

Interview with John Bell Williams, former governor and Congressman, Jackson, Mississippi, March 29, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter de Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Jack Bass: Looking back over this last twenty-five years since 1948, governor, what has been the most significant change in Mississippi politics?

John Bell Williams: Of course I would say the advent of Negro voting in great numbers probably has brought about the most significant change. However, there has been very little change in the basic philosophy of a great majority of our people. Second, I would say that one of the most significant changes is the apparent trend away from the one party system toward either a two party system or toward a majority-minority party system--a majority party in place of the remnants of what we might call the old regular Democratic party and the minority group being the liberal or ultra-liberal elements that exist in the state. The Republican party has sought to make inroads in Mississippi and of course they have in a few places by, with the election of a couple of Congressmen and one or two municipal offices and some other local offices. But oddly enough the issues involved in those campaigns were more in the area of personalities and platforms than in party affiliation. I think Mississippi is moving more toward an independent system than anything else at this point. Because our people are loath to affiliate with the Republican party and they're sick of the present apparatus of the national Democratic party.

J.B.: When you say they're loath to associate with the Republican party, is that because of the Watergate situation?

Williams: No, that had nothing to do with it. As I find it in

Mississippi, the people are thoroughly disgusted with the Watergate affairs in the sense that they feel it is nothing more nor less than a press vendetta against the president. And I've found that our people by and large support the president--at this point, on the basis of what we know about Watergate. Most of them seem to feel that the president has made a very good president, that he has at least turned the country back somewhat to stability that we lost during the liberal era of, oh, I'd say Truman-Eisenhower-Kennedy and Johnson. As far as other significant changes that have taken place, of course we've witnessed a tremendous economic revolution in Mississippi. The tremendous growth of our economy. We've witnessed a change from a cotton economy into a pretty well diversified system. I think we've witnessed the disappearance of what might be characterized or categorized as the old southern demagogue type of politician

one who appeals more to reason than to emotions. Now. But I suppose that comes about as a result of enlightenment, better education and better communication systems. Beyond that, just off the top of my head, I can't think of any other particular points which might need to be brought out.

Walter de Vries: You were governor during the massive integration, 1970. Did you anticipate it was going to go off that smoothly without virulence, as it did?

Williams: I hope that I made some contribution to its going off that smoothly.

W.D.V.: Did you expect, back in '68, '69...

Williams: Quite frankly, no.

W.D.V.: Why did it?

Williams: I think that. . . well, I don't want to blow my horn, but I think that the primary reason for it was to be found in the attitude of

the leadership of the state. Political leadership of the state. We recognized that we had fought every court battle that we knew to fight and we had lost every time we moved in, whether it was a legal decision or one based on the arbitrary caprices of the judges. But none the less, we saw that we had no hope there. We realized that the time had come when we . . . the tactics that we had previously used had proven to be not fruitful. I think the people simply resigned themselves to living with what they considered to be a very, very bad and almost impossible situation. But they realized that they were boxed in and there was nothing they could do about it.

W.D.V.: But everybody before that, during the '60s, was predicting the state would go to hell in a hand cart, go up in flames and so on.

Williams: Well, that's true, and let me say this. Some of those predictions indeed were correct. Because the quality of instruction and learning in our public schools now has suffered a very visible decline, a deterioration. We have, in the city of Jackson, for instance. . . these are last year's figures. I haven't seen this year's figures. I haven't had them available to me. As of this time last year, there were more white students enrolled in private schools than there were in public schools in the city of Jackson. That's another change. And you find that to be true wherever there is a great percentage of blacks in the population. As a matter of fact, at one time there were one or two counties in the state where there was not a single white child enrolled in a public school.

J.B.: Yet roughly 90% of the school enrollment is still in the public schools, isn't that correct?

