

Interview with Thomas Reed, state representative, Tuskegee, Alabama,
July 11, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter de Vries, transcribed
by Linda Killen.

Jack Bass: I'd like for you to give us just a very brief summary
of your own background and how you got involved in politics and what
you're doing and so forth.

Thomas Reed: I don't know how much time you have. Here's something
that you might want that might be what you. . . .

J.B.: Fine. That will take care of that. [Apparently Reed has
given him something.]

Walter de Vries: Were you involved in politics before you got elected
to the legislature?

Reed: Yes. I ^{completed} ~~was defeated~~ one term. I was recently re-elected.

W.D.V.: You defeated Grey, right?

Reed: Yes.

J.B.: But had you run for political office locally before that?

Reed: Yes. I ran for mayor.

J.B.: That was when?

Reed: That was some eight years ago.

J.B.: What do you think it's going to mean in the legislature next
term from a stand point of having 15 blacks in the legislature instead
of three and having blacks in both the house and the senate? How much
impact is that going to have?

Reed: It would mean a number of things. Deprived, oppressed people
are so deprived and so oppressed as I see it because of the lack of informa-

tion. It's very difficult to keep. . . for people to remain in undesirable status in life if they have information. So with. . . twice as much, three times as much information available to the so-called deprived communities, the black communities, as opposed to the last four years. Really we are multiplying the number of persons here this the upcoming term by four or five. What I'm really saying is that there will be more blacks disseminating information back to their constituency, back to the black community which heretofore was just three of us. Now so far as the effectiveness, being effective, numbers will not necessarily be significant unless we are able to win the support and influence of other members of the legislature. No 15, 13, 11 members in the house and two in the senate--or 13 in the house and two in the senate--can pass a bill. But that number will become significant when it's coupled with the other liberal thinking members and the other members that are basically concerned with the problems that effect the black community. And on the other hand, I see that we will be sought after to use our vote and our influence to pass legislation period. And I don't see much if any truly black or truly white legislation being passed, simply because what's good for the goose is good for the gander. I mean certainly I would encourage members to vote against capital punishment, knowing full well capital punishment is really aimed at blacks, as it has been consistently aimed at blacks throughout this country, not only in the South. Black and poor have been the persons that have been executed in this country. The uninformed, the ill-educated, the black and the poor to who they were. So how effective we will be will depend upon, first of all, what we propose. But I can see no truly black legislation being proposed. Or any truly white legislation being proposed.

W.D.V.: Will there be a black caucus organized?

Reed: I do not see at this point a black caucus per se. Naturally we will talk from time to time. Naturally we will try to decide if this is the best for the total community. Or we will readily identify obnoxious legislation in which we will automatically vote a certain pattern. And along with us, as before, will be a number of whites voting along the same lines in which we vote. For example, the bringing back or restoring of capital punishment in Alabama. Well, I talked against it until I got blue in the face. There are white members who talked against it until they got blue in the face. But the bill passed the house but died in the senate. It met stronger opposition from a larger number of senators than it did from house members. Consequently it passed the house and didn't pass the senate. So that's obvious that whites will be voting the way blacks will be voting, because it's a measure of state-wide consequence and they have determined that they don't want to look back, so to speak. Now as it related to appropriations to private school, or so-called private schools, blacks and whites will be voting because there are white private schools that want state funds and there are black private schools that want state funds. So you will have a natural togetherness there for a purpose.

J.B.: You're speaking of colleges and this. . . .

Reed: Yes. Institutions of higher learning we refer to.

W.D.V.: You anticipate with more than half of the legislature being new and coming from single member districts that you will have a change in the kind of person that's there?

Reed: Change in what?

W.D.V.: Change in the kind of person that's going to be in the legislature?

Reed: Oh, very definitely so.

W.D.V.: Is it going to effect the program that's passed by it?

Reed: Yes, simply because most members, whether they are coming for the first time or whether they're returning, will have the blessings of the blacks in the districts from which they came, although it may have been 10 percent or 30 percent of the vote. I think in only three or four instances where blacks endorsed white candidates they lost. So you will have blacks. . . members from. . . representing labor, the traditional liberal whites, the foreign elements of persons in the legislature, and those have been. . . . They are either returning because of the efforts of the black community. They will be more prone to vote together. As opposed to the last session of the legislature, very few members are there because of the black vote.

J.B.: Is this a reflection of the effectiveness of the Alabama Democratic Conference?

