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LeRoy Collins: . . . that and I was a liberal. All that Gurney said was, "This choice is simple. He is a liberal and I'm a conservative. Make your choice."

Jack Bass: Governor, would that work today?

Collins: Not as well, I don't think, but it still has its strength.

Walter De Vries: And the liberal-conservative difference is based on race?

Collins: Yes, sir. Almost wholly.

W.D.V.: Is that as strong today?

Collins: My record actually is quite conservative in fiscal matters and quite liberal in the area of human relations, but I get quite upset really, now, with the view of and all in government. I think that the federal government and the is going hog wild. It would seem that way. I'm not in touch with it and I don't want to be like some people that I've known who after they went off the scene, didn't feel like things ever went quite as well since. I made a great deal of but this, I don't know whether he is really deeply concerned about this. Of course, it has been fantastic, I think far beyond anything normal, any normal need of population growth or these other factors. One of the big reasons for it is the legislature, because it has led the way. It is totally different from the way it used to be and in some respects, it is argued that it is much better, but I don't know.

W.D.V.: Everybody that we've talked to says that it is better.

Collins: I think that it is better but at the same time, I think that it has lost something, because they have lost the position of being a check against the other phases of government, the executive and particularly the administrative. They create their own staffs to the extent that they have, I hope that you can go down there and see the offices and they are just crawling over with staff people for the legislators. I didn't see this in the paper, but somebody told me that it came out in the paper the other day that they want to pay \$2,000 for individual desks in the house, that they are going to do that over and they are going to have closed television, closed circuit television sets for each desk and just all kinds of things that to me, are not in line with the conservative approach to expenditures that we certainly should have in a time when we've got inflation and a time when paying taxes are very difficult for the people, because its too much in many ways for what their income is. I mention that in starting because I am pointing out that I am actually quite conservative, I think, in many aspects of my thinking. But in the area of human relations, in the area of getting something done about the disadvantaged, the blacks and getting them to a level where they can participate with even a semblance of equal opportunity, I'm really strong in that area. I think that has been the really great failure of this country since its beginning, that it is not rectifying that.

W.D.V.: You think that it was the race issue that defeated you?

Collins: Yes. No doubt about it.

W.D.V.: You think that can happen again today, in Florida, an open attempt to defeat somebody on the basis of race?

Collins: Well, it remains to be seen, because last year everybody decided that they didn't want race talked at all. There was no issue made. The blacks didn't make any issue. This is the last time we elected a governor, when Askew ran. He didn't have to get involved at all in this area and there was no criticism back and forth and the blacks themselves were rather submerged. They weren't demanding positions from candidates on this kind of thing. So, it was . . . people were just fed up with it in my campaign and the other campaigns that went at that time. Wallace was running at the same time that I was and Nixon was running at the same time that I was. Subsequently, they changed the times of the election of governors to the off years, they will not have it during federal elections. It would have helped me if it had been so, if we hadn't had them all at the same time. Wallace was tremendously popular in Florida. He drew many more crowds and a great deal more vocal support and obvious support than any candidate for president.

J.B.: Did the fact that Wallace was actively campaigning for president in '68 when you were making your Senate race, did that hurt you in the sense of bringing fully to the surface all the submerged racial feeling?

Collins: Yes, it sure did. And it hurt me in the sense that the Wallace people were organized and they were getting their people out to vote. They had a real strong campaign, well financed and everytime they got someone to the polls to vote, they weren't voting for me.

W.D.V.: Do you think that race issue would work again in a statewide campaign? Do you think that it is submerged forever, or was

that just an abberation?

Collins: Well, I think if I ran, it probably would surface again pretty strongly. I made a speech last night right there in that hotel where you are staying, to a group of the Florida Voters League, their closing banquet, what I said there would probably project that issue again, because they regard me as a kind of an extremist. I don't think I'm extreme in that area. I think that I'm in line with the constitution and in line with the right, but still, Askeu is not a man to get involved or say the things that I will say. Lawton Chiles, when he was running for the United States Senate, he didn't say the things that I would say.

J.B.: What was the thrust of your message last night?

Collins: Well, there were three parts. One, I made a review of what had already happened in race relations, since the twentieth anniversary of the Brown decision was recently, and I rationalized what that had done with other Supreme Court decisions of the past and I mentioned the involvement of the blacks and paid tribute to them insofar as the progress that was made following that. This was not something that people, because of what they thought in Sunday School or what they thought about the Constitution, were willing to support, that it took the pressures and the march on Washington and out of that came the Civil Rights Act of 1964, out of Selma came the Voting Rights Act that Johnson advocated, and that actually, the black people working together and praying together, singing together, going to jail together, dying together, was the real cause of the country's moving to open the gates of opportunities. Then, the middle part of



my speech had to do with going to the gates and the ability to get through the gates. This was emphasized by Johnson at Howard University, I don't know whether you remember that or not, but he made a very, very strong speech. It wasn't regarded at the time as being very strong. I told him at the White House that I thought that was a very strong speech and he seemed a little surprised himself. But this was what he was talking about, the next phase of this had to be assisting people to have the ability to get through these gates. So, I talked in terms of what should be done now in regard to that, I mentioned the schools, this educational situation and I dealt rather candidly with them about a number of things. For example, that report fairly recently about how over a million children between twelve and seventeen years of age, black children in the United States, had only the equivalent of fourth grade ability to read and write. So, I stressed the point that they had had twelve years of schooling, but only four years of education. I mentioned what I think is the vicious circle in education, you know, of where a child goes to school from a home environment that is almost totally bereft of any cultural advantages or development and he gets the teacher that comes from the other end of the cycle that he gets involved in. He is pushed right on through grade after grade and passed although he hasn't really learned the equivalent of what he should have learned at that time in his life and then he goes to a college where the standards are inferior and so they push people right on through and then they get qualified as teachers and come back down and start teaching as inferior teachers teaching the inferior children. So, what has happened is that our best teachers are being given the