Williams: Oh yes. But you have to understand the population make-up of the state of Mississippi in order to give a reason as to why. And part

of that's economic, of course, on the part of persons who are absolutely unable to send their children to private schools but who would do so if they were financially able. There are other cases where we would have people who are prejudiced against private schools and in favor of public education. By the same token you have them in reverse. You have those who are prejudiced in favor of private schools against public schools. But there are a certain number on both sides. These people are determined to keep their children in public schools no matter how bad the situation may become. I think it has been the advent of the private schools providing an escape value, you might say, that has helped keep down some of the

W.D.V.: If you were to remove the legal compunctions to maintain this system. . . suppose the anti-busing amendment that passed the House yesterday succeeded, would the state revert back to segregated schools? Would you ever move back to where you were?

Williams: No, oh no. I think it would be wishful thinking to contemplate such a thing. As a practical matter, no, I don't think we ever can. However, I think that the amount or degree of integration or mixing, if the busing situation is taken care of legislatively, will simply be in proportion to the ratio in the population in that particular school area. I don't think there's any question about that.

W.D.V.: It would go back to a sort of natural balance of the district that school serves?

Williams: We have blacks who live within the white school district, within the district served by a particular elementary or high school or what have you. We have mixed neighborhoods. And to that extent, these would be mixed.

W.D.V.: What would happen if the voting rights act were not extended?

Williams: At this point in Mississippi I don't think it would make a bit of difference, except that we wouldn't have to be the host to hoards of invaders from Washington coming down here to sit in on our elections and attempt to dictate to us how we should handle them. I think that would be about the only change. The Negro has now been accepted as a voter. I haven't seen any problems whatsoever connected with that. I feel they've already wiped out educational requirements and literacy requirements and no way that we can get that re-established. The so-called busing had nothing to do with that, the qualification of voters. I don't mean busing. I mean the inclusion of Mississippi among the five jurisdictions, I believe, that are presently affected by the . . . Six jurisdictions or five. I don't remember. Mississippi, Alaska, Alabama, Georgia, what other states?

J.B.: South Carolina or North Carolina. I think Virginia. I think there's six or seven.

W.D.V.: Do you anticipate that the loyalists and the regulars are going to (get together) before the '76 election?

Williams: Ain't no way!

W.D.V.: What could bring them back together? Let me ask you first, why do you feel that way?

Williams: One is oil, one's water; one's apples, one's oranges. There's no way to mix them. There's no catalyst that can put them together because their respective philosophies are 180 degrees apart.

W.D.V.: So you would see that situation just continuing as it is?

Williams: For a long time to come, yes.

W.D.V.: Who could bring it back together?

Williams: No individual.

W.D.V.: Could the next governor do it?

Williams: No, I don't think so. The so-called loyalists are not a political party as such. They're not qualified as a political party under our laws and they have no standing recognized by Mississippi law at this time.

J.B.: Do you think they'll get the call to the convention in 1976?

Williams: Not if the leaders of the Democratic national convention have any sense, they won't. They'll go ahead and proceed under the established rules that have always been followed. They may have representation. They may be able to elect a few delegates. But only if they elect those few delegates will they be able to get them in there.

J.B.: You think delegates will be elected then in '76 at large?

Williams: Well, I don't know. That's pending now, you know. In the legislature. I'm not sure just where we stand on it. Since I went out of the governor's office I refuse to read political news.

J.B.: We hear some speculation that you might be a candidate for governor in 1975.

Williams: ~~You can~~ set it aside.

J.B.: How about the US Senate?

W.D.V.: What did you think of the legisla. . . .

Williams: That too. I served a 21 year sentence in Washington. That thought me a lesson not to indulge in the same ~~offense~~ again. I don't think I'll. . .

W.D.V.: If you've written off governor and Senator, that doesn't leave anything left, does it, to run in the future?

Williams: Have you heard of retirement?

W.D.V.: What did you think of the legislature's action yesterday in

overriding the veto of the governor for the first time in (some amount of time)?

Williams: I don't know enough about it to comment on it. Of course I know it was a precedent setter. As I say, I've made it a point not to try to stay current on political affairs in the governor's mansion and in the legislature. I just try to make a point not to do that, because ex-governors can be drawn into political controversies not of their own making so much that I feel the present governor should be able to serve without my being consulted or my sticking my big nose into his business. That's what I'm trying to say. I think I owe him that courtesy.

J.B.: When you were governor I think you had some problems with the R&D Center. How do you evaluate that organization?