Reed: By all means no. The Alabama Democratic Conference does not have a monopoly on efforts to get blacks and liberals elected to the Alabama legislature. The NAACP, which is the most highly organized organization in the state and in the nation. . . . We are in each county in Alabama, organized. We have a political action committee of each unit. SCIC has played a very visible role in getting blacks registered and elected to public office. Other minor civil rights organizations have played a role. And I see giving credit to no particular group or no particular individual. The Alabama Democratic Conference is unheard of in some counties and is outlawed in others. It's frowned upon in a number of counties. I think it has placed itself in a role that they would wish to be recognized rather than the wishes and the mandate, by the mandates of the people. But it has played roles in which we all appreciate in the

efforts.

J.B.: Well, how significant are their endorsements?

Reed: Heretofore. . . I guess the proof of the thing is in the eating. I think an analysis of their efforts will prove that for the first time they've caused a person running for state-wide office to be elected or that they have endorsed a person running for state-wide office and that person was elected. And I refer to ^{Jere}~~Jeri~~ Beasley. ^{Jere}~~Jeri~~ Beasley could have won, I suspect, without the endorsement of the Alabama Democratic Conference simply because blacks were prone to support ^{Jere}~~Jeri~~ Beasley anyway. And he did not have the full endorsement of the Alabama Democratic Conference. L. Reed
It is my understanding that Mr Joe [Elreed?] and Mr Allan Holmes wanted the record to reflect that they did not endorse Jeri Beasley. But they were overruled in their recommendation, as I understand it, of Mr Woods. Or they were overruled. And the majority of the members in attendance supported Mr Beasley.

W.D.V.: Has the association that you head done anything to help elect other officials?

Reed: NAACP?

W.D.V.: No, the association for elected--

Reed: Black elected officials? Very definitely we have played roles there. We have provided technical assistance. We have given directions of sources of funds, contributions and sources of volunteer help. We've been a source of technical information so far as qualification dates and laws governing the election process. The finer points of how we thought an election could be won.

J.B.: How many members in that association now?

Reed: Black elected and appointed officials? As you know, it

fluctuates from time to time. The last count was 172.

J.B.: What's the most number that's ever attended a meeting?

Reed: The last meeting, public meeting was over 100.

J.B.: Because of the growing number of black elected officials in the state, do you see that organization playing an increased role?

Reed: Yes, after the dust has settled or when we can convince black elected officials that the purpose of a black elected officials association in Alabama is not to support the idea of a Democratic party or a Republican party or the NDPA party or to frown on a man for being elected because he ran on the independent ticket. When the rival factions, those that are vying for leadership, come to the realization that about some things we must all be together on, I see us playing a more effective role.

W.D.V.: When do you see that coming about?

Reed: in the immediate future. Simply because those who have been the agitators of distrust and those who have aided and abetted dissension have somewhat fallen by the wayside. They have not been elected, re-elected to public office and they just won't be around to aid and abet dissension. For example, Gary Cooper, mayor-- Jay Cooper, rather, mayor of Pritchard, has offered a number of times to say "Tom, now you ^{head} have the black elected officials while I head the black mayors. Let's come together. You know, jointly let's as a total unit. Although we might go our separate ways at the beginning, we'll all end up together." What is your idea on supporting this, that or the other? Those are the bright signs that I see.

J.B.: Do you see any similar sort of coalition or joint meetings when there are separate organizations there with the Alabama Democratic Conference?

Reed: There is a meeting being put together that will involve the leadership of all major and minor civil rights organizations and political organizations or organizations that are neither of the two, religious and what have you. There's a meeting being put together now with the idea of bringing all segments of leadership together for the purpose of becoming more acquainted and discussing problems as they see it, see them, that confront the minorities throughout the state of Alabama. And for coming together and jointly deciding that this is what should be and this is the better thing for us at this time.

W.D.V.: What's the difference between those black leaders who hold public office and those who do not? It appears to us that there's a division of opinion here. How does that develop?

Reed: Yes there is somewhat a division of opinion or separate opinions about how the problems can be solved and how you should deal with them, but that. . . . I think we're coming closer together in that all of us are beginning to discover that although he is not an elected official, a public elected official that he has and is still playing a very definite role in the total process for justice and equality. SCLC. An official in SCLC is not a public elected official, but it's obvious that he is the leader of an identifiable group of people that say that this is the man or the woman that we wish to lead us for the next year, two years or four years. And to me he is equally as important in the total effort.

