the aid of Governors of other states, Democratic Governors. I am not saying that he should have, I am just pointing out that he didn't, that was a decision for him to make, and I held a very stern policy of not publically criticizing my successors. That is the most obnoxious thing I suppose an ex-Governor can do . . . to sit around and second guess his successors. There is nothing more ex than an ex-Governor, you know, when it comes to those things.

W.D.: Is it hard to refrain from it?

J.C.: Not really. Once you assume the role. . . I mean, of course I didn't refrain until I put on that black robe, I mean I very actively participated, but once you are a federal judge, you've got to decide whether or not you want to pay the price and if you do, well alright, and if so do it.

W.D.: How do you access the administration during that period? How do you see it, and so on.

J.C.: Well, I suppose that my chief pride in my administration from 1956 to 1960 with the Little Rock crisis right on top of us right across the river and other things, my chief pride is that we had no difficulties or problems in Mississippi of any consequence. The idea of hating someone because of the color in which God made him and that sort of thing was totally, not totally but substantially submerged . . . very much more so than in any prior time. My administration was the first one in the history of the state to guarantee school term on state funds for every child in the state regardless of race. We maintained a very happy relationships with the other states in the union and other Governors. On the other hand, I think the occurrences since that time had better speak for themselves rather than me to evaluate them, they are there.

J.B.: How do you explain the number of successive Republicans that last year had elected mayors?

J.C.: Well I think in municipal elections people vote for the identity of the individual, what they know about him, and what they consider his capabilities and so forth, rather than what party he belongs to. I think that every Republican could have easily been . . . could have as easily been elected if he had been running on the Democratic ticket, probably more so.

J.B.: Do you feel that the conflict between the loyalists and the regulars will be resolved before the

1976 convention?

J.C.: No, unless it is left to a vote of the people to select the delegates then. Let the people set it up . . . they are not going to settle it, it's a question of who is going to be the Deacons in church, and it may be a hint, ~~that~~ but still it is a matter of pride with them, and that is true on both sides I must say. In 1968, Governor Williams could have avoided the contest in Chicago if he had agreed to allow three more negro delegates; although they had not been chosen by the ordinary lawful process of convention, county and state. Had I been here, I would have made the concession. I hope that is not understood as criticizing him. I mean, that is one thing that I don't care to be quoted on, as I have already indicated. He took the position that was, of course, undermining the methods by which the people chose their delegates, but the other side of it remains that you have a slate of delegates elected by the state convention itself, and they are generally named by the Governor at least in all of my experiences they were. I started going to those conventions in 1940. I was a delegate from Mississippi to the Chicago convention of 1940, which nominated Roosevelt for his third term, and Wallace for Vice-President. So I have had some familiarity with the dog gone thing. I think you'd have to make compromises . . . if you want to call them compromises . . . some things called compromises are not really compromises, they are just concessions to the

realities without being harmful to anybody, really. But as long as we follow this method of whoever wants to go to the precinct convention, just go there and name delegates to the county convention, and met those delegates in turn name delegates to the state convention, as long as the question as I say of who is going to be the altar, why they are not going to agree. It is just the same kind of a spirit that has prevailed in so many other things.

W.D.: Is there anybody in the state that can bring it together?

J.C.: Oh yes, there are people in the state who can bring it together if they were willing to exert the effort, but my guess is that most of them think that the accomplishment is not worth the time and the effort and the sacrifice because it couldn't be done by waving any magic wand. I thought for a while they were going to settle it in 1972. They made . . . there was considerable maneuver back and forth, but I think that Waller agreed, as I recall it, to have the loyalists hold half the seats to the convention, but then they wanted to guarantee that he would then appoint each of them to one of the election commissions in the state or some other utterly unacceptable premise. The Governor can't bargain his appointing power away like that. He would be, I think, violating his oath of office to agree that I am going to name a certain number of a certain group to every election commission in the state, not because they are better qualified or

more representative, but just because I have to do it to get my feet into a national convention. Had I been Waller, I would not have agreed to that. Of course, I would have tried to have forestalled the necessity of such agreement by some other more acceptable method; maybe it couldn't be done. I think if both sides probably went so far out on the limb that there wasn't any way for them to get back.

J.B.: What affect do you think Watergate is going to have on the Republican party in Mississippi?

J.C.: I don't think any.

J.B.: If the Republicans run a full slate, in 1975, for state-wide offices, of strong candidates including some possible former Democrats, do you see a realignment possibly taking place and a lot of Democrats shifting over to the Republican party?

J.C.: I don't think so.

J.B.: How about if they elect a Republican Governor?