Williams: The R&D Center is potentially a great organization, if we could. . . . But my criticism was not of the R&D Center but of the man who heads the R&D Center, who is a sociologist by education and then in training and knows about as much about economic development and that type of thing as I do about atomic energy, which is a flat zero. And that's about as far as I can go on that point. I've had personality conflicts. . . . As he has with the present governor, so I'm told.

W.D.V.: What were the most significant accomplishments of your administration as compared to other. . . .?

Williams: Well, of course, the first thing we did was to upgrade the quality of public education in our schools, which, frankly, had deteriorated to virtually nothing. We gave the school teachers the highest single pay raise in one lump that they've ever received in the history of the state. At that time we brought our teachers up to a level comparable to the level of salaries in the surrounding states for the first time since I can remember.

We provided a number of new. . . . We also revised the law so as to reduce the number of students per teaching unit. We also added a per cost factor to each teacher's unit. I think I would prefer that you ask the school people themselves about that. Don't take my word. But I think probably that was the first and most notable, most important accomplishment of the administration. The second thing, we were able to pass what at that time was the largest highway construction program in the history of the state. The first major highway construction program that had been passed since 1938. It was not passed in exactly the form that I asked, that I requested. It was watered down. Because I lost on the financing of the program by two votes in the senate after it passed the house by an overwhelming vote. But we came back and we were able to get, still get the largest program which had ever been passed up to that point in the history of the state, including the 1938 program. We completed our educational television network. We revised and overhauled our entire revenue structure. Put the state in good, sound financial condition. And I left the largest surplus--if you want to call it that--the largest balance in the state treasury when I left office that had ever been seen in the history of Mississippi. We established an office of federal-state relations, an office of the coordinator of federal-state programs or state-federal programs. Who, incidentally, did such a good job that he was elected to the United States Congress from his Congressional district this last time. David Bowen. Of course I went through the trauma of hurricane Camille and its recovery, which has been described by the national Civil Defense Office as the finest example of federal-state disaster cooperation in history. We rewrote the book, so to speak, for disaster relief. Oh, just touching on a few more, we passed legislation that would permit our participation in

Medicaid program. We set it up. Set up the Medicaid program. Just off the top of my head. . . I'm trying to think of others. We went from a bi-annual session of the legislature to an annual session. Of course our state construction program was eccellerated considerably. We upgraded our Negro colleges in particular. Placed emphasis on Jackson State, ^{and} Delta Valley State ~~and~~ and got them some much needed capital improvements. The creation of the governor's emergency council, immediately following hurricane Camille, according to the national Civil Defense people, has set a pattern for other states to follow when they suffer similar disasters. We cleaned our statute books of practically all of the old segregation laws, etc., which had been placed on there in an attempt to frustrate the federal attempts to integrate us in earlier days.

J.B.: On that question, why did you continue the sovereignty commission?

Williams: By that time the sovereignty commission had changed its approach in some way and was acting as an intelligence agency so that we could keep trace of those who were coming into the state to create trouble. I mean physical trouble, I mean physical violence, that type of thing. Witness the RNA incident which occurred here in Jackson. That's one. So that we stayed a step ahead of them most of the time. Part of it went to the Ku Klux Klan and its operations. They were under surveillance all the time, too, so that we knew, generally, in advance what their plans were going to be. We had had a series of bombings, if you remember. Church and synagogue bombings. Church burnings. By night riders. All that disappeared during the four years that I was in office.

W.D.V.: What major things you wanted to get done you didn't?

Williams: The only major thing that I had advocated that I wanted to

get done that I was unable to get done was the enactment of the original highway legislation which I had advocated in my campaign. However, I might add that as soon as I went out of office and the new man came in, he had run on the same type of platform, the legislature completed the job and went ahead and proceeded to write my original act into law. So that we now have the construction bill. The sad part being in the meantime costs had accelerated and we're not going to get as much highway for our money as we would have previously.

J.B.: Were you the first governor ever to come out of Congress in Mississippi?

Williams: You mean directly from the Congress? No. Our first governor came directly from the Congress, George Poindexter. George Poindexter served I believe from 1817 to 1819.

