

Interview with Dr. Lawrence C. Goodwin, Duke University, November 18, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Jack Bass: You said you had a couple of thoughts you'd like to offer at the beginning.

Goodwin: You can check the figures. In 1964 Lyndon Johnson ran against Barry Goldwater the same time that Ralph Yarborough was running for re-election for the US Senate. Yarborough has become increasingly identified, in the eyes of his Texas constituents, with the pro civil rights position. It becomes a major issue in the campaign. He's running against Gordon ^{McLendon.} ~~McClinden~~. There are a tier of counties bordering the Sabine River, which is the border between Louisiana and Texas. The percentages will vary from county to county, but they tend to get more conservative on the Texas side the further north one goes from the Gulf of Mexico. Because as one gets further north one gets to the area of the east Texas oil field, which is a very conservative area. But by and large the counties on the Texas side of the Sabine River are voting for Ralph Yarborough at the same time, Jack, that the counties on the Louisiana side are voting 2-1, 3-1 and 4-1 for Barry Goldwater. Now these counties are exactly the same in terms of an agricultural base and the size of the county and that sort of thing. How does one explain this? I'm not sure it can be explained. But I have the following theory.

Texas became a state in the Jacksonian period, became a republic,

acquired a political identity, got its domestic, mythic hero--Sam Houston, the victor at San Jacinto. He became president of the Texas republic, later became United States senator. He was a Jacksonian nationalist. He voted for a bill to admit Oregon as a free territory. As I recall, he voted against the Kansas-Nebraska compromise. He committed a number of public acts in the Senate that identified himself with a national position as opposed to a pro-slavery position. In 1857 he came home from Congress to run for governor of Texas as an independent because he was afraid that forces of extremist separationists were taking control of the Democratic party. He did not win. In '59 he ran again. A bitter campaign on the eve of the Civil War. His campaign was to hold Texas for the Union. He won that campaign. He was subsequently deposed for refusing to take an oath of loyalty to the Confederacy in '61. After that came the populist revolt. At no time between 1865 and this election I just referred to in 1964 was there not a presence in Texas, a living presence, of a political entity generally associated with what we might call liberal values. The populists, a series of progressive governors--at least one in particular, Campbell I believe his name is about 1907--Ferguson in the '20s, Jimmy Allred in the '30s, Ralph Yarborough in the '50s. This position did not always prevail, to say the least. That's not the point. The point is that it was always there. Now in so far as a one party structure diminishes the possibility of ideological division, such division can only be maintained, it seems to me, by word of mouth, generation upon generation. That there is a body of people in a small town who work "for the people," for the candidates of the people. And

that they pass on their organization. Now if, in any given generation, there is no political presence representing this perspective, this tradition, which essentially is an oral tradition containing a political memory, dies. And I would suspect, although I don't know this to be true, that in most--and conceivably all--southern states, this tradition has been severed at least once between the Civil War and the present for a generation. So that this living memory is no longer there. And I think the explanation of the 1964 vote on the two sides of the Sabine River, to the extent those votes reveal a different political stance by people who in all other respects are the same, is traceable to this continuing presence of an alternative mode to the conservative Democratic apparatus. Represented by Sam Houston, the populists, Ferguson, Allred and Yarborough. And Rainey in the '40s. It would be Allred, Rainey and Yarborough. The beginning of modern Texas politics, I think, is probably the '52 campaign. When Allen Shivers is leading the entire hierarchy of the Texas Democratic establishment in support of President Eisenhower as national Republican. The story goes--Ralph has told it many times--that he decided to run for attorney general. He was a judge. And he met Allen Shivers on the steps of the capital and said "Governor, I wanted you to know, I've decided to run for attorney general." And Shivers reportedly said to Yarborough "You can't do that, Ralph. I've already picked my attorney general." As Yarborough tells the story, the manner in which this information, the imperious manner in which Shivers delivered this message, so outraged the good Senator--the good judge, I should say at that point--that he decided he'd run against Shivers. And he did, in '52.