easiest jobs and the least qualified are given the hardest assignments, assignments that they are just not competent to deliver. I said to them last night that the job that must be done for these children is to get the best qualified teachers that they can get regardless of what the color may be. Then I mentioned the legal situation, this kind of distresses me, I'm a lawyer. We've got 15% of our people in Florida that are black and less than 1% of the lawyers in Florida are black. We don't know exactly just how many because somebody for some motivation that I don't understand, hides these statistics of whether a lawyer is black or white. As a consequence, if you go to the Florida Bar, they won't tell you, they can't tell you how many black lawyers we have. When they make an application to pass the law examining bar, they don't disclose it there and for the last two or three sessions, they tell me that they try to look out over the audience of these people taking the examination and write down the number and they have come up with different figures. It is ridiculous. Anyhow, it is certainly less than one percent and this is wrong. I think that we should take more in the Florida law schools that are black, but still at the rate that we take them, we have made a minuscule effort, really, to bridge any gap in the quality of opportunity. I said very frankly that I thought these law schools ought to take more blacks and that they ought to insist upon these schools making the adjustments that would allow for blacks, whether it meant changing the budgets or changing some of their rules, I still thought they ought to let more in. There is a case pending before the United States Supreme Court in Washington now that is quite a subject of interest, of whether a white

a white man who had a LSAT score that was higher than a black was denied entry and he was claiming that this was denying his equal opportunities by not allowing him to go when they have allowed these blacks to go with lesser scores. The Supreme Court hasn't passed on that.

W.D.V.: I thought they did, I thought they said . . . .

Collins: Well, they said that it was moot, because actually he had come in and graduated, they had let him on in. That's the way they decided. That was the middle part of my talk and the third part of my talk had nothing with race really, it had to do with the general malaise in the country, Watergate and I was trying really, to bring them into it, to talk to them as I would to any group, not because they were black, but because they were American citizens. So, that was the third part of my talk and I mentioned some of the evils that I currently see on the national scene that called for some specific improvements and changes. These would be publicly financed campaigns above minimal support and not contributive. This is something that I think the federal government should start at the presidential and Congressional level. I don't think that there is any question but that you can see that our democratic process is hobbled and crippled by virtue of influence that comes from campaign contributors. This comes right to the center of whether or not the system can work. I think that you need to get that freed in order to see if free enterprise can work, because free enterprise can't work under the present system when Congressmen and president and the people that are going to run things are beholden to special interests for

for their right to be there to rule and to govern. I think this is quite important and I mentioned several things of this kind in the third part of it.

W.D.V.: How did they react?

Collins: Oh, they were very friendly. We had quite a few candidates down there. . . .

W.D.V.: What kinds of questions did they ask?

Collins: We had two supreme court judges, we had one cabinet member, the secretary of agriculture. We had Mallory Horne down there, who is president of the senate and who is a candidate for the United States Senate and quite a few candidates for the legislature to speak to a pretty good group of people. They were from all over the state. But Horne and these others are even now dropping the idea that is the liberal in the campaign, so they seek some advantage from that.

W.D.V.: But does that mean the same thing that it did six years ago?

Collins: I don't think that it means the same thing that it did six years ago, but I think that it is still kind of a code word as far as race relations are concerned and yet, Horne and all these others are actively seeking black help, openly, like his presence there last night.

W.D.V.: Is that different from six years ago?

Collins: Yes it is, I believe so.

W.D.V.: So, there is that change?

Collins: Yes.

W.D.V.: Still using code words but seeking black support.

Collins: Yes, I think so. They are more open about that, but I

think that this has been an adjustment that has also been contributed to by the fact that the blacks are everywhere, in public accommodations, and there is an easing of the tension that we had a few years back.

J.B.: Would you have had a meeting of something like the Voters League six years ago and had it in something like the downtown Holiday Inn in Tallahassee?

Collins: Six years ago, I think so. I don't know if the Holiday Inn was there six years ago, I doubt if you would have had the . . . .

J.B.: You would not have had the outpouring of public officials six years ago?

Collins: No, I don't think that we would have and I don't think that we would have . . . .well, they were accepting them in hotels six years ago, but now . . . that was the beginning point of this and increasing acceleration and now just wide open. You can have it at any hotel or motel, any restaurant. I think that you will find public places totally accepting. The old statutes are out.

J.B.: Did you have any reluctance to take the Community Relations Director job, you went into that when, '64?

Collins: Not any real reluctance. I knew that it was going to have its problems, but really felt that this was, to use the term that Oliver Wendell Holmes used, this was "the issue and passion of my time." I didn't feel like I would ever be right in not becoming involved in it and in trying to circumvent it, get around it in some way or deal with it in the least possible way. All during the time that I was governor, I was dealing with it to the extent that I felt