W.B.: You're the first one since then. How do you feel about that? Your experience in Washington as relating to the governor's office.

Williams: I think it was invaluable.

J.B.: Do you think you'd have been better off, say, if you'd come directly out of the legislature or lieutenant-governor's office?

Williams: No, not necessarily. I feel that I would have been better off had I had some service in the legislature previously, but if I had to make a choice of whether I was coming from, say, 20 years in the Congress or 20 years in the state legislature, probably 20 years in the state legislature would have qualified me a bit better, but I think it's hair-splitting to say either one at this point.

J.B.: What would be the special advantages you found of having been in Congress?

Williams: Well, 40 years ago it wouldn't have amounted to anything. However, in this day and time, the state's activities are so closely intertwined and interlinked with federal activities that I think its definitely

an advantage that a man should have had service in the Congress before he goes to the governor's office. I don't think that should be a requirement, please don't misunderstand me, but I think it helps. It helps, because after all, I'm on virtually a first name basis with everybody in Washington, in the Washington agencies and, of course, in the Congress. I knew where to go in Washington to get done what we needed to get done. And I could sit down across a table and talk eyeball to eyeball to most of the officials there.

J.B.: There seems to be somewhat of a growing tendency. You came back from Washington as governor. Congressman Watson from South Carolina came back and ran for governor. Gov. Edwards in Louisiana came out of Congress.

Williams: Right. Arch Moore from West Virginia.

J.B.: Brion Dorn is running this year in South Carolina. Do you see this as a continuing trend?

Williams: I can't answer that question. I don't know. I've been. . . it's been a year since I've been to Washington; it's been two years since I've been out of office; and about seven years since I left Washington as a Congressman. And of course I just don't know. I can't answer that question. What's his name, Bill Cahill from New Jersey was also elected governor from the Congress since I was governor--since I went into office.

J.B.: After the 1964 election, when you were stripped of your seniority in Congress--you and Congressman Watson and he switched to the Republican party and you did not. Why not?

Williams: Because I was not in conflict with the rules of the regular Mississippi Democratic party. Mississippi regular Democratic party in convention had already adopted resolutions that would free any member of the Mississippi Democratic party to vote for the candidate of his choice regardless

of party for president or vice-president. And that is a point which the national Democratic group failed to respond to. I was acting purely within the rules of the Mississippi Democratic party.

J.B.: Did you consider a party switch at that time?

Williams: Yes, I considered the possibility of a party switch, but I felt that as long as I was not in violation of any of the rules in the Mississippi Democratic party and I was still in sympathy with the advocacies and the philosophies of the Mississippi Democratic party that it would serve no purpose to change to another party. At this point in time the Mississippi Democratic party is more an independent party than it is a partisan party, so to speak. We've been denied admission to the last two Democratic conventions, so. . . I think we'd have to say it's more an independent party than it is a Democratic party.

J.B.: In future state-wide races, do you see the elections being determined primarily by the personality of the candidates more than anything else?

Williams: Yes, very definitely. Definitely so. As a matter of fact, if I should ever run for governor again and as a matter of expediency seek to select a ticket that I felt would best advance my interests, I would be hard put to determine whether to run as a Democrat, Republican or independent. Probably I'd run as an independent if I ever ran for office again.

W.D.V.: Why?

Williams: Because I am an independent.

J.B.: Independent of what? The Democratic party?

Williams: I'm independent of party.

J.B.: What does an independent have to do to get on the ballot in Mississippi? Petition?

Williams: Petition, yeah.

J.B.: If this open primary law gets approved by the attorney general do you think there will be a lot more candidates running as independents?

Williams: Probably so, yes.

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

Williams: I think they will have to come to Mississippi and show us that they want us in the national party. I think they would have to give us a voice in the councils of the party--which we have not had for the past 25 or 30 years. I think that they would have to discard some of the arbitrary, ultra-liberal rules which have been established within the national Democratic party. Quota systems, that type of thing. And bring it back purely to a democratic system. And I think we could live with that.