J.C.: Well that'll be the day when they do that. I don't think that is anywhere in the cards at all, and I'll give you some examples now of what went on in Mississippi. In 1968 we had several legislators like the lady in Jackson who is a state senator, who under the impulse of a moment, although having been elected Democrat, having been elected as Democrats, switched to the Republican party and declared themselves to be Republicans and ally Strom Thurmond, and what have you, and every last one of them were defeated in the '71 election. So, I don't see anything in Mississippi

today economically, politically, or otherwise that is going to help the Republican party exercise any real influence at the state or local level. There'll be instances where a man . . . and we have had them, we are going to continue to have them, where a man who is considered to be the better man running on the Republican ticket for Mayor of Ackerman, or what have you, will win, but it won't be because he is running on the Republican ticket. And now Rubel Phillips has made two races for Governor on the Republican ticket in Mississippi against Johnson in 1963 and against Williams in 1967. He carried his county in 1963, but it's because the people were sore because Johnson had defeated me in the primary. I supported Johnson. I had run as a Democrat . . . I had run as the Democratic nomination and having lost, I voted for the nominee in the general election and made no bones about saying so, but the people said, "well you're probably going to have to do that but we don't have to. We are going to vote as we please, and Phillips was consonant politician. He used to be a way out so called Truman liberal, maybe that had something to do with his ineffectiveness. He was not ineffective with his ability to win as a Republican, but I don't know . . . politics, you know, as I have said about Mississippi, has some quick, sudden, unexpected volcanos and interruptions, but I don't believe that will happen. I'd have to see a whole lot more than I see today. I don't know of anybody the Republicans have got that could be elected Governor, even

against weak opposition. You can't beat somebody that is nobody. You have got to have horse that is capable of winning the race before you can expect to win, and they don't have it. Carmichael is a very personable fellow, obviously well informed. He makes a tremendous appearance on TV, but he has never held any political office of any kind by which the people can judge him as a performer rather than as a candidate. I suppose he is the most able man they have at this time. You put him right down to the brass tacks and I don't know whether he has any idea of running for Governor or not, maybe he has, maybe he expects to make another try for the senate, but accessing the cold realities, I don't think he could make anything like the race today that he made back then. Of course, he complained about not getting the support of *Nixon* administration, and more or less attributed his defeat to that, but I don't think that was it. Senator Eastland and I have never been on the same side politically in Mississippi. We have always had . . . well in my life time, or in my political life time, we have always had two factions within the Democratic party. I belong to the Feilding Wright, Hugh White, J. P. Coleman crowd, and Senator Eastland, of course, has always been associated with the Paul B. Johnson group because old man Paul B. Johnson senior appointed him to the senate when Pat Harrison died way back in 1941, and that is what put his foot in the door, and resulted in his going to the Senate.

He didn't run for the unexpired term, but he waited until the next regular term came up and defeated Wall Doxie. He owes his allegiance to Johnson group, and he and I have never had any personal misunderstandings about it or any political quarrels. He announced publically in 1955 when I was elected that he was going to vote for Paul Johnson, but at the same time Senator Stennis announced that he was going to vote for me so that pretty well took care of that. The Senator didn't do anything but announce what he was going to do. In 1963, I never heard him say anything so, but because he is the chairman of the judiciary committee of the United States Senate, there wasn't anybody who could have defeated Senator Eastland. I have a lot of friends from Tennessee, but I certainly wouldn't have attempted to run against him.

J.B.: Were you surprised that Carmichael ran as well as he did under those circumstances, I mean without White House support?

J.C.: Well, I was not surprised. Yet on the other hand, there was a lot of ground for surprise. I was not surprised because for one thing Senator Eastland really didn't make any campaign, and that to me is always a bad political maneuver. That is how Arthur Winston got beat for Congress in 1964. He just assumed that as the Democratic nominee, he would be elected. He didn't do anything about it. That is what got a bunch of Congressmen beaten in Alabama in '64. The ones who went out and worked, the Democrats

were elected. I think Senator Eastland would have defeated Carmichael by a much more heavy majority than he did if he had made an active campaign. You see, we don't have a straight . . . you don't vote a straight ticket in Mississippi, you have to vote on each office individually. So, I don't think that Carmichael got the vote that he got as any kind of Republican expression at all, and bear in mind if Senator Eastland and his crowd had been through many, many, many campaigns in Mississippi going all the way back to 1939, and in that length of time he accumulated a large collection of barnacles and political enemies and folks would have liked to have seen him put out. I think Carmichael got the vote he got because of the personality that he has and his ability to get on the television and talk to people, and talk to them about things that anybody would know darned well they were highly interested in and had political impact on. On top of that you had a lot of people right in this town, for example, leading citizens and good people who are really Republican after all in national politics and always have been, although they always go vote in the Democrat primaries. They worked very actively for him, and I expect that Senator Eastland was amazed at the narrowness of the majority, I have forgotten exactly how much it was, but it wasn't all that stupendous.