W.D.V.: Is it really not a difference over goals but over strategy and tactics in getting those goals?

Reed: The differences are really so minor until you cannot say that either would be the case. I think the difference may be magnified by the lack of a real effort to pull all of these groups under one umbrella. For

example, although the first official investi-, public hearing on abuse, treatment of inmates was held at the state capital in Montgomery and sponsored by the NAACP, there was broad representation from all spectrums throughout the state represented there and participating without conflict.

W.D.V.: Yes, but there is no state-wide organization into which everybody fits.

Reed: No. I don't think you'll find that in too many places.

W.D.V.: No. And there is no one man, apparently, that can pull it all together.

Reed: Oh, well I disagree there. I think we would respond to invitations from any person that would want to put that sort of a thing together. Some sort of an ad hoc committee coming from those various and sundry groups of people. That was evidenced at the prison hearings, the first public hearing that was held. They responded although it was called by the NAACP. I don't know of any organization that would say "No, we don't want to be bothered because it is the NAACP" or that it is SCIC. I don't know of that much bitterness and dissension. It may be, but I don't know about it.

J.B.: In the past session, did the three black legislators ever meet with the governor to discuss problems effecting blacks?

Reed: No, not three of us.

J.B.: You think 15 might next year?

Reed: Yes, if the opportunity affords itself.

J.B.: What would be required for that?

Reed: If the governor fails to. . . . Well, if we get a mandate from the courts that the governor must appoint 25 percent blacks to all

agencies that he has jurisdiction over and if he fails to do it, I suspect that during the monitoring--as he is monitored--we will find it necessary to say "Governor, as we see it you're dragging your feet. We certainly would hope that it would not be necessary for us to come as a unit because we feel that you understand what is morally right." Or something to that effect. If legislation comes with reference to renewing the capital punishment in Alabama, I would suspect if it passes the senate and if it was awaiting his signature, I would suspect that we would all go in. But I would suspect that other members would want to join us.

W.D.V.: Has he had individual meetings with black legislators?

Reed: Oh, yes, yes.

W.D.V.: When was the first black elected?

Reed: Four years ago.

W.D.V.: But it was not you. Was it you?

Reed: Yes. I was one of the two. There were two of us sworn in, elected. November is the final/filing date, month, to determine elections in Alabama, which you possibly know. You have the primary, as we commonly refer to it. Thirty days later you have what we refer to as the run-off. And then November you have what we call the general election. And persons are only nominated. And they are elected in November. And until that time no one is assured, from the governor on down, that he is elected to public office until the votes are counted on the designated day in November.

W.D.V.: When you first went to that legislature, did you have the experiences you thought you were going to have?

Reed: I was fairly well equipped because of my background. I've taught social studies in high school. I've always tried to be a student of government. As a child I worked in and out of the court houses. And I

tried to read everything I could find to read, everything especially that was current. I had no difficulty adjusting myself. I had been a parliamentarian for several organizations. But you know the rules of the house are rules that are made by members themselves. And the procedures that govern activity in the house of representatives are set forth and changed from time to time. But basic courtesies. . . . If you're equipped with that and basic parliamentarian procedure, you have no difficulty.

W.D.V.: Any of the bills you sponsored get passed?

Reed: About 80 percent of the bills that I sponsored were enacted.

W.D.V.: Were they co-sponsored or were they just introduced by you?

Reed: I introduced some and some were co-sponsored.

W.D.V.: Do you see a wave of legislative reform coming next year because of all the new members and the single member districts? You don't see it coming? Why not?

Reed: Well, that's something people talk more about than legislators respond to. I don't see too much that we are doing wrong. I don't see where we need to reform ourselves too much. I've not been one that has said we had a do nothing legislature. The Alabama legislature was productive. The house was more productive because you measure, I guess, productivity at the end. But the senate was denied the opportunity to act on various pieces of legislation. They plan to change some of their rules which would eliminate this possibility of one man tying up the entire senate as long as he wishes. But the house rules were different in that they did not permit such conduct as was permitted in the senate. So we passed a number of bills and sent them to the senate that the senate did not act on and didn't have the opportunity to act on because the rules permitted the filibuster and what have you and the objection by one man. Which

we didn't have in the house. So consequently we got bills over to them that they never had the opportunity to act on.

W.D.V.: The reason that I asked that is that most states, when they move to a single member district, the prediction is always that that's going to mean reform in terms of annual sessions, more staff, more salary, all that sort of thing. Changing procedure, rules.