I could and still hold a position of leadership to accomplish so much that I was anxious to accomplish for the state. What I did as governor would seem very puny now, but in those times, the little puny steps were very difficult to take. And public leaders were in positions in the South where they could just go so far and I always used the parallel that they had to stay within the horizon of the people. If you got over the horizon, you got so far out that the people couldn't see them and then they lost their effectiveness and their ability to lead. While I think that public officials should be out front, I think that they have got to stay in the range of what people can see and understand what they are standing for. I tried to do that as governor and when I was governor, there were a lot of things that I didn't do that I should have done. We didn't make any enormous strides in desegregation then, but still we made some and it was difficult. I remember that when the sit-ins, right after they got started up there in your country, and there started being quite a demonstration here and people were just raving about this situation. They were terribly resentful that these blacks would want to eat at the lunch counter in the ten cent store. It seems ridiculous now, but nevertheless at that time, they were ready to get axehandles and really go to fighting on the streets. I made a speech on television that was carried all over the state, and on radio, on a Sunday afternoon. I didn't have any text, I was just talking to the people to try to get them to see that we did not want disorder and we wanted to find proper solutions for these problems and solve them by communicating back and

forth and not out in the streets with blood and thunder. I said to them at that time that while under the law at that time, the owner of a store had the legal right to say that he would not allow black people to trade at one counter of his store although he would permit them to trade and welcomed them to trade at other places in his store, that while the owner had that legal right, to me it was morally wrong for a store owner to take that position. This is kind of the way I talked. I said that the members of my family wouldn't agree with this and a lot of my closest friends didn't agree with it and yet, that was the way that I as one individual felt about it. I didn't want us to fight this thing out in the streets, I wanted to fight it out in the courts and with the due process of the law and struggle to a right conclusion. Good gracious, you would have thought that the world was coming to an end, almost. There was a tremendous reaction because I said that it was morally wrong. It was that simple. The man that introduced me down there last night reminded them to remember that speech. He said, "Here is a man who said that it was morally wrong if a man wouldn't let us eat a sandwich at a ten cent store." They applauded at that point in his introduction.

W.D.V.: Do you find that hard to believe, the intensity of those feelings now when you look back?

Collins: Yes.

W.D.V.: Do you find it hard to believe all the changes that have occurred?

Collins: Yes.

W.D.V.: Could you have anticipated it?

Collins: I could not have anticipated it, but I certainly can see it as it actually occurred.

W.D.V.: Do you think that was one of the high points of the six years that you were in public office, getting over that transition period?

Collins: Yes. I count that as one of the things I did that measured up to my responsibility. I wish that in that respect I had done more. Whether I could have gotten by doing more and stayed within the horizon, I don't know. The law suits were just coming, you know and there were so many areas where that particular thing was not settled until these four big Congressional acts came along. Before they came and before the decisions were clarified, people were thinking in terms that this was going to be a bad nightmare dream that was just going to pass away. They didn't even take that Brown decision seriously at first. It made no great impact on the emotions of people and I think that most of the thinking was, "Well, this is just a screwball opinion up in the Supreme Court and smart lawyers will figure ways to get around it." And smart lawyers did try to find ways to get around it. We were battling it, we had people here who were trying that interposition route. You remember something about that and I openly declared at the time antagonism and resentment about that. The legislature just insisted on passing it and I had no legal way to prevent it. It was concurrently moved in the two houses and there wasn't anything that the governor had a chance to do but see that it got filed in the secretary of state's office when they finally passed it. We defeated it in one session, but they were and I took the thing when it came across my desk and wrote on it



on the face of it, "This is wrong. This issue was settled in the Civil War and we have gotten beyond that. I want the record to show that this resolution passed with my active opposition and I resent it as not being a sound concept of government in this day and time." So, I was every now and then out there on the firing line, but I called my county superintendents up to try to get them to start a program of desegregation and their feeling at the time was . . . I explained to them that this was the law and we did have to make a beginning and do something about this and move from a small beginning on to something more and that they were the ones who should bear the brunt of getting something started. There wasn't but one superintendent who felt that he could do anything right at that time, the rest of them said, "We can a little later, Governor, we need a little time." But the one in Dade County did and the school board in Dade County did. They took a school that was in a changing neighborhood but was still all white and it was a very logical place to start. They took a few black children in there, but they couldn't hold out because the white children all deserted the school and so it became an all black school. In the meantime, there had been starts made in the state.

W.D.V.: In the last twenty-five years, is that the major change in Florida politics, the attitude toward race relations?

Collins: Is that the only major?

W.D.V.: Is it the major change that has occurred in the last twenty-five years?

Collins: That, and the reapportionment of the legislature.

J.B.: Can you talk about the impact of . . .

Collins: Well, we had an awfully lot of things going about that

time. We developed from the beginnings, back before many of the states had it, a junior college program that was really very intensive. In my term as six years of governor, we put in the community colleges and they were soundly developed, community colleges that would give two years of schooling above the high schools and also vocational training related to indigenous employment opportunities and this sort of thing. I don't know what we would have done had we not had these schools that have been taking a great part of the mushrooming college and university student enrollment increases, which in our state has been tremendous. We built a new university down there in Tampa, the University of South Florida. You may be familiar with it and it is a pretty first rate institution, I think, now. We built that in our six years from sand burrs to graduating students. I was down to turn the first spade of earth to get it started. We had a big battle to get it located and then we built it and I welcomed the first convocation of the first class of students that graduated and also participated in the first graduation service. This is just one thing, but we made a real solid basis of educational expansion at that time. All through this time, we were getting the strength of our interstate highway program and we took a strong position that we ought to concentrate in the cities where the needs were the greatest and not try to see how many miles we could build but get some expressways. So, we built some expressways in Miami, Orlando and Jacksonville and those have just had an enormous impact, really, and have accomodated the rapid growth of transportation. Now, we still haven't gotten that whole program, but we laid the foundations and the directions for the way that we are going in our time. In the area of attracteing business to the state, it was a need that we had which is no longer an important need, because the momentum

that we established at that time has carried forward and because we had a fast mushrooming population but we didn't have the growth in the employment opportunities we needed to make it stable and not get trapped into a situation like California got into where they were trying to keep people out of the state because of the welfare problems they were getting. So, we had a development commission program, organized a development commission, and I went to various places all over the Midwest telling the story of Florida opportunity and we attracted and got a number of very fine clean businesses in the state. I thought that this was an important part of my progress. Race relations and economic development. I served the same six years that Luther Hodges served up there in North Carolina and he was interested in many of the same things. I know that we compared notes every now and then.