~~W~~.D.: We are told that the basis of Eastland's power in the state comes from several things; one, of course because he has been there so long, two, that he is on the Judiciary Committee, and has contacts with the benches

in the state, third, because of the County Supervisors. Is that essentially correct?

J.B.: An additional factor was the traditional control of patronage.

J.C.: Yeah.

W.D.: And access to money for campaigns.

J.C.: Yeah. Well there is no question of whether he has access to all the money he needs, in fact, he has got it himself, but I don't know that he ever uses any of his own. You know, that is one of the standard of politics, you don't spend your own money even if you have got it, but, and another thing is you can't win if you don't have enough support and so forth to generate the necessary campaign expense, you're not going to win anyway. But well, I think, if Senator Eastland does not get out and get among the people, or pursue any political personal political connections, . . . I think the last time he was in this town was in 1954 which has been 20 years ago. He spoke here then on Carol Garden, who was then Lieutenant Governor, who was running against him for the Senate, and he defeated Carol by a two to one majority or maybe even more than that. I think it is a fact that the State of Mississippi realizing that we only have five representatives out of 435 and we only have two Senators out of 100 are just not prepared to give away the Chairmanship of the Judiciary Committee and ought to send somebody else up there, it's going to be a long time before he can

develop any strength at all. I think that is the real key to the thing. Now supposedly the Supervisors are for him, but that argument really has two very serious defects. Number one, the Supervisors are politicians themselves, and that is number one first and foremost. Number two, while they have great political weight in a few counties in Mississippi, not in many . . . now the Supervisor in this county ever since I've been big enough to know where the Court House, they don't fool anybody else's election or politics. You have got a few counties like Maynard, Harrison, Meban, Meban is where they do . . . they supported me for Governor in 1955. As Attorney General I had caused them a lot of trouble that they deserved so they went on for me, but it didn't really make any difference except in about two or three places. So I don't think that's it, although he always makes it a habit to go down and speak to their conventions pretty regularly, and so on, but I would say that if Senator Eastland were a United States Senator, without being Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, that his ability would be quite a different story; but he has been Chairman since 1956 I believe. Now as to patronage, of course, you know that is divided. They have a gentleman's agreement between he and Stennis. He takes so and so and Stennis takes so and so. Stennis has half the patronage. I was appointed to the Court of Appeals on Stennis's recommendation. It was his time to recommend. He did and I was the man. By the same token when certain

groups very actively opposed my confirmation and brought on a three day hearing up there why Senator Eastland, although we had never run in the same pack, very actively did what he could to get me confirmed, and I think when the role was called there were only about seven or eleven or some such votes against confirming me. A lot of that, I think, was due to the fact that I had the support of Senator Kennedy of New York and Kennedy of Massachusetts both, because they knew how close I was to the late President both personally and politically, and that had a lot to do with that. I never saw Senator Kennedy until we supported him in the convention in '66 with the Vice-Presidential nomination, then he came down to Jackson at my invitation and spoke to a Jackson-Jefferson dinner . . . I think it was in 1957 or 1958 maybe and spent the night at the Governor's mansion, that was one of the things they objected to so strenuously when I ran for Governor again, and of course I took the stump for him in TV in 1960, and we almost brought it off. As a matter of fact, Senator Kennedy thought that he was going to carry Mississippi and lose South Carolina. It turned out the other way, he carried South Carolina and lost Mississippi. So I think that Carmichael made a tremendous race considering what he is up against. What I am saying is that a lot of these feats are never duplicated and never done again. I think about Ross Collins who was in Congress from Mississippi and Attorney General from the State and so on . . . came

within 500 votes of being elected to the Senate in a special election in 1941, and in 1946 got only 18,000 from the same state for the same job.

J.B.: Governor, you are a historian by instinct and nature and interest, do you compare these last ten years to the . . . how would you compare it to the Reconstruction period? Again you had a lot of social and political change in Mississippi basically brought about by outside forces rather than internal.