Reed: I don't see how we would hope to get more changes this time than we got the last time. Because you only have one member less in the house and one member less in the senate. And the opportunity for reform has always been by majority vote you change what you want changed. By majority vote you let stay what you want to let stay. So I think the [citizenry] are talking more about reform than members of the legislature talk about it. And that's where it's going to come from. From the floor of the legislature.

W.D.V.: But you don't see it coming?

Reed: No, I don't see it. I see upgrading of the process. I don't see too much significant. . . .

J.B.: Beasley got elected with black support this time and Baxley got elected with black support. If it comes down to the two of them, do you see blacks generally lining up behind either of the two candidates or likely to split?

Reed: First of all, I don't think blacks can say that they were responsible for Beasley's election. Because if you make an analysis of the vote, you'll find that Woods received an appreciable number of black votes and if you would take away the black votes that Beasley got and add them to the ones that Woods received, it wouldn't be enough to turn it around. You see what I mean? So being realistic I'm not one just to say

that blacks were responsible for getting Beasley elected to public office. By the same token, blacks could have kept Wallace from being elected. If they were responsible for Beasley being elected, they could have kept Wallace from being elected. And Wallace has consistently won the election without the black vote.

W.D.V.: How do you explain Wallace's hold on this state?

Reed: The absence of personalities or individuals that are able to say what the people want to hear and to recognize where the power really is and does whatever it takes to influence that segment of the population that swings the vote. For example, it's no question about who the Farm Bureau would vote for if a liberal and a conservative were running for public office. There would be no question about who the dairy people, the agriculture people, the industrial people would vote for. Or people in organized labor. There would be no question. On the other hand, there would be no question about who the white citizens council members would vote for and who the Ku Klux Klan would support. And without the support of those groups and other groups, you're just barking up a hollow log.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but most politicians after eight years in office or ten or twelve or so on tend to go down hill. You know, that's it. But he's been dominating this state since 1962.

Reed: I suspect that he will be there as long as he would like to stay or as long as the laws of the state of Alabama would permit him.

W.D.V.: Well, that's '78 unless he runs his wife or somebody else.

Reed: Well, yes. He's prohibited by statute from succeeding himself. But I suspect there will be other areas in which he will come forward. Like for the Senate, for example.

J.B.: Did you support him this year?

Reed: No, I did not.

J.B.: How did you feel about people like the mayor from here supporting Wallace?

Reed: I think that that is a betrayal of the trust of everything that we have fought for down through the years. I think that it was a mistake on his part. I feel that the administration did not appreciate the gesture, based on the various comments that I have gotten. I feel, again, that the Wallace administration would have been better off had he not taken the position that he took. First of all, you want to know who is Johnny Ford? And who is he to say what Macon county and blacks throughout the state are going to do? He has a right to come forward with his point of view, but it fell on deaf ears. He wasn't able to deliver Macon county.

W.D.V.: Did he say he was going to try to?

Reed:

W.D.V.: His argument is that that thing helped the city. It may help the county in terms of state appropriations.

Reed: He doesn't understand how state government works. Macon county, Tuskegee, any other subdivision of the state of Alabama, has line item in the budget. There's nothing that I could do or he could do or even the governor himself to deny Tuskegee what Tuskegee rightfully deserves of the line item of the budget. That's all set forth by law.

W.D.V.: There are no discretionary funds that are not earmarked?

Reed: No, of any--

W.D.V.: Everything line item?

Reed: Not of any major consequence.

W.D.V.: Revenue sharing plans?

Reed: That is more of a line item than you might think.

W.D.V.: It is.

Reed: Even coming out of Washington it says what that money can be spent for. It just so happened we gave the governor permission to spend it. Which, in the final analysis, the governor of any state has the final authority on how monies are spent what on and by categories. And he's prohibited from doing what he would like to do with it. There's just so many things he can do with revenue sharing money himself after he gets.

W.D.V.: So you don't accept that argument then that that builds better relationships with the executive office and therefore you get a better deal when it comes to. . . .

Reed: Well, let's see what has it brought us thus far. What can he show to say that his point of view is fruitful?

W.D.V.: Maybe it's still coming.

Reed: Well, justice too long delayed is justice denied.

W.D.V.: How about with the federal government?