J.B.: If Gov. Wallace were to actively campaign for the Democratic national ticket--whether or not he's on it because I assume he's not on it but actively campaign for it--would that make a significant difference in Mississippi?

Williams: It would make some difference but not. . . it wouldn't be a controlling factor. From a standpoint of party, no. That depends to a great extent on the individuals who might be nominated by the national . . . the two national parties, their respective platforms and advocacies.

J.B.: Do you see race re-emerging as a political issue in Mississippi?

Williams: No.

With race submerged

J.B.: ~~If race re-emerged~~ as an issue, do you see Mississippi reverting back to the tradition of economic liberalism it had of an earlier period?

Williams: No, no I don't, not at any time in the foreseeable future. Most of that so-called economic liberalism was the result of a populist movement, as you know, that was very popular back in the days of let's say between 1900 and 1930--in the pre-Roosevelt days. Of course Mississippi was

a great supporter of Roosevelt. But our people feel that government should serve and not rule. Our people are staunch believers in the premise of the tenth amendment, which apparently has been wiped completely off the books as a matter of practicality by the courts and is not even recognizable in law anymore. But our people still feel that we have too much government, too much attempt to regulate their lives, to regulate and control their lives from Washington. And that we're not left sufficiently free to do the things that we believe to be the best for us and for our people. Well, I'll put it another way. In the years prior to the 1930s, we were a farm economy, a cotton economy, practically all depending on the prosperity of cotton as such. Back in those days the great clamor and cry was Wall Street. Wall Street was the great enemy of our people. And politicians would be elected by excoriating Wall Street and holding it up as their straw man. Whether it was a straw man or an actual threat, I don't know. But today people have their own businesses and we are enjoying prosperity. We realize now that everything that the government gives it must first take away from the people, that government produces nothing. That the people produce the prosperity and that government simply acts as a middle man to take their production away from them and distribute it. So I don't think that. . . for instance a Huey Long. . . and he was in the context of his time. I suppose he was a very popular and real crusader. Maybe in the context of his times he was the man of the hour. But times have changed and I hardly think that you'd find that type of approach today being very effective in Mississippi.

J.B.: Some people talk about Gov. Waller's victory. . . give a lot of credit to the type of media campaign he ran. Do you think that was a decisive factor?

Williams: Oh, I don't think that there's any doubt but that the type of campaign that he ran was very effective. Particularly in the absence of

resistance on the other side. I don't want to get involved in that campaign, please. There were mistakes made by his opponent which didn't help his situation. Judgment mistakes. And his supporters, I think, were overconfident.

W.D.V.: Can we talk about the campaign of '71? Why do you think he won that second primary? I'm sorry, I mean you in '67.

Williams: Man, I had that thing won when I saw the results from the first primary. I knew that I had won it. Because I knew that there was a certain bloc vote. . . well, I could analyze that very easily. I knew that I would get the Barnett vote, the great bulk of it. I knew that I would get the Swan vote, the great bulk of it. And putting those together, why we knew the question was just how big the majority was going to be. And then I worked. And I worked hard. And then I presented a case, my case open and above board. That's not to infer that the other side didn't either. I don't mean that. But I presented my case open and above board and we won it.

W.D.V.: Anything about your administration you would have done differently?

Williams: Oh, I'm sure there were a number of things I would have done differently. I might have made a few personnel choices differently had I known then what I know now. But by and large I think my approach would have been about the same. There were one or two bills passed that I should have vetoed that I didn't veto. The primary reason that I didn't veto them was because of my very high respect for our legislative system--that it's the legislature's responsibility to write the laws and the executive's responsibility to administer and execute the laws. When the great majority of the legislature favors a matter I don't feel that it is--unless there is something in there that is wholly repugnant--I don't think that--either repugnant

or unreasonable or what have you. In other words, I am very, very reluctant to try to place my judgment above that of the collective judgment of the legislature.

W.D.V.: Most people view the Mississippi legislature as very strong and the executive as very weak.

Williams: There's no question of that.

W.D.V.: Would you change anything in those terms of those relationships?