J.C.: Well, it was about the same duration in time as far as that is concerned. Mississippi went through it from 1865 to really 1875, although it was readmitted to the union, which the Supreme Court later said it had never been out of in 1870. The last thing Carpetbag legislature did in Mississippi was to dismember this county. We used to have 1,080 square miles, they cut it down to 414. It had a terrific political and economic impact on us. There are similarities alright, but not in the same context, or time frame, or . . . it didn't happen just immediately following 400,000 men being killed on the battle field, and others walking around every community minus an arm and a leg or both or what have you. They walked around with the aid of crutches or a peg leg, and the South was not economically just totally destroyed this time as it was. Now in Reconstruction, the Civil War . . . it was total war and total defeat. There wasn't a thing left when that war was over but the people and the land, ~~and if you went a little and the~~ and being weighed

Klux Klan except in just a few isolated places around Long and Hattiesburg and a few other places. Of course, we did have the citizens council. They never supported me. I never made a speech to the citizens council meeting in Mississippi in my entire career. I thought the only hope for Mississippi was for the races to understand each others problems and try to work them out together. (Tape flipped to side 2) . . . 1954 was a far cry from what they experienced in Reconstruction.

J.B.: One of the places where the analogy really falls down is in economics.

J.C.: That's one.

J.B.: What do you think would happen if the Voting Rights Act is not renewed and Congress ends up passing this anti-bussing amendment that the house has passed . . . of course we are getting into judicial areas.

J.C.: Well it's a funny thing about the Voting Rights thing. In some parts of Mississippi the black people have been voting all the time. For example in Adams County, Natchez and over on the Mississippi coast and other places but butthere had not been in the state as a whole. Of course, I don't know. Here in this county we have never had a voting referee, we've never had a . . . the schools were integrated on a consent decree. You find different conditions in different parts of Mississippi. Mississippi is really about three states, just about like Tennessee geographically . . . you've got the Delta, you've got the northeast hills, of which this is a part, and you have got South Mississippi

and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. South Mississippi was largely uninhabited before the Civil War, now has the majority of the population in the state. I think if the Voting Rights Bill were appealed tomorrow that the writer that needled people to vote would not be tampered with anymore. For one thing, all of the things that the people were afraid of would happen. To wit more specially block voting. This has not happened. We've seen . . . let's take Charles Evers, for example, obviously they lacked about 100,000 of getting the black voting strength for Governor in the 1971 general election. Time and time and time again we see white people elected in counties where the overwhelming majority of the voting population is black. Then to, the black people now are educated so much more than they used to be and they are in a far better position to intelligently vote instead of being marched in and voted as a group, and that did go on after the Civil War. That is all together in reality of what caused their disenfranchisement in the Constitution of 1890. My family has always enjoyed very close individual relationships with black people, and of course they say that about the South. They say that as individuals we are great friends and groups we are great enemies and all of that sort of thing, but my grandfather told me about how he could take a box of cigars and go to a voting precinct in the 1870's and 1880's and go there because a man showed up to vote and he said it was a reprehensible practice, but it had to be done

because that was the only way they could in any way influence the outcome of an election. But bear in mind those people had grown up when it was against the law to teach them how to read and write, and it was against the law to teach them how to read and write because they didn't want them to be able to forge passes by which they could go from place to place and make their escape, it was cruelty born of a cruelty, but I just look around and see that somebody sent me an old roster of the Mississippi legislature in 1884, and they had 14 black men in the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1884, and we've got one today, and after the Voting Rights Act has been in affect 10 years. So what I am saying is that . . . and then I think that the general conscience of the people is much more satisfied than saying "let him go on and vote, and then whatever happens, why it can't be said that its brought about by intimidation and not a racial exclusion or anything like that." Of course, the voting rights act then reinacted how much longer? Five more years.

J.B.: It runs out next year.

J.C.: I don't know why they just didn't make it permanent, you know. They certainly have that authority under the 15th Amendment, but I guess they had some reason not to . . . maybe they couldn't pass it as a permanent thing, or maybe they thought that it wouldn't be necessary as a permanent thing, but it is a funny thing about that . . . You know, in 1939 when I wasn't

but 25 years old, and I don't know what possessed the people to do it, but I didn't know any better then, I was elected District Attorney of this district from seven counties.