Reed: With the federal government. I think there are other people in the community with political clout. And I think that there again. . . . Alabama is insignificant so far as a national election is concerned. Let's face it. At one time the South was insignificant. You know that. A candidate didn't even spend time in the South. Then the wishes of the black people and those blacks that are in a bargaining position throughout this state and throughout this nation. . . it just so happened that those blacks who are tooting the horns of these people are not in that group that set the pace for the black community throughout this state and throughout the South and throughout the country.

W.D.V.: So you think it was more than just a tactical error?

Reed: More than a tactical error?

W.D.V.: If you viewed it as a tactic, as a way to have entree to the federal, to the White House to the various departments to endorse Nixon and also as a tactic to get better consideration from Montgomery to the governor's office, you don't think as a tactic it's going to work?

Reed: No. I do not. I do not.

W.D.V.: Then he would have a very serious problem with the black community.

Reed: I think he has. I think he has. When I say the black community I mean the total black community throughout this state and throughout this nation. They did not buy the argument that he put forward.

J.B.: How about in this city?

Reed: What do you mean?

W.D.V.: Well, do they buy the argument here?

J.B.: Do they buy the argument here? Can he get re-elected I guess is the question?

Reed: He hasn't had an opportunity for re-election. He's midway his first term.

J.B.: But presumably, if there's opposition, that's going to be a big issue at least in the black community.

Reed: Yes, it will be.

J.B.: And I presume there'll be opposition.

Reed: I suspect there will. I suspect there will.

W.D.V.: I don't want to keep belaboring this, but it seems to us there's a basic division on this. Some of the blacks we've talked to believe that in terms of strategy and tactics, it doesn't mean a damn thing what you do as long as there are results coming out of it. If it means more

federal money or more state money, which means more jobs and so on for blacks, then that's the way to go.

Reed: Well, maybe you haven't talked to enough blacks.

W.D.V.: I'm sure we haven't. But we've talked to quite a few. I'm saying we do find those two basic approaches. And the argument is "Look, we all have the same goals. You know, we're all united on the same issues. It's the way, how to get there."

Reed: I think if a poll was taken it would show that by far the majority of blacks do not buy his argument.

J.B.: Including locally.

Reed: Yeah, I mean locally. Well, I would say. . . I meant locally, but I would expand it to state-wide, region-wide and national-wide. I know! There's no question about that. How many blacks have you heard come forward and. . . what blacks of any substance has come forward with that argument? Name them. Name them.

J.B.: We're not defending it. . . I'm trying to understand it and that's why. . . .

Reed: I think the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has on its national board of directors what we consider the leadership of the black community and the liberal community, white community. I think SCLC has, for most part, the same composition of leadership. Southern Regional Council. SNCC. CORE. But how many people from CORE have come forward with that idea? Only one that I know anything about. None from the NAACP. None from SCLC. None from SNCC. None from Church Women United. None from the Negro Business League. None from the Urban League. You haven't had a handful of black folk to come forward with that argument. And I don't know one of any substance that has come forward with

that argument.

J.B.: Then you would expect him to be repudiated at the polls next time?

Reed: Well, it's a long time between now and the time he comes up for re-election. A lot of things can happen.

W.D.V.: If he produces the economic development. The jobs. Then what happens?

Reed: Blacks are not saying if you provide jobs we'll forget about the past. We'll forgive you of all your sins, transgressions. We're not saying that. We never will say that. You know that. Blacks for the most part that are equipped to do work are employed. They may be underemployed, but they're basically employed. Those blacks that are underemployed and unemployed, they must be upgraded by real leadership of the black community. And the people that they are going to rely on to upgrade themselves don't drink out of that same dipper that you're talking about. You can not bring 500 jobs into Macon county and then a poll would be taken and that poll would reveal that blacks have changed their mind about Nixon. Nixon could set a mint machine up in Macon county. The rank and file blacks and the majority of blacks would still vote against Nixon come, what, '76.

W.D.V.: But how would they feel about Ford? He had help to get that.

Reed: Well, when I said Nixon I mean any person either is on his team or trying to call the shots for him is the same thing. There's just no way to spit in a black man's face, call him everything but a child of God, then come up and give him a Cadillac and you forget about the past. It just doesn't work like that.

J.B.: What's your attitude on this question everybody asks: Has George Wallace changed? Meaning has he changed because of the experience of being shot, being near death at one time, or has he merely adjusted to changing circumstances of increasing black voters and changing times and whites getting kind of tired of hearing the racial rhetoric?