Williams: Oh, indeed I would. I would attempt to get the organization *of state government changed*. Waller has been seeking reorganization. I mean, getting down to details I'm not sure about that. But I think we need a reorganization. As far as I know this is the only state, or perhaps one of the few states, for example, in which the legislature prepares the executive's budget request for him and submits it to themselves for approval. I would seek to change *the* boards and commissions so as to make them real executive boards and commissions rather than legislative boards and commissions. And to enforce the second paragraph of the first article of the state constitution, which is the separation of powers clause. And I think that someday someone will have the initiative and the wherewithal to go into court and force it.

W.D.V.: Why hasn't that ever been challenged?

Williams: It has been challenged, it has been. Not in the courts. But I believe that attorney general Greek (?) Rice--I believe it was Greek Rice and then it was upheld by Joe Patterson later--wrote an opinion which was to serve a particular purpose at a particular time, I presume, in which he made a distinction between legislators serving on executive boards and commissions with a definite term of years and those who were simply appointed for. . . subject to the will of the governor in other words. For instance, he made the distinction that if a particular commission appointment was for

six years or four years or what have you and a definite term appointment, that it would be in violation. But the legislature was given the right, at the same time under this ruling, to name ex officio members of these boards and commissions who would serve. . . in other words to require that members of the legislature be selected for certain positions but without a definite term of office. And I think that violates both the spirit and the letter, but that's neither here nor there. I'm not in a position to say that it's bad law. The courts are going to have to say that and I think they will in time.

J.B.: Governor, if you were elected again would you have a black on your staff?

Williams: I wouldn't go search out a black to put on my staff, no. I wouldn't go search one out just because he was black. And I certainly would not have one on there if I thought he would disrupt the operations. I don't think that I would object to having a qualified black on my staff.

J.B.: Some governors in the south now have put blacks on their staff, some as general staff members, some to deal specifically with what they usually refer to as minority affairs. How about appointment of blacks to boards and commissions? Would you change your policy on that?

Williams: What do you mean, change my policy? I appointed blacks to boards and commissions.

J.B.: Would you appoint more?

Williams: I don't know. If more qualified ones appeared, I suppose, and they happened to be political friends of mine, they might be appointed. You've got to remember that politics is a game of you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, in politics. And I felt that out of the tremendous majority of people who supported me for governor that I could certainly find qualified

people to put in these positions and I couldn't find a single qualified black that supported me for governor. You're not expected to put your political enemies into office. If you do, you're a fool.

J.B.: You think if you ran again you'd have qualified blacks supporting you?

Williams: I would suspect so. I really would. I think I would have several college presidents supporting me. Depending, of course, on who I was running against and what the issues. . . and the issues that might develop.

J.B.: Is there anything else you wanted to add? To our understanding.

W.D.V.: Can I ask you one more thing?

Williams: Now you fellows have dealt with black and white for a half an hour. You want to get around to something else? That's always what they want to talk to me about. If I'd known that I would have told you hell no, I'm not even going to talk to you. I'm tired of talking black and white.

W.D.V.: When you served in the national governors conference and your colleagues in the governors conference. . . is there any difference between Mississippi and the rest of the South and Mississippi and the rest of the nation?

Williams: How do you mean?

W.D.V.: Are its people any different?

Williams: They have different attitudes, of course. You know, my last year I served as chairman of the southern governors conference. Which I think is, in itself, a fairly good refutation of the idea that Mississippi is looked down upon by its sister states. And this was a 19 jurisdiction conference--largest in the country. I served as a member of the executive committee of the council of state governments, which I believe had five governors on it. I don't think that that is an indication that Mississippi

is held in contempt by its sister states or by the governors of the sister states.

W.D.V.: That's what I was getting at. *Do they* see Mississippi as somehow different from the rest.

Williams: No. I think Mississippi has long since outlived that label. As a matter of fact, I think the manner in which Mississippi has acted in accommodation of the things that we were forced to do, very much against our will, speaks probably higher. . . speaks probably better for the state of Mississippi than any other state in the union. We're the people who have the problem. . . people far removed from our problems have sought to solve our problems for us without consulting us. And I think that we have done a very commendable job in adjusting to meet these forced criteria.