up

there to the Court House to vote that morning and I met up with Ned Kellers (?) who was a colored man, he said "but my good friend," he said "Mr. Coleman, I can't vote for you," and I said "I know that and I'm sorry." But he said "I prayed for you all last night," and I said "your prayers are probably worth a heck of a lot more than mine and I appreciate it." The cold truth of the business is there just isn't that much individual animosity between white and black people when it comes to selecting somebody to hold an office. Now maybe there are places, there are bound to be, there are exceptions to all the rules. There are places where they'll just vote for a black man just because he is black, but right here in this Congressional District four years ago, I guess it was, a black candidate ran against Tom _____ for the Congress, and over here in South Ackerman where this county is about 71% white and 29% black, and all the black people in the county live over in the South Ackerman precinct, they all vote over there at the Court House, and that fellow didn't get five or six votes for Congress. Well obviously if they were going to vote for a black man because he is a black man, they knew who he was alright, he was well publicized. Then amazingly enough, the overwhelming majority voted for Nixon for President and the election

returns will bear it out. So I don't think if the Voting Rights Act were left to die, if it would be tomorrow, it would make any difference in this city now. Of course, I argued when I was Governor that we had an untenable position. I told the legislature, I said "when you let a white man go in and vote, whether he can read or write or not, the law said he couldn't, but still they let him vote anyhow, and he won't let a high school graduate or college vote because he is black, you know you're going to lose, and the result of it is going to be that they are going to require him to let the fellows who have no education at all and no real ability to cast intelligent vote, he is going to vote too. It is just a matter of time and it's going to happen. If you don't clean up your own house, the time will come when Congress will do it for you because they certainly . . . and there may be some doubt about the authority on local schools but there isn't any doubt about franchise, but they still aren't doing anything about it soAlthough there were plenty members of the legislature who thought it ought to be done, so I don't think it's a repeat of the Voting Rights Act is going to make any difference, and of course so far as the schools are concerned, here we are running two sets of schools with one set of children, and I am pretty well satisfied . . . of course, it's not going to be changed, but it wouldn't be anything like the great Revolution if it were repealed a lot of

people think. As far as bussing is concerned, well we have always bussed in this county, so you see it doesn't make any difference in the rural areas. I went to high school myself from the farm out here to Ackmore on the school bus over forty years ago. Where the problems come is in places like Jackson where they will pick up a child and drive him past three or four school houses just to obtain racial balance, and I think the opposition to that is still mighty strong even among the black people themselves, but you only have a few places in Mississippi where that is a problem . . . Jackson, Greenwood, some locations like that. Of course, in counties like Kemper down here where the blacks outnumber the whites 85 to 15, those private schools are going to continue because of problems that I can't help and you can't help and nobody else can help for the next 25 years. It is going to be a process of education.

J.B.: You, I believe, were on the bench once and then ran for elective office, is that right?

J.C.: Well I was a State Circuit Judge but that is elective too.

J.B.: Oh, that is elective also.

J.C.: I was elected Circuit Judge in 1946.

J.B.: Any chance you might return to elective politics?

J.C.: Well I guess I am locked in now. I've spent nine years on this job, and I don't have but six years to go to earn my retirement, and not much

. . . had a letter from a lady today who wanted to know if I would please run for Governor, and I wrote her back and told her that if I consulted my heart, I most certainly would but upon consulting my head, I could not, so I guess that is the answer to your question. I might not be elected anyway. I might end up like Richardson Preyer in North Carolina who quit the federal bench to run for Governor and led the ticket with 100,000 votes and got beat in the run off, you know, back a few years ago. He is in Congress now, I think. Of course I like Mississippi, obviously, I wouldn't stay here. I could live anywhere in these six states if I had a preference, but I don't have any. They say that is a great weakness of southerners attachment for place, but when I got out of the Governor's office and came back to Ackerman and started practicing law, which I did for five years before I was appointed to the court, somebody said "why do you want to go back to that little old town for?" I said I guess it is because it is the only place where I feel reasonably certain that I know where I am and what I am doing. So, that's it. I'd like to be Governor again. I think that great things could be done for Mississippi, with the right kind of firm, aggressive leadership, but one man can't do everything and there were a lot of things I couldn't do. I tried my best as the Governor of Mississippi to get a Constitutional Convention to

rewrite the legislative apportionment which couldn't possibly stand on any line of reason, and to rewrite the franchise provisions of the constitution and to do a lot of other things. I hadn't run on that platform, it was just something that after I got my platform into law I decided to take one step further, and we passed it in the senate, and got beat in the House by seven votes and that was it. Since then the federal courts are just about . . . rewritten the entire document, and I have twice had to sit on a three judge court which reapportioned the legislature, the very thing I tried to do, I expect that is the history of mankind. It doesn't really discourage me a lot, but it is wholly unnecessary they can do it themselves, but they aren't and they won't. Getting two houses to agree on who is going to walk the plank and who is not, you know, is just asking too much and yet, you know, Mississippi up until the Constitution of 1890 reapportioned itself every ten years just as conscientiously and regularly as the time rolled around, but they wrote the reapportionment into the Constitution in 1890, it had been in the statutes up until then, and then it took a two-thirds vote of both houses on three different legislative days . . . submitted to the people in an election in which a majority of all of those participating in the election had the vote. . . I mean, had the votes for it to the minute. I did get that changed. I did get the Constitutional amendment to where two-thirds on