Reed: You almost answered your own question. Whites, in Alabama, have come, for the most part--a large number of whites have come to the realization that they have been misled. And throughout the South and throughout this nation. About black people. They have been denied the opportunity to associate with blacks. Consequently they have been blocked out from information with reference to black people. And when they were permitted first of all to associate, physically associate with blacks, they had a chance to learn first hand what has been said some has been true and some has not been true about black people. And on the other hand, blacks learned the same thing about whites. Wallace. . . Nixon could call for the return of segregation and discrimination. They would be just as far away from it now as they would be 50 years from now. What I'm saying is Americans have decided--and we must realize that Americans didn't have to obey the mandates of the court, did they? Did they? This white waitress does not have to say "Mr Smith would you like another cup of coffee?" or "May I remove this? It's soiled. I'll bring you another napkin." That white woman still does not have to say that to a black man. She could just quit her job, couldn't she? She could just refuse to work for him. But how many has refused to work because the manager says "Now you're going to wait on everybody who come in here be he Jew or Gentile." You see? On the other hand, what white has refused to send his child to the University of Alabama because blacks are going to the

University of Alabama? You can't find any evidence of that. The private school population at the higher level is not increased significantly. But on the other hand I think the trend is toward, is a decrease in enrollment.

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--where ever he goes, he's going to find people of various backgrounds, various religions, various nationalities. So I think Americans themselves have come to the determination that certain things have been basically wrong and that there is a more appropriate way to deal with the problem.

W.D.V.: Is it true, in that regard, that Wallace, by exploiting the fear of the unknown, was able to keep the races apart that much longer than in other places? You talk about leadership. Is that what his function or his role was in this state? Is that what the impact was?

Reed: When he talked of segregation. . .?

W.D.V.: Or exploit the fear of the unknown and keep the thing boiling like that for so many years?

Reed: That was what was expedient to do at that time to gain public office or to remain in public office. It was no way to get elected to public office in Alabama had he taken any other course. That's evidenced in that there were whites, so-called liberals, running for the governor of the state of Alabama.

W.D.V.: Even in 1970?

Reed: Yes, yes.

W.D.V.: the open exploitation of race as a major issue in a state-wide campaign stopped in most states before 1970.

Reed: Oh, sure.

W.D.V.: But it was critical here, wasn't it?

Reed: Yes. . . well, someone had to be last to get the message. Just so happened Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama were the last to get the message. Maddox had his , four years ago too, didn't he? Yes.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but he lost. Jimmy Carter won.

J.B.: Got elected lieutenant governor.

Reed: Yeah. And who's predicted to be elected governor this time?

W.D.V.: He won't make it.

Reed: Well, I wouldn't bet a dime.

W.D.V.: I would.

J.B.: I wouldn't.

W.D.V.: He may come in first in the primary, but he'll never make the run-off.

Reed: I hope he doesn't. But, being realistic. . . .

W.D.V.: Although I guess I was asking a broader question. What has been the impact of Wallace on this state's politics since 1962? Is that the principle ?

Reed: Since '62?

W.D.V.: Since he came in office.

Reed: changed. His impact has changed. From the time that he shouted segregation today, tomorrow and forever he was applauded like no person in public life has ever been applauded. But now I would be prone to say he would be booed if he said that in Birmingham or Montgomery or Tuscaloosa or Tuskegee. It's obvious that he felt that that was not the proper thing to say when he ran this time. He spoke. . . he made no mention of segregation and discrimination and turning the clock

back. I don't recall.

J.B.: But your reaction to that is that Wallace is merely adjusting to changed circumstances rather than any change in Wallace.

Reed: I would not venture to say whether he has changed as an individual or not. But I would say that he has . . . he saw fit to keep a close watch on the mood of the general public as to what they would accept at this time and what they would not accept.

W.D.V.: One of the blacks we talked to said that in order for him to believe that Wallace really changed, he's have to do three things. Appoint blacks to boards and commissions in this state. See that blacks were hired in the state government in proportion to the population. And third, to come out and say "Look, I was wrong. I'm sorry I was wrong." Then he would believe.

Reed: That's not evidence enough to believe that he has changed. That would be evidence enough to believe that he still recognizes he must do what is expedient to be done in order to remain alive politically. I'm concerned more about getting mandates from the courts and laws on the books than I am about individuals and as to whether they will change or not. For example, I did not prevail upon the governor to hire black state troopers. I went before the legislature and asked that they hire black state troopers. But when they refused or rejected me there, I went into federal court. And so far as that question is concerned, it's settled. Blacks will constitute 25 percent of the work force of the state patrol, Department of Public Safety, period. The highest ranking black woman in the department of public safety is the assistant secretary of the state NAACP. It's not. . . to me, you don't try to change individuals. You try to change law under which all of us live.