W.D.V.: You said earlier that that was partly the function of the political leaders of the state during that time. How do you look at the people in that regard? It's also got to be part of the character of the people, doesn't it?

Williams: Yes. People respond, though, to their leaders. There are several ways. I could have stood up at this particular time--and I'm not reflecting on any other governor or former governor, please don't misunderstand me. Because in the context of the times perhaps they did what was right and what was best. But I sought to be conciliatory. I sought to ask the people to leave these problems in the hands of the duly constituted authorities. Not to take the law into their own hands. Some governors in the past have suggested that they should take it in their own hands and they did take it in their own hands. And we suffered as a result. It was bad judgment.

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W.D.V.: --in terms of its economy. As you say it was a cotton economy and now it's diversified. And what, about 90% of its income is other than agricultural. What do you see happening in the next *few years?*

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Williams: I can see more urbanization. I can also see more industrial progress. And I think that from the standpoint of just economic development, I think that Mississippi is just now beginning to move. And I think we're going to accelerate as the years go by for the next ten or fifteen years. I think Mississippi will be booming. We have everything. We have the area. In other words, we have land available. We have all of the natural resources. We have the weather. We have the water. We have both water and air and land transportation available. We have the sea ports. We have about everything. And so much of the state is undeveloped, at this point, by comparison with other areas in the country. It's a fertile field for development and I think that the world is going to beat a path to our door.

J.B.: Do you see the old delta vs hills conflicts still alive?

Williams: It's still alive to some extent, but not as intense as it once was.

J.B.: Has reapportionment done more than any other single thing to reduce the delta strength in the legislature?

Williams: Possibly. However, the delta, even before reapportionment their strength was on the wane. Well, of course, there's another thing. The advent of the automobile, a good system of highways, a good system of communications, the interchange of trade between the delta and other areas of the state has seemed to have solidified our state. In other words, it's not a . . . with a lot of these old divisions, geographical divisions or . . . what am I trying to say. . . the provincialism in this state.

W.D.V.: What has television done to that, the state's politics, to campaigning and so on?

Williams: It's increased the cost of it about ten times. But I think that it has made it possible for candidates to present their views to more people and I think we have a more enlightened voter than we formerly had.

W.D.V.: Pretty optimistic about the state's future?

Williams: Indeed.

(Interruption)

J.B.: Anything else you wanted to add?

Williams: Let me think just a minute.

J.B.: What do you think is the greatest misconception about Mississippi politics that exists both within and without the state?

Williams: The relationship and attitudes of the whites and the blacks in our state. It's misunderstood, misconstrued. I mean the great majority now. We have activists, of course, among the blacks and I suppose we still have a few of the Ku Klux sympathizers, whether we have a Ku Klux or not. But they are in a small minority and I think the attitudes of the great majority of our white and black people, with respect to each other, has been badly distorted in its projection to the other parts of the country.

W.D.V.: Do you see that changing?

Williams: You mean the attitudes? No. I think its wholesome. I think we have a very wholesome attitude at this point between the whites and the blacks.

W.D.V.: I mean the attitude outside the state.

Williams: I think it has changed considerably in the last five or six years, or the last ten years. In 1965 over 100 members of Congress voted purely on the basis of prejudice against the state of Mississippi to refuse Mississippi any representation whatsoever in the United States House of

Representatives. I don't believe that would get ten votes today. And it was based purely and solely and exclusively on the media vendetta that had been directed toward the state of Mississippi and had built up ever since 1954. Today that seems to have abated considerably, although I realize that persons in other sections of the country still have preconceived ideas about Mississippi. But I think that now that the busing has created similar problems in their areas and the shoe is beginning to pinch other feet, I think they are beginning to sympathize with us considerably with the problems that we have had down here and have had to overcome and have overcome.

W.D.V.: Some people say the racial that problem has been not overcome but at least submerged, there would be a lot more social and economic progress, a lot more consideration of some of the fundamental issues that face the state in the future. Is that. . . .

Williams: That that problem has been submerged?

W.D.V.: Well, that there's no longer an obsession. . .