any one day to propose an amendment, and where a majority of those voted on the amendment to approve it, we slacked it up to that extent, and I did take the lead in cutting the size of the house down from 149 to 120 . . . the others were just more or less trading bait, they were just there and they just followed along when Mr. so and so crooked his finger and that wasn't representation. The thing that disappointed me about the Constitutional Convention was the fact that Mr. Walter ^{Sillers} ~~Silvers~~, Speaker of the House, who had been such a strong champion at it when it failed in 1934 was opposed to it this time. If I would have had his help, we would have put it over.

J.B.: How would you characterize the role and power of Walter ^{Sillers} ~~Silver~~ of whom you speak?

J.C.: Well, he was a very very powerful man legislatively. There were people who said he was more powerful than the Governor and of course that wasn't true. He certainly exercised more power than the Governor on legislative processes, because he appointed the committees, that is still the system down there. They don't do like they do in Congress and have committee on committee, and so on. But I'll tell you, he made efforts to be speaker of the house before he ultimately got there. He supposedly represented the *whites*, not only supposedly but did. He was one man who would have made a great Governor of Mississippi by ability and by personal strength and so forth, but he was never willing to pay the price. He didn't want to get out and get with and among the people . . . something

of the idea like to do. I have often said that no man could make a race for Governor or serve as Governor unless he liked it. It is such a painful thing . . . Mr. Silvers wouldn't do that. Finally he got elected Speaker of the House in 1944 and he stayed there until his death in 1965, and it was easy for him to do. We have a first primary and second primary. About maybe 51% of the house will be elected in the first. Okay, Mr. Silvers gets busy and he commits all of them before the second primary comes off. Well, the Governor is busy getting himself elected Governor in that run off, that is when all the blood flows in the second. So, he's already in before the Governor gets in. Now that does not keep the Governor from . . . if he wants to give him a terrible time and fight him to the last ditch. But all that gets the Governor is the appointment of hostile committees who'll kill everything he wants or most of it. Bilbo had that, you know, in 1928. In 1928 the big four composed of Silvers, Kennedy, George, and Tom Bailey totally wrecked his administration. Well, in 1956 a bunch of young men wanted William Winter to run for Speaker against Mr. Silvers. William Winter was my very devoted friend and I was his . . . in fact, I later appointed him State Tax Collector, which was on a fee basis and the most lucrative job in the state. I appointed him because he deserved it. His father was a state senator when I was just a young beginner and a great man. Before Williams got going Mr. Silvers already had the votes. Yet Mr. Silvers . . . he was a

pretty good operator. I don't know it either . . . he might have voted for me for Governor, I don't really know. Although I was from the hills and he was from the Delta and I was a Democrat and he was one of those who walked out in '48. As a matter of fact, I'm a yellow dog Democrat, I've never made any bones about it. You know what a yellow dog Democrat is?

J.B.: I think I do, but I'd like to hear your definition.

J.C.: A yellow dog Democrat is a man who'll vote for a yellow dog if he is running on the Democratic ticket. Well, I'm not quite that bad, but anyway, when that election was over, he came over here and he said "I started practicing law in that little office over there, I built it," and his own railroad property and I built it of frames where I could move it if I had to. My son is now the District Attorney and he has his office over there and has my old library and so forth." Incidentally, he was elected Democrat in '52, but he came over here and he said "now, I've got the votes, I think to be elected, but I don't want to have any fight about it if I can help it, and I'll promise you this, if you will not interfere in my election, I will actively support your program, not to stifle your opposition, but mainly because I think it is a good program anyway." He said "I've had to deal with Governors who had no program. I had one to tell me when I went to see him, he said 'I won't have any.'" Well I said "Mr. Silvers, that

is fair enough," I said "you know my friendship ~~will~~
~~that~~ won't be diminished, but
I am realistic enough to know that you already have it."
Well, Williams stayed on in the race against my advice
and of course was clobbered and when I keenly regretted
that, but Mr. Silvers kept his word. Did you know
that when I was elected Governor of Mississippi, the
State of Mississippi didn't even regulate the electric
power companies and the natural gas companies. They
have always been able to keep it all. That was one
of the planks in my platform. Well Mr. Silvers was
a high flying lawyer for the power company and every-
body knew that, but he supported the bill because of
that pledge. He was a very very honorable man, and
a very able man. My only regret is that he didn't
always see eye to eye with me on supporting the
Democratic party or on various other governmental
questions. Mr. Silvers never would . . . I tried to
. . . for example, I tried to get party registration,
we still don't have it. Republicans go right down
there and vote in the Democratic primary. That
happened to me in '63. I don't think that defeated
me, I don't think it was enough to defeat me, but many
of the Republicans have openly stated that they were
going to support Johnson in the run off because they
could beat him more easily in November than they could
me, and in the so called heavy Republican counties,
don't have but a handful of them, you can look and
see what happened. But, when I ran for Governor in