W.D.V.: What was the affect of reapportionment?

Collins: We had the worst struggle, I think, of any state in the country, because we tried to do it before the Supreme Court made the states do it. This was also one of the big things that I concentrated on because we had the most malapportioned legislature in the United States. We had a county right next to us up here with 11,000 people with a senator and Dade County, with a population of a million, had one senator also. So, this was a strong . . . I made a strong effort to get something done in this area. It was almost impossible because of the fact that it had to come through the legislature. We had no way to bypass the legislature, no way of initiating a referendum. So, I tried to get the legislature itself to reapportion and I had special session after special session. I had the strong support of the press in all the big cities, of course, and we would make a little progress and then we finally got a package that made substantial

progress, it didn't do the total thing, but it was the maximum that I felt we could possibly do with that legislature. It was my feeling that we ought to go ahead and take that and then that would be used as a step and we would have a more valuable opportunity to move this to a higher level. So, we got a referendum on this and this was one of the biggest fusses that I've had in my life. All these same newspapers that had been fighting this battle with me, they took the position that we were accepting a half a loaf and if we would just hold on, we would get the whole loaf and it would be better to leave it in a terrible state, an indefensible sort of thing than to do a job that could possibly be defended in any way. They thought that it was bad strategy. So, they opposed it in the referendum and the people voted it down. They combined their strength with the papers of all these little counties that were really upset about it and so they defeated me. I thought then that they were mistaken and I think so now. But, after me spending six years haggling over that issue and trying to get some decency in that area, then the Supreme Court . . . and I told the legislature that the Supreme Court was going to do this in time in my opinion and here our state constitution banned it . . . now, we talk about states' rights and state's responsibilities, why didn't we go on and do this? If we didn't do it, I told them that we were going to find that the United States Supreme Court was going to do it and I read a little to them of that Hawaii decision. I don't know whether you followed that, but a federal judge out there really made an enlightened opinion in this area way ahead of his time. This was the wave of things in the future, but I had to leave there without having done anymore than making the people aware of that. Then the Supreme Court decision came

along and then they started the process of reapportionment as required by the Court.

J.B.: But the battle of reapportionment that you fought actually preceeded Baker vs. Carr?

Collins: Right.

J.B.: You were acting under the state constitutional mandate and the fact that Florida had never really for decades followed its own state constitution on that?

Collins: Right.

J.B.: Now, did that mandate apply to both houses of the legislature, or was it a little federal system?

Collins: It applied to both houses of the legislature, it provided that every ten years the state was mandated to reapportion its representation. It doesn't say on the basis of population, but the reapportionment of its legislature and the representation there. Of course, they claimed that this could take into account pine trees and bulls and steers or rutabagas or whatever and geographic limiations. They were all arguing that this didn't need to be related to people. But we were mandated to do this every ten years. And historically, the legislature just passed the reapportionment bill like it was to meet that mandate and nobody had been making fight. Now, Caldwell made a fight, but his was a very minimal fight. I forgotten the exact details of what he did, but he raised the issue when he was governor back during the war.

W.D.V.: When the complete reapportionment based on population came, were the results what you expected in terms of the legislature's operation, the people will go there and the product and so on?

Collins: Yes, we've had substantial representation from the largest

cities and I do think that the level of intelligence and the level of competence of the legislators has substantially increased. I think the main handicap of it has been that they have kind of gotten the feeling that they were kind of like little Congressmen and that the main theme was and the main concern that they had was staying in office. So, all this staff development, I think that much of it has been for political purposes and this aspect of it, I have not admired.

W.D.V.: What about the legislation enacted?

Collins: They have gotten away from the rather pure concept of the citizen-legislator. I stayed in the legislature for twenty years and there were all kinds of people in there. We had some crooked people and a lot of honest people, but there were a large number of people who were motivated almost totally, if not totally, because of the opportunity to render a public service. And so far as being compensated for it, it was . . . they used to give us six dollars a day for every day the legislature was in session. It helped to defray expenses and that was all. I didn't have much expenses because I lived here. I think that we have missed getting some people that would undertake this assignment on the basis of a high level of commitment to public service. At the same time, I think that in all fairness, that the old system could not have worked at this time, I think the change helped, but I do think they should recognize that they ought to handle their expenses carefully and be scrutinized, not only because of the wrongs in overdoing for themselves, but in the of government, I don't see how legislative committees and legislators can be critical of wasted public expenditures, when they are guilty of the same kind of waste. That is to say, having

more people on the payroll than are committed to a service that really is in the public interest. That is my big passion now, that we need government fitted to the public interest and not diverted or not generated for self aggradizement. This is what I think this country needs desperately at this time. We've got to come around to the fact that we are committed to public service and the public has to be the dominant thing, public service has to be dominant in their thinking and not what effort can be made to influence things for some special purpose that is not consistent to the public interest.

W.D.V.: The defenders of the large staffs and the higher salaries and the greater expenses has been that that has the effect of making the legislators more independent, that their staffs put them in the position of not having to depend on lobbyists and special interests for information and that the greater salaries and expenses allow broader ranges and more people to serve, people who couldn't have afforded to serve on their on.

Collins: My guess is that we have fifty lobbyists right here now for every one that we had twenty years ago, or before this mushrooming started. A large part of the income of Tallahassee lawyers comes from lobbying activities. Much, much larger than it used to be. Now, of course, the whole thing is going on in the state . . . you've got the homebuilders, for example, development people. We didn't have much from them and they have an enormous effort now. I guess it can be explained, but I don't think that's a sound assumption, that there is any less lobbying effort or any less subjects . . . .