W.D.V.: Yes, but a governor could provide the leadership that would really accelerate that.

Reed: I wouldn't trust, at this point, any governor to provide that type of thing and say that I honestly believe that this is what he's going to do. Simply because you point out one governor in the United States that has done what we're talking about that's desirable to be done. New York has fewer blacks in its state police force than Alabama has. Yet they are alleged to have been liberal since the beginning. California has fewer blacks than does Alabama, yet it is supposed to have been liberal down through the years. I'm told you only have four blacks in the California assembly. Alabama now has 13, possibly 15, 18, possibly 25. You see.

W.D.V.: You're saying that one sure way to get this is through the federal judiciary.

Reed: That, I think, really would be. . . is going to be the answer to the problems effecting society--

W.D.V.: If you're going to get social change, that's the route to go in terms of getting it rapidly.

Reed: Yes. And you know, this tokenism that these governors of Illinois and Indiana, New York has practiced. . . . I have less appreciation for that than what is happening in the deep South. Simply because blacks are finally discovering that they are left out of the mainstreams of things in New York and Illinois as much or more so as in Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee. Even in the area of public education. Some Northern states had no black principals. While on the other hand, some had one or two. Three to five. Alabama had as many as 500 to 600 black principals. And I suspect. . . .

J.B.: How many do they have now?

Reed: We have less than 50.

W.D.V.: Would you agree with a black who moved up from I guess it was Mississippi to Michigan. He said the difference was that in Michigan the rhetoric was very liberal and the results very conservative. In Mississippi the rhetoric was conservative and the results are conservative. know where you stood.

Reed: Yes, that's generally [accepted?] again. The [sublimation?] But listen, we must recognize that no race or no nation has stooped to raise another race or another nation unless they did it to project themselves or to sustain their possibility of survival. People must be concerned about themselves. People that find themselves laboring under similar circumstances must make that first step themselves. Had we not gone into the federal courts and left it for Alabama to decide that they were wrong about not hiring blacks in the department of public safety, we'd possibly would have had five black state troopers or two or three blacks at various other levels in the department of public safety. I don't know anything that would tell me anything different. Else we didn't need the Supreme Court decision. We didn't need the anti-lynch laws. We didn't need any other decisions that we got. Or we would say we don't ever have to go into court again.

J.B.: Who has had more impact upon the life of Alabama citizens in the last ten years? George Wallace or Frank Johnson?

Reed: Well, if it were not for George Wallace you probably wouldn't have heard of Frank Johnson. I would say that. . . oh, let's see. We might be glad that George Wallace came along. We might would have had a so-called liberal governor that would have sugar-coated and gave token

appointment of blacks. And we would have been just like blacks in some other sections of the country who just haven't seen the light. They still haven't seen the light. They still feel that simply because you can physically mix and mingle, that's it. See? And I don't know who has had the greatest impact. I thank God oftentimes for Judge Johnson and I'm just wondering was it not God's wishes and will that George Wallace come on the scene. And when you say George Wallace in Alabama, I don't think it's even fair to limit it to him as an individual. There are thousands and thousands, millions of George Wallaces in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, California.

J.B.: What was your reaction to Senator Kennedy's coming here last year?

Reed: I didn't see fit to attend the occasion. I saw Kennedy coming responding to an invitation as a basic courtesy gesture. I don't think he came to court the Wallacites. I'd rather think he responded to an invitation, a common courtesy. And secondly, to see and be seen. I don't think he felt that this was something he must do to further enhance his chances of becoming president of the United States.

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

Reed: Not necessarily.

W.D.V.: If you think back to the days of 1962 and 1963 and so on, over ten years ago, could you have foreseen the changes that have occurred in racial relations in this county or in this state?

Reed: Yes.

W.D.V.: You could have? Why?