1963, why I spoke in Cleveland in the county seat of Barber County and Mr. Silver was on the front row, and he *and I had a* disagreement about the Constitutional Convention. He wouldn't have been there if he had been very much opposed to me because his presence was an implied support if nothing else. So, I guess you'd say that all big men, and he was a big man, have their various facets, and they are not always just one . . . I don't like to use the word color . . . use some other synonomous term, they change according to various facets and circumstances. Mr. Silvers mellowed a whole lot as he got older. I served one term in the legislature after I was Governor . . . no man in Mississippi has ever been elected to a place in the executive, legislative and judicial . . . all three, and the representative from this county was quitting anyway, so I ran and was elected and served under Mr. Silvers in the house. We had a real interesting development on that. The Governor of Mississippi served two weeks beyond the incoming legislature so I was Governor for two weeks with the legislature that I was elected to serve in. Well of course I served out my time as Governor, but some of those old boys who had fought me so hard when I was Governor and who had formerly been in the Silver's *camp* so to speak. They put out the word that if I didn't resign as Governor and come around and be sworn in in the day that they were that they were going to decline

to admit me when I came around to be sworn in under that old clause, you know, that each house is the judge of the election and qualification of its members. In other words, they were going to declare the office vacant. So I heard about it. Mr. Silvers was in the capitol one day and I told him about it and he said well "I'll guarantee damn tee you one thing, there won't anything like that take place." So, I just went on and didn't say anything. I served my time out and two or three days later I reported to the House of Representatives to take the oath, and not a one of them said a word. I think he had already put out the word. So, he was a very powerful man and he was not . . . And what I am saying to you, I am not agreeing with a lot of things he stood for in the legislature, he was one of those that was strongly opposed to any change in the franchise provisions, for example, . . . Not a bad man at all.

J.B.: Anything else you would like to add to help us in our understanding?

J.C.: Well I go back to . . .

J.B.: Let me ask you this one question. The . . . with this tradition of populism that you mentioned, particularly in this part of Mississippi, do you think with the racial issue submerged as a political issue at least at this time, that the populists issues will re-emerge as viable political issues?

J.C.: Well my best guess is not, because race was not involved in the populists movement. You know that was economic . . . the farmer against business, and back in those 1890's, of course, we had the panic of 1893, but more than that, cotton was \$.05 a pound, and this was a one crop economy . . . the farms were in deplorable condition. Really what they were trying to do as I analyze it, was sort of get up sort of a farmers union . . . they couldn't do it because there were too many farmers, and if there is any independent soul on eart it is a farmer, and they just couldn't make it . . . I think that 1974 we lack only a few days of being up to May 17, I think 1974 is . . . in Mississippi is politically and governmentally and economically an altogether different time to what it was then. Now I don't mean that . . . you know, the Supreme Court speaks of all the vestiges must be of eminated root and branch . . . No, that didn't happen. I think anybody would be highly unrealistic to suppose that it had. But I go back . . . it is altogether different . . . nobody has run for Governor of Mississippi on a racial approach since 1963, that has been eleven years ago.

J.B.: Would you even include John Bell Williams in that?

J.C.: His campaigning aspect was really very new compared to what we have been accustomed to seeing in

Mississippi as I recall it. Now, of course, I was the Circuit Judge then, but I wasn't paying acute attention to it that I did in former years, but I don't recall any blantant racism in that campaign. To say the least of the matter, he is the fellow who polished off Ross Barnett, and if you want to look at a revolutionary change let's take Barnett. The "hero" of Oxford in '62 got 10% of the votes in '67 five years later.

J.B.: What does that mean to you?