J.B.: I don't think these people said there were less lobbyists, I think they were contending that the individual lobbyists had less influence. Getting back, Governor, to the time that you made that speech . . .

(interruption on tape. Tape turned off)

Collins: My last year as governor was '60. I went out the first of '61. I think that it was in '59.

J.B.: You said that there was a tremendous reaction to that speech. Was there any overt threats made?

Collins: Oh, yes.

(End of Side A of tape)

Collins: . . . I mean, I had a highway patrolman that spent a full working day, but only a full working day and that was all the assistance I had in that respect. My family and me were over there all night without anybody to even answer the telephone. I walked to town in the morning just by myself. Sometimes, I would get friends to walk and talk about things, but it is a totally different thing there and this kind of parallels the legislation that you are talking about. Now, they have centers of security over there with about eighteen or twenty people. Of course, all these assassinations came along and all this concern and they patterned the security arrangement after the White House recommendations of the people who have the security responsibilities at the White House.

J.B.: Did the intensity of the reaction to that speech surprise you, or had you anticipated it would be like that?

Collins: I expected it would be that way.

J.B.: I wanted to ask you this: When you were in Washington under the Johnson Administration, were you called on to provide input to the Civil Rights Act?

Collins: No, I was with the broadcasters first. I went up there



and was president of the National Association of Broadcasters for three years. That's the only time that I really made a lot of money in my work, but I left the governorship and went to Washington for the broadcasters and was there for three years and when the act was just about passed was the time when Johnson called me over to the White House and asked me to take that community relation service which was under Title X of that Civil Rights Act which was about to pass. Luther Hodges figured into that too, you see. He was Secretary of Commerce and this service was going to be under Commerce and he talked to me about it and agreed that it should be operated independently and the only thing that Commerce would do was to do the housekeeping and I would be free to develop the program the way that I thought it should be, which was a very attractive kind of a thing. Johnson was one of these kinds that would just grab you and say, "Listen . . ." as he did to me, . . . "I've just looked all over the country and you are the logical man to do this. The country needs you and I'm not asking you for political purposes, I'm asking you that if you love your country to come on and take this job." So, you just don't turn down a president of the United States when he talks like that. I didn't. So, I left a job that was paying me about \$85,000 or \$90,000 a year and took this on and handled it for a year. I told him at the time that I would only do it for a year.

J.B.: And you took that job when?

Collins: It was about 1964, I think. After the act passed. The law had passed in July.

W.D.V.: That's right, it was created by that act.

Collins: That's right. But he had talked with me about it first and I had actually gone to work a little bit before then, because we had a group of people up there in Washington who were kind of volunteering to do some spade work and get the personnel together, they were a fine group of people. So, that was a big thing that I had, fine group of people.

J.B.: In fact, I think that my friend, Max Seacrest was working for you at that time..

Collins: Yes, he was one of my very strong helpers. He was on there before I got there. These were the kind of people that were up there and I'm glad to know that he's your friend. He went to Selma and went through a lot of it.

J.B.: You went to Selma after the altercation on the bridge, am I correct on that?

Collins: Yes. They started the march right along the bridge and this was on Sunday, as I recall, Dr. King wasn't there, he was in Atlanta, but our people were there I was not. But they had that horrible mess there with the horses and clubs and all and when these people came over the bridge, they just went right into them, breaking heads. They had several odd people in the hospital, knocked them off the bridge and all. Then they announced that they were going to go over that bridge come what may the following Tuesday. They sent the word out all over the country, you know, for reinforcements and they really poured in there. That's when Johnson called me and asked me to go down there personally and try anything I could because we couldn't afford another repetition of that. It was a disgrace to the country.

So, I went in on Monday and we had a frantic time trying to find a way to get around that. There was a court order enjoining them from making the march. John Doar was their representing attorney and he couldn't talk with them about anything other than for that court order and not marching. Well, there had to be some kind of a way to find a middle ground, as I saw it.

J.B.: That was a federal court order?

Collins: Yes. I think it was. So, we figured out that if we could find a way that both of them could win. You can settle something if both sides feel like they are winning. So, I asked Dr. King and a bunch of them around the house if they could symbolically and actually go over the bridge and if the troops were withdrawn to a point beyond the bridge, but then when they got to that point where the troops were if they would stop and were not determinedly assaulted like they were before, you see, they didn't put up a barricade and say, "Don't come by this." When those people came over the bridge, they just went right on into them. He didn't think that we could work out anything like that and he didn't think that his people would stop even if he asked them. Their emotions were running awfully high. I told him that I was going to try to get them to agree. We went back over the bridge. They had the state troops and the county troops and the city were there. I talked to them and told them that Dr. King would stop if they would let them go over the bridge and if they held things and let them stop and pray and talk for twenty or thirty minutes, then they will turn around and go back, "if you promise that you won't move into them." They made some calls, one to Wallace, I'm sure in Montgomery and they finally agreed. They didn't

didn't think their people would stop, but I said, "Let's just see if they will." They agreed that if they followed a certain route through town and came on over the bridge and at that point, they would not move into them and allow them to stop and pray and all that and then they should go back. Then I had the job of getting back over there. They were already marching. They were halfway from Brown's Chapel, where they had headquarters, they were halfway to the bridge and coming along. I had this little slip of paper that they had given me about the route to follow. So, I talked to Dr. King as they went along, we just got in there and walked with them. He said, "I don't think my people will do it. I don't think they'll stop, but I'll try and if they will hold everything and give us our chance, I'll do my best to turn them back. I won't promise you, but I'll do my best." Then, I went back and stood right there with those troops at that point. They came over the bridge and came up to that point and stopped. It looked like one of them was going to jump and then all hell would have broken loose, but they didn't and so we avoided a horrible mess there. They went back. If I hadn't done anything else in my lifetime but get involved in that, I would have felt that I had something to feel good about.