(Interruption)

Williams: --support conservatives. Our people by and large are fundamentalists. Political fundamentalists. We don't feel that the courts, under our American system, have the right to create law, only to interpret law. We don't think that the president, the executive branch, has the right to create law in the absence of legislation. . . . We feel that the states. . . in the beginning were the states. The federal government was a creature of the states. And that the states surrendered certain of their powers in order to provide for a common defense and a system of communications and highways and so forth. And that they surrendered only the powers that were granted to the federal government in the constitution. We regard the constitution as being a document of limitation. Because indeed, if it were not a document of limitation there would be no need *for* a constitution.

If that constitution is going to be ignored, or if its going to be perverted or changed through a series of judicial interpretations. . . . We still believe in the common law doctrine of ~~judicial~~ and feel that. . . . Well, we go back I think. . . . And I'm not giving you a political lecture now. I'm just speaking philosophically. You go back to Washington's Farewell Address, which I think pretty well outlined the South's attitude in this matter and its philosophy at the present time. In which he stated the constitution. . . he stated in so many words that if the constitution be wrong in any respect let it be corrected in the manner provided therein. Which as you and I know is by the people, by act of the people or the legislature. He went further to say let there be no usurpation. Though this in one instance might serve the temporary good, its usual means by which free governments are destroyed. Now you go back and get that quotation and I think you will find the basic philosophy of the southern people with respect to our constitutional system. We have seen that constitution usurped. We've seen them by-pass constitutional limitations in order to accomplish temporary purposes without receiving the permission of the people to change the constitution. Now you didn't hear us complain at all. A number of our people were very much opposed to the 18 year old vote, but they proceeded about that in the right manner and went ahead and got a constitutional amendment to take care of it. So now we don't complain, we don't care anything about it in the South. We accept it. Had the black and white situation been submitted by constitutional amendment and enacted by the requisite number of states or approved by the requisite number of states, there would have been no complaint in the South. The social aspect of it, of course, was a cover-up, as a means to permit an unconstitutional act, to further encroach on and erode the constitutionally guaranteed--of course they couldn't guarantee them, but the reserved powers of the several states.

W.D.V.: How do you think the people of this state see the whole Watergate thing and the impeachment?

Williams: Well, I think they're so thoroughly disgusted with the whole mess that they would like to just not hear any more. Our people-- as of yet no specific crime has been charged against the president. And our people still believe that a person is innocent until he is found guilty. We don't think that they've even substantiated a charge against--an impeachable charge against the president.

W.D.V.: Do you see that issue as affecting the state's politics in any way?

Williams: Not in the least.

W.D.V.: Do you see it having any affect on politics in general and politicians?

Williams: I think it would have to, throughout the country. In other areas where you have strong political party organizations and so forth, I don't think there's any question but that it will have an effect there. But the effect in Mississippi will be minimal. Indeed, if any.

W.D.V.: Do you miss serving in public office?

Williams: No. Imagine carrying a bale of cotton around for 25 or 26 years on your back. Never being able to get up in the morning without that bale of cotton on your back and having to take it every where you go and then finally get rid of it after about 27 or 28 years. You can understand how I feel.

W.D.V.: No regrets, huh?

Williams: No.

W.D.V.: Do it all over again?

Williams: I probably would, ~~(n'f)~~, I don't know. You have to put it in context for that. I don't know. I went to Washington when I was 27 years

old as a Congressman and my whole life has been politics. Under different circumstances in a different day I might do differently, I don't know. I just don't know.

W.D.V.: I was asking, do you think it was worth it?

Williams: Well, yes and no. A lot of heart aches and a lot of feelings of accomplishment. A lot of satisfactions and a lot of frustrations. As I say, great feelings of accomplishment. I'm very happy with it. I think every man who has given his life to public service encounters this same emotions and the same feelings at one time or another. I would like to think that I've left a better ~~country~~ behind than I've found. And I hope that I have. I think. . . I know I've left a better state behind than I took over when I took over as governor. I know that I've left some marks there to the credit of our administration. And to that extent I was very happy that I was able to do so, that I was able to serve as governor.

W.D.V: I'm not being impertinent. . .

Williams: Oh no. . .

(End of Interview.)