J.C.: Well now I want to add a little more frosting to the cake, then I'll come back, and if I forget to then remind me. Paul Johnson was elected Governor in '63 on Oxford and on my relationship with the Kennedys. He ran for Lieutenant Governor in '67 and didn't even get in the second primary. Now that is '67 for you. John Bell Williams, of course, and I were never political friends. He was in the Eastland, Brady, what have you axis, and as I have always said was in the White, Stennis, and what have you axis. However, you know, they contested their seats in the house of representatives in 1965 after the 1964 election, and they were going to throw them out, and to my surprise they employed me as their counsel in that contest. So I was hung up with old brother Counsellor and that crowd for about six months, during which time John Bell and I got to be good friends personally. I had never known anything about him. He and Brady and Eastland, you know, came out right

after I had been elected Governor in '55, and announced with great headlines that the legislature as soon as it met should adopt a resolution of nullification, and of course, I . . . being younger then than I am now, and so forth, it made me mad that they had presumed to say what should be done when . . . before I could even get sworn in. After all they had not been elected Governor, so we had a pretty severe interchange about that. But . . . in the press and otherwise. But, he made a far more reasonable tolerant Governor along that line than anybody would have thought he would, even three years before he was elected, and as I have already said, Bill Waller not only did not run on it, but more than that, so far as I can tell has not pursued it as Governor. So we'll get back, it's not the same state either politically or educationally or economically. Now this looks like a rural county to you as you drive through it, and it is in geography, but we have far more people employed in these industries you see strung out around town today than we had . . . than we have farming, and that did not come to pass until . . . well we got our last . . . well only this year we got a \$3 million plant, Tennessee River Pulp and Paper which is a subsidiary of TENECO, one of these companies in the country. But even before it came we were already predominately industrial so far as employment is concerned. Well, there can be no discrimination in employment, these people are working side by side in every one of these factories. I haven't heard of a single

racial incidence. I have not heard of a single racial incident in schools. Maybe because in this area, everybody knows everybody else as an individual and it's not a question of white against black, it's Joe against Jim if you want to put it that way. But this is largely true in the whole state. We still believe, of course, we still have a lot of strong beliefs in Mississippi to the effect that government ought to be responsible, it ought to be financially responsible, and it ought not to operate on a deficit basis. Mississippi State Government has not have a deficit since 1932, which is 32 years, and they only had that one because of the Depression. We still think that people ought to work for a living, and they ought not to be supported by the labor of others if they themselves are able to work. By the same token we think that it is the duty of those who are able to take care of those, who through no fault of their own economically or otherwise are not able. I just wonder what Senator Bilboa, and those other great antagonists Jim Barteman would think if they were to come back to Mississippi today. And more especially if they got on the stump and said the things that they said and believed in, they wouldn't get anywhere.

J.B.: What do you think Senator Bilboa would think if he came back today?

J.C.: I don't know. I think he'd be in an altogether almost new world, maybe not entirely new, he'd still see

him, but the fact remains they didn't. I believe he carried one county out of 82 which was Lee County where he was born and raised. We had . . . in the gubernatorial campaign of 1971, we had a Circuit Judge right here in this district named Marshall Perry. He was born and raised in this county, but he moved ~~to~~ to practice law when he got out of old Miss, he and I finished High School together, and he ran on that old fire eating platform. He didn't carry any county, not the first one. So now you can learn a lot from looking at the elections. Of course I think that if a man got out here and ran for office on the platform that I am black and I am entitled to the office and I am going to see that the bottom rail gets on top and all of that inflammatory stuff, he'd get beat just like a white supremisist is going to say well I'm going to return to separate schools, or I am going to reinstate *slavery* so to speak. I think those are dark rivers that we have crossed, I really believe it. I just don't see how it could possibly be any return. I wonder if you have seen anybody from Mississippi who thinks that it could. (Break in conversation.) . . . to tie a bomb on the automobile and got intercepted out here at the although his interceptor didn't know what he was up to. I later found out all about it from the FBI, who of course had them infiltrated, but I often wondered what he came up here for. I wasn't in any office. I wasn't holding any office, I wasn't running for any

office. They are very funny people, but you can find them at the University of Mississippi, ~~but I still~~

~~pt~~ They thought having made any in-
depth investigation into what the membership of the
citizens council is or anything like that (break in
conversation) . . . he was inactive while I was Governor, and
I signed the Bill for two reasons; number one, they were
going to pass it over my veto if I didn't, and number
two, I ~~that~~ that I can make it to the point
of the majority of the members so appointing the majority
of the members why it wasn't going to do all that much
harm at the worst, and one of the great issues all
during that four years was, you know, give them state
money, and I never would agree to it, . . . opened
publically, it was, of course, blundered as public
relations and stuff like that. Boy I'll tell you
though, I guess I ought not to put this on the
recorder, you better take the recorder off (Tape recorder
cut off.)

End of interview.