J.B.: What actually happened at that point of confrontation?

Collins: The troops were there barricaded, they were standing there and some were kneeling down with guns and ammunition and those people walked up with some of them looking right down those guns. They stopped and nobody on either side said a word, I think, but Dr. King made a little statement. He called on Abernathy, as I recall, to offer a prayer and they prayed and I think they sang a song. I don't remember

anything that was said because I was so concerned about somebody moving with one of those guns that would break the spell of that thing. I wasn't paying too much attention to what was really being said. He told them then that they were going back. He said, "We've crossed the bridge." They had the symbolic accomplishment of crossing that bridge where they were not able to do it before. They still had a court order against them making a march, so they were in technical compliance with the order . . . not really, because they had marched a little ways, but it certainly wasn't grossly defiant of the court order. He told them to go back and there must have been ten or twelve thousand of them and they went back. Then the next day, the court order was rescinded, or the next two or three days, within a week after that, they opened the road and went on a made the march.

J.B.: How did you feel that morning of confrontation?

Collins: Well, I felt very sympathetic to the people, frankly. I had been down there to Brown's Chapel and I saw what was going on there, they were praying and singing out in front, a group of mostly young people, black people, and they weren't harming a soul. They weren't trying to be disorderly, just singing. The soldiers were gathered around them, you know, where they were, and I said, "What are you doing here?" They said, "We are protecting these people from the crowd." I said, "Well, they aren't bothering anybody, why aren't you facing the crowd?" They were pointing the guns right at these people, these children, really, who were doing the singing. I heard that one of them was shot and I went into the parsonage and this girl was sitting on

the floor and this doctor, black doctor, was working with her. She had been shot through the lip. Probably somebody from just shot into the crowd and knocked a tooth out, but it was a wonder that it hadn't knocked her head off, but the bullet was spent by the time it got there. I had a great feeling of sympathy for them at the point we were out there. Then I went with them on the march, I didn't stay with them continually, but I had a problem then of trying to work out agreements between these troops and enforcement people and the marchers regarding where they could camp and what they would do after they got to Montgomery. We had a citizen's committee in Montgomery that was working directly with the police authority. That man Blount, you know, who was Postmaster General fairly recently, he was a big man in that citizen's committee and did a fine job for us. I had to get in with the marchers, yo u know, to clarify certain requests that they were making about what streets they would go on and all that. The only way that I could talk to them was either in an encampment at night, which I didn't want to do, or on the march, walk along with them. So, I walked along with Dr. King and we talked about all these details as we went along. Well, right in front of us was a truck, loaded with cameras. There must have been a hundred there and they were just grinding away, taking pictures by the thousands and out of that group came one picture, there were a number of pictures, you know, of me walking along and it just looked like I was leading the march. This is what they used against me, they had a picture and circulated it all over the state with "Collins leading the march."

J.B.: This was in your '68 campaign?

Collins: Yes.

W.D.V.: Is it hard for you to believe that that was nine years ago?

Collins: It is, but yet when you think of the progress that has been made since that time, why it . . . .

J.B.: Were you engaged at any time in any direct negotiations with Governor Wallace during that crisis?

Collins: No. But this was his man . . . what was his name, the colonel there? Lingo, Colonel Lingo was his man and he was the man that we worked with him. has written a good report on that whole thing. There is a girl who happens to be right in town now, she is one of these staff people for one of these senators and says that she never had it so good, but she has just gotten a master's degree from the University of South Florida and her thesis is on the community relations service and she did a fine job. I helped her get to people and get to files that were secret, really. Her name is Chapman and if you are interested in writing anything about that, I would get a copy of her thesis, because it is very well done. It documents most everything and it really seems more like a doctor's dissertation than a master's thesis. She told me the other day that it was the finest thesis that had been written there.

J.B.: Do you know her first name?

Collins: Julia Chapman. She is working under Jim Silver, you remember him, the man from Mississippi. Jim is teaching down there on that faculty. He was quite pleased with it. They've got all my papers down there at South Florida. I gave them all my papers and didn't get a tax deduction. (laughter) I thought about it, but I had passed that

deadline.

J.B.: From you perspective at that time, is it your conclusion then and now that the Voting Rights Act grew directly out of that Selma situation?

Collins: Yes.

J.B.: What do you think has been the effect of that in the South?

Collins: Enormous. My only direct knowledge is what happened in Florida. When I was governor, I encouraged the black people to register and vote, but there were very few of them who did, not that they were prevented from doing it, but they didn't, they just felt for their own peace, I guess, maybe through intimidation, they didn't. Right over here in Gadsen County, they have a population that I think is maybe a little more than the white population and there weren't over thirty or forty of them over there voting.

J.B.: Fear primarily?

Collins: I think so. I think that it was set up in such a way that they were intimidated from voting. This act really just broke that down and we have a large black constituency voting.

W.D.V.: During the period that we are studying, the years from 1944 to 1974, there are two or three waves of New South governors and you were in one of the first. Could you talk a little bit about that and how you see it, both in terms of your own administration and the subsequent waves of New South governors, whatever that means to you?