Now that campaign took place in the Democratic primary prior to the public unveiling of the coalition between the Shivers Democrats and the national Republicans. So that Shivers did not have to bear that burden while campaigning against Yarborough. As I recall it was 800,000 for Shivers and 400,000 for Yarborough. But after that election, after the general election, Yarborough then ran against Shivers in '54. Accused him of Democratic party disloyalty. Accused him of being a Republican, of being a party of big business. He was counterattacked by the Shivers forces, Yarborough was, as being the candidate of the ADA, AFL-CIO, NAACP. Now at that point I don't think Ralph was any of those things. I think he came to accept support from those points of the compass because they voted for him. It's even been argued that they voted for him because they were being used as bludgeons against Ralph. But it is by no means clear that Ralph Yarborough was a conscious liberal in 1954. That was an incredible race. At the end of the first primary there were three people in the race. Shivers got something like 690,000. Yarborough got 670,000 votes. And the other fellow got 25,000. Just enough to throw it into a run-off. That is, to deny Shivers an absolute majority. That scared the death out of the Texas establishment. Here's this most popular and powerful conservative governor who was almost defeated by this Johnny come lately. The run-off campaign was a violent one, rhetorically violent. You'll hear stories in Texas--and you should get them--about the filming of a documentary film that was made called "The Port Aruthur Story." Which is a major campaign document of that period by the conservatives. It opened with a scene of deserted streets in Port Arthur. Footage that was taken at dawn. Had a camera crew there for three or

four days to get enough footage of completely deserted streets without passing bread trucks and things like that that kind of messed it up. They opened the film with this and the announcer came on and said "This is Port Arthur, Texas. This is what happens when the CIO invades a Texas city." And it turned on a strike of retail clerks there and associated Yarborough with it. Black pickets and there was a lot of racism involved. A race-baiting, anti-labor diatribe. Very effective. It played on state-wide television. It was a violent campaign. And they both spent a great deal of money. Shivers spent an estimated \$7 million. Which was a considerable amount of money for the governorship in that era. Shivers won the run-off. There were actually something like 100,000 more votes cast in the run-off than were cast in the primary. Which is very unusual. So great was the interest. In the course of that campaign, Yarborough predicted scandals because of what he called the corrupt Shivers gang. Well, low and behold, the land scandals broke the next year. It was evident that Shivers was discredited.

Bascom Giles was a land commissioner. Texas had a veterans land fund that had been created right after the war. Allowed people to buy land at low interest. And there were some scandals in the awarding of. . . the manner in which tracts of land were approved for these loans and who got them and so forth. The Texas Observer played a key role in breaking all this. Incidentally, I did a paper at the Southern Historical on the Texas Observer in which I go into the background and formation of the Observer, which grew out of the '54 campaign. You can get a copy of that.

The conservatives looked around and discovered, my god, Yarborough is going to win! We've got to get a horse to beat him. So they pulled out of the US Senate the junior Senator, Price Daniel, to run against Yarborough in '56. That's a two-pronged campaign that you ought to study because there's a third candidate in there. Pappy O'Daniel is a dem^aagogue from the early forties. Pass the Biscuits Pappy. In the first primary, the vote totals are roughly like this: 600,000 for Daniel, 400,000 for Yarborough, and 280,000 for O'Daniel. But the O'Daniel vote was almost wholly transferable to Yarborough. Even though ideologically O'Daniel was very conservative. And the run-off was very close. It is the considered opinion of most Yarborough leaders and certainly the Senator himself, that that election was stolen from him. They had to steal something like 25,000 votes. That he actually won it by that much. The official election return as I recall was 694,000 for Daniel and 691,000 for Yarborough. 3,000 difference out of 1.5 million cast. That was '56. Well, the election of Price Daniel now created a vacancy in the US Senate. Yarborough ran for that in a special election in '57 and won. He became the junior Senator. Ran for re-election in '58 against a man named Cowboy Bill Blakely, the owner at that time of Braniff Airways. An oil millionaire. Yarborough beat him decisively. Then ran for re-election in '64 against Gordon ^{McLendon,} ~~McClendon~~, another Dallas millionaire, the founder of the Liberty network. He won that decisively in the midst of the Johnson landslide. Then he ran in '70 for re-election a third time and was defeated.

Now, the polarization of Texas politics that occurred in those campaigns in '52, '54, '56, '57 and '58 when Yarborough's name was on the

ballot created the basic constituencies that exist in Texas today.

There have been some changes in those constituencies. The liberal coalition used to be a rural populist urban liberal minority group coalition. The rural component of that has gone down. The urban component has gone up. The black component has gone up. The chicano component has gone up. They have not taken power. They have not won the elections. Sissy came close in '70 I guess it was when she got 45 percent of the vote. That's the historical background.

J.B.: Labor fits in to that coalition?

Goodwin: Yes.

J.B.: What was the role of John Connally?