Reed: There were so many things that pointed in that direction. And the thing that I observed most of all was a feeling more or less on the part

of blacks themselves that we're tired and we're no longer going to be subjected to this type of treatment and we're not going to continue to grow up and be left out of things. I saw it coming. And it is for that reason that I stayed to make sure that I would play maybe a minor role in that change. As a number of other blacks. There was no question though. It started before '64, '62 and '60. Blacks seem to have been determined that they were not going to live under conditions in which they'd lived the past 10, 15, 20 years or all their lives. And there were whites as equally determined that this trend should be reversed, that it's morally wrong. There's a lot of work to be done yet. We still are not out of the woods. When you have a prison system with 80 percent of the men in prison black and 90 percent of the women in prison black, it goes back to unequal treatment in the courts. It goes back to magnify the idea that the poor and less affluent are the ones you're going to find being sent to prison. When you look at certain departments of state government and federal government here in the state of Alabama, where the federal government employs 52,000 and less than 10 percent of those are black yet we constitute 26.4 percent of the population. When you look at the federal government, less than 10 percent of those people are black. Now they are running the percentages up for a number of reasons to say that it's greater than 10. But 90 percent of that 10 is in what we call the mop and broom department. The number of post masters in the state and the small number of black post masters. The appointments--federal and state appointments--have not gone to blacks. It's still a lot to be done. And there's only one fear that I have. And I see I'm losing more and more of that everyday. That since the barriers have been broken where we can communicate and where we can mix and mingle, that we might forget that the main thrust is equity

in proportion to the population. But I'm not as concerned about that now as I was two or three years ago.

J.B.: You find a growing determination among blacks?

Reed: Yes, among blacks.

J.B.: Let me ask you this question about Wallace and how you perceive him, or how you perceive that most blacks in Alabama perceive him. Is it a question that George Wallace, because of his record in so far as politics is concerned, is beyond redemption?

Reed: I don't think that too much time should be spent looking back. You look back just long enough to see which is the right fork in the road to take. If we spend too much time talking about yesterday, unless we're using that to determine which route we should take today, we might still miss the boat. Instead of saying to our people how we were mistreated eight, ten, twelve years ago, surely we should be forever mindful of that, but we should try to use that time and that energy advising our people which forward road to take. I could have been still crying about the lack of blacks being in the department of public safety. I never would have gone to the federal courts and brought charges against the state of Alabama and won the case. It never would have happened. I think we should take a look at what needs to be done in the next six months, twelve months, eighteen months, two years, and work in that direction as fast as we can. And use a check off system and never stop, regardless of whether Wallace appoints five people in the next six months.

[Interruption.]

I don't know. We can talk on and on, but. . . . I'm one of the ones--and I know there are many--that are determined that blacks get their rightful share in the state of Alabama. not become satisfied with tokenism.

Because I think really the salvation of democracy is by a strong and a satisfied citizenry. I don't see discontented people willing to continue to defend. But we have moved to the point--and thank God we have moved to the point--that we as blacks. . . I think we recognize there are more people in this country that mean to do right as opposed to those that are bent on doing wrong. Something very interesting happened up on questioning persons who have spent five, ten, fifteen, twenty years in prison. Most of them felt that they were sent to prison unjustly so. They wasn't given a fair shake. But invariably, every one that was questioned would you be willing to defend this country in the event that the president directs you to do so, they would answer to the affirmative. That was really interesting. And these were blacks. Ninety percent of these people were blacks. We did not find a single person, whether he spent five years, ten years or twenty years in prison, whether he thought that it was just or not, that said that he would not defend this country. And I would be one who would always advocate that let's save the country and then get the bugs and snakes out later, you know. I think that has been the black man's salvation. Loyalty to this country. Has impressed other people. Although they would not say it openly that they are impressed and appreciate the loyalty of the black man. But I think they do.

J.B.: How would you feel if George Wallace were on the presidential Democratic ticket?

Reed: I would have a feeling unlike I've ever had, I expect. And I couldn't hardly describe it because I've never had that kind of feeling. I suspect that's the best way I can answer that.

J.B.: What would that feeling be, though?

Reed: Having not had it, I don't know how it would be. I just couldn't

answer that.

J.B.: Would it be just a feeling of sinking or. . . . The implication is that it would be one of total revulsion, but I don't [want to misinterpret]. . . .

Reed: If we have not sunk under the Nixon administration, I don't know of any other administration that could. . . . You know, if we survived under the Nixon administration, I suspect we could survive under the leadership of any person. I would suspect so. In my estimation, Nixon has out Wallaced Wallace. And we're still around. The country hasn't fallen apart. You know, democracy is not centered around any one individual or any one small cluster of people. Nixon is really insignificant in so far as the security of this country is concerned. I guess you're surprised to hear that, but you probably know more about that than I do. If that was in the hands of one individual, he'd be in bad shape. Wouldn't you think so?

W.D.V.: Be down the tube.

J.B.: Sure would.

[End of interview.]