Collins: Well, I don't know, that term has been misused and overused. There have been significant things that have happened to the South that have caused enormous changes. Most of these were national



events, rather than internal things in their origin. I think that the first term that you could think of in terms of the New South was the industrial development that came along. I was there when Florida began, and of course, this strengthened the economy of the region tremendously. So much of all kinds of progress in this nation, really, relates to economic progress, in social fields and all fields where people are earning substantial wages and can afford things, why their individual homes and in community life and everything is naturally strengthened with strong economic support. Bright children can begin to wear nice clothes and they buy those clothes from the merchants downtown and they get an enormous economic advantage from having that expanded trade and so it goes. We did have a great surge in economic strength in the South and it came along and had its origin, or took its impetus in the early part of my governorship and on through it. But the greatest single fact that has changed has been the emergence of the black man as a participant in the whole society. This has influenced enormous changes. I don't think in terms of this being a New South, I think that this has just been an awakening of national responsibility and it has just influenced the South and affected the South perhaps more dramatically than any other region because the black people in the South were poorer than they were in the North, they had been denied more opportunities in the South than they had in the North and so they had so much more to gain in the South. At the same time, this came along with a movement in the South away from a rural, agrarian nation and this influenced substantially the black people, had great influencing contributions on this overall social change, of having one class of society, one class

of people rather than the black and white classes. Although we still have, of course, and always will have, economic strata and there will seemingly be different classes of people, but that in a free enterprise system is a very flexible thing, too. A man can be poor and come from poor origins but still he can get very rich very quickly in this country. He has in the past and he can now. I guess that we always will be able to do that. I think in many ways, the South can be very proud of this progress in its acceptance and assimilation of the implications and all of the desegregation and the end of discrimination efforts of our federal government. On the other hand, there are many ways that . . . there is still a long ways to go and if you think in terms of attitudes of people, there is still a much longer way to go than I think is apparent. I think that still, there is a pretty strong feeling of resentment and feeling of unhappiness as the black man emerges more on the basis of equality. I don't know how we are ever going to get over this. Certainly, the free access to public accommodations and the various ways that black and white associate today, working together, playing together and living together in many ways, it would seem that this would appear, but I don't know. I fear still that a demagogue could come along and light the fires pretty easily and find a lot of acceptance in a lot of places that shouldn't be the case, but I think it would be the case. I don't know whether what I'm saying makes any sense or not, but that's the way I feel.

W.D.V.: Do you think the South is loosing its distinctiveness? You know, the premise of this book is that somehow Southern politics is different from other regions of the country. Do you think that's true?

Collins: Well, I think the South is losing its character, characteristics rather, I should say, in the past years. I think that one of the great forces that is contributing to that is the movement away from the farm and the little villages and communities into the more urban ways of life. On the farm, and of course the South had a much higher percentage of farms than the rest of the nation, that's changing drastically. But the farm life and small community life is quite different and I think that we've got a lot of values that are being lost in that process. The farm family was a close knit family and their interests were with each other and the grandmother and grandfather were there until they died and the children stayed there until they were grown and you didn't have the fluid movement in life that they have come to have since that time. Well, as they were held together in a compact relationship, I think there were values that developed there. I think that the great writing that has come out of the South has come about largely because of people who were influenced by that kind of life. The writer writes about what he knows best and as people lived close together, you knew people much better than you get to know them now. The Faulkners and the Tom Wolfes and all the people of that great tradition, that surge of brilliant southern writing, I think that it is based upon the fact that people were associated with that kind of environment and Aunt Maude was a character and Uncle Jim was this and it's something that this Walton family is trying to recapture and project on their television program at the present time. To be realistic, I don't believe some of it, but at the same time, they are finding and rekindling a reception of interest in that sort of thing. This is what the South had, though,

that made it especially unique and as more of our people are working in the factories and the little farm is gone and the farming now itself is a big business operation, well, I think that we've got a lot to lose and we've got a lot of different kinds of needs and challenges that are more closely related to the nation totally. So, I think that we are losing our character, but it seems to me that this rise in urban living and urban lifestyles has just as much to do with it as the changing pattern of relations between black and white people, although that is a big characteristic of it.

J.B.: The impact of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act . . . some people have told us that they felt that the real impact of that legislation has exerted a liberating influence among southerners and particularly liberating political influence. Do you feel that or not?

Collins: Well . . . .

J.B.: I'm talking about being able to deal with other problems other than just race.

Collins: I think that is probably true, but I think that it is truer in other southern states more than Florida. We've never had, really, a leadership in our government that has been solely based on race and has come into being because of the impetus of racial feeling, antagonistic racial feelings. In the campaign that was made against me, you may think that that statement is inconsistent with that, because I told you that was the reason I lost. But that was not because the man who took advantage of this was projecting himself as a demagogue and he was going to carry on and hold out to the

people the battle so far as race was concerned. But it was true because it developed an opposition vote to me and it was a subtle thing, it was subtle to show it itself without saying what I was doing there. You know, Selma in the public mind was something that the people didn't think favorably about. The man that beat me, Gurney for example, he hasn't been on any binge of racial antagonism, he would benefit from that in a far more subtle way than just being like, say, a typical Mississippi politician you've had in years gone by, or Alabama or Georgia. Now, a man ran against me who was that kind exactly, when I ran for the full term as governor. Now you see, I ran first for an unexpired term. We had a governor who died and he was succeeded by the president of the senate, who was a rural man and was more typical of the old fashioned political leader. I ran against him and defeated him and then I had the option to run for a full term. Our constitution prohibited a governor from succeeding himself at the time, but nevertheless the court held right at the last minute that since I had not served a full term, that clause would not apply. So, I qualified and ran. This time, I had Lowry, who was a former retired military general from down in Tampa and he really ran a hardnosed, mean campaign dealing with race. I was in office and had to cope with that. I had to deal with it and fortunately, I was in office so that most of the attention that I was getting in the press was from constructive things that I was doing and I never did feel like I had to come to grips with any debate of this kind. I did in my campaign make reference to the fact that this kind of talk would lead the state into turmoil and disorder. But he was making all kinds of demagogical efforts and

he ran second to me, but there were five of us in the race and I got more than all the rest of the field. If he had come into a second primary with me, we really would have had something pretty bad. That's the kind of man, a man who talks like that, who has been elected other places in the South, but it did not go here. I think that it has not because of the infusion of people from the outside more than anything else. We have been a notch or two above that, I think, in Florida.