Goodwin: In 1960, after Kennedy selected Johnson as Vice-President, and the thrust given to southern liberalism by the presence of Kennedy in the White House created a great opportunity. At that juncture, John Connally came home, as Secretary of the Navy under Kennedy, to run for governorship of Texas. The liberals didn't have a candidate. One young man offered himself. Don Yarborough. No relation to Ralph. Who had run for lieutenant governor in 1958 against an old establishment hack named Ben Ramsey. Yarborough had run a fairly good race. Better than people expected. But he was defeated. He decided to run for governor against Connally. This was really an interesting and decisive moment. The incumbent is Price Daniel, running for a third term. There were six major candidates in the field. Five of them running basically for the conservative vote. John Connally, Price Daniel, a railroad commissioner named Marshall Fornbee who had certain oil and gas backing and

west Texas ranching backing. He was from west Texas. The attorney general of the state, who was quite conservative, Will Wilson who later became a Republican and acquired certain national notariety in the Nixon administration. Had to resign under pressure. And General Walker of Oxford, Mississippi, fame, running with the support of the John Birch Society. It was very clear to the liberals in the state that Don Yarborough was going to be in the run-off. Even assuming that John Connally could cut into the liberal vote by using the Kennedy connection and by spending money in the black community and by chopping away at the right wing of the labor vote, making deals through Lyndon and so forth, for get cooperation from certain labor leaders. . . . Even with all those inroads, there was enough liberal vote left over when compared with the conservative vote being split five ways, that Yarborough should be in the run-off. Well, he made the run-off. In fact the incumbent governor ran third. John Connally ran first, Yarborough ran second. At that point, older liberals who had held back from the campaign because they thought Don Yarborough was something of a charleton came into the campaign. And that run-off was one of the most exciting political races I've ever been a part of. I was Don Yarborough's press secretary in that campaign. We were closing the gap fast and they knew it. We knew it. Even Tom Wicker came into town the Monday before election and said the word in Washington is that Don Yarborough might be closing fast enough to catch him. What do you think? I said "I think so, but I would feel better if we had until about next Tuesday instead of next Saturday." I just felt we hadn't peaked yet. We lost that race by 10,000 votes as I

recall. Very, very close. And then, of course, Connally was shot with Kennedy and he became a martyr and there was no hope of beating him. Although Don Yarborough foolishly ran against him in '64. The campaign I'm speaking about in the '62 campaign for the governorship of Texas. What Connally did, in effect was to coopt part of the Yarborough coalition, the right wing of it. Johnson had always had a certain clout. Johnson's basic power base was the Yarborough coalition plus what he himself could add to it through his connections with big oil. Connally broadened that base. Cut into the liberals a little more. Mobilized the conservatives. And became a figure in his own right. That had the effect of slightly changing the public face of conservatism from the sort of heels in the ground reactionary politics of Allen Shivers to a slightly more flexible position. As the '60s wore on and the liberal threat became more pronounced, the willingness of conservatives to placate labor, made certain accommodations with black leaders, became more pronounced. And this had the effect, in ways that aren't too substantive but are highly visible, to liberalize the ruling conservative regime. That, in turn, allowed liberals to be more liberal without laying themselves open to racist attack.

J.B.: There's nothing else anywhere in the South comparable to that liberal wing in Texas is there?

Goodwin: I don't think so. Because it is very liberal. It's comparable to northern liberalism in Minnesota or Michigan. Very liberal.

J.B.: You credit it all to the direct descent from Sam Houston?

Goodwin: I think you can do that. I'm not an authority on Texas

history. I just observed that we have this phenomenon of this tradition. And I observe also that it's always been there. It's always had at least one representative in each generation to keep it alive. I don't think I've ever written that. So if you write it, you'll be the first.

J.B.: Those Sabine parishes in Louisiana. . . you still had that Long tradition in Louisiana that should have provided. . . . I'm throwing that out as a devil's advocate.

Goodwin: Well, but the Long presence was not visible in that election of '64 in a way that could be translatable.

J.B.: I think Jimmy Davis was governor of Louisiana at that time and it tilted Louisiana politics far to the right, particularly in racial terms. Probably most racist period in Louisiana's history.

Goodwin: I think you ought to talk to Ralph Yarborough. And you ought to tell him that Larry Goodwin has this theory that Larry holds very tenuously. Larry speculates that this might be true. And ask him what he thinks. And Dolph Briscoe. If I were you, I'd talk to all of these men first and get their highly contradictory versions of what Texas politics is and their characterizations of the respective sides. Then I'd go to a new moderate, like Armstrong, the land commissioner. And you'd now be armed, you see, with all the things that Connally and Briscoe and Yarborough and Sissy Farenthold had told you. And I think you'll get a somewhat different perspective from all of those. It will be between those perspectives, you see. From a man like Armstrong. Who is really trying to get votes from all those points of view.

J.B.: What does he have his eyes on?

Goodwin: I don't know. But the Observer people should be able

to tell you what they think. I think it's very important you talk to a man named Stewart Long.

[Interruption.]

^{John}
~~John~~ Ford is an interesting man. He used to be the capital correspondent--

[End of interview.]