J.B.: That brings up another question. Is Florida now, in 1974, looking to the future, do you consider Florida a southern state?

Collins: Well, geographically, we certainly are, but I think the regional elements are decreasing rapidly and I think that the country is getting more homogenized and I think we are going to find that the difference between the South and the others are largely insofar as the climate we have and the advantages that we have in a lot of open lands and beautiful country and the advantages we have in not having the scope of environmental problems that a lot of the rest of the nation has. There are some advantages this way, but I don't think that we are going to be distinguishable so far as black and white people are concerned in comparison with the rest of the nation. Maybe we will be in better shape, even, because we are really handling that. Our race relations are better than they are in other parts of the nation. I think that we are better now than they are in many places.

W.D.V.: Can I ask you one final question? It appears that the Florida press corps is unique in the South, the state capital press corps, second in the nation, second in size to California. It appears to be very aggressive and so on. Do you have any comments about that? It seems to have played a very significant part in the state's politics. More so than

any other state we have looked at.

Collins: I think so. I think that we've got a fine press. We've got extraordinarily strong papers, St. Petersburg, Tampa, Miami, Jacksonville. Jacksonville is a little more conservative and less likely to become involved editorially in the stands about a number of things. The Orlando paper also is a strong one. The Tallahassee paper here is not inclined to be editorially strong, I don't think. It is owned by the Knight people who have the Miami papers and the Charlotte Observer and it is probably tending in that same direction that those papers have followed, but I think that they have played an enormous part and these papers have all kept people stationed here. If a man wants to make an announcement now that he wants press coverage for anywhere in the state for politics, will come right here first because we've got a strong press corps and strong papers that keep a strong press corps. I think that this is unique in the South, so far as I have been able to observe outside in other states. Ours is much stronger. I don't want to leave you with any impression that I don't like the South or that I don't want to stay in the South. This is my home and this is where I would rather live, I'd rather work and I'd rather be in public life or private life, in the South. Much more than any other place. We have opportunities in the South, a little time to live broadly and we've got a coastline down here that has enormous advantages. It's not overpopulated. I've got a house down there on an island off the Gulf coast where I can go down there and walk miles on that beach and never see a soul and watch the different flowers that bloom at the different times of the year. We've got streams of <sup>which</sup> young people that are particularly interested in going on canoeing and it's tremendous. We've got lakes.

I went out yesterday morning early with a doctor here, not more than four miles from Tallahassee to a lake, we caught a nice string of bass. This to me is just a great place to live and I think that we have advantages like that that make this region unique. These people in Tennessee, in Georgia, in South Carolina and Mississippi, all have this opportunity far more than you do in New Jersey or New York and some of those other places like that.

J.B.: Governor Collins, I think that you are in a unique position to comment on this, I don't know how to frame it properly, but the impact on political attitudes of people in the South of the type of leadership that Lyndon Johnson gave on the race issue compared to the type of leadership that Richard Nixon has given on the race issue. Particularly insofar as adjusting to racial changes?

Collins: Well, Johnson was more open and aboveboard about what he wanted to do and what he would do. President Johnson saw, really, that his opportunity to establish a position in history and be a great man by what he could do to affect race relations and he was glad to assume a role of strong leadership. In addressing himself to Congressional actions and other areas, he was continually open in urging Congress in race relations. I think that President Nixon's interest in this has been covert rather than overt. When it's covert, you don't know just exactly what is going on. He made a statement earlier as president, "You watch what we do and not what we say." He has not wanted to be forthright in what he said because I think that he has realized that this would be offensive to a lot of people who helped get him elected president. But at the same time, apparently the HEW, for example, as a national agency has proceeded just as strongly in its insistence upon agencies and departments



being . . . Nixon recognizes that the trend of history calls for positive action. I don't think that he has been resentful of people that work underneath him in moving along, just keeping out of it as best he can and I think that whatever he has done hasn't surfaced very much.

. . . (interruption. Tape turned off) . . . I think that so many people in this state just don't want that to be involved. I think that the business industry of the state doesn't want it to become involved and they see that as not good for business and not good for progress. I think that most Florida people kind of want the state to move forward.

J.B.: We hear a great deal of speculation that Governor Askew's position on busing, the aggressive role that he played, is going to be used as an issue to. . . an attempt to make it an issue. Do you think that it will be effective?

Collins: Well, that's hard for me to assess. As I see it, from where I sit, people are generally very satisfied with Askew. He is, number one, a very clean man, a man of very solid integrity. He has shown this a great deal. He has announced that he is going to accept campaign contributions up to a hundred dollars from individuals and I think this has been a very popular thing for him to have lead on. I believe that particularly at this time and with all this national furor is going on over Watergate, that people have a sense of real release and satisfaction that they have a governor of the type that he is. Now, as I see it now, this great feeling of confidence in the man is going to make his election a very easy one. It may not work out that way, but I just can't see that this lieutenant governor that we have who is running against him making this a real strong race or anything like a close race. Now, if he does, if he does make it a close race, then this will be an advantage to the

Republican candidate, because he is running as a reform candidate.

He is a man of good background and I think that he is generally accepted as a nice fellow. He is wealthy, made his money recently, quickly, but he's got money and comes from that populous coast of the state in Palm Beach County. I guess . . . . .

(end of interview)