

Interview with Robert Clark, representative from Homes county, Mississippi, March 28, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Bass: The county-wide meeting in Homes county is what?

Clark:

the  
Freedom Democratic party, where you have about 17 communities throughout Homes county and they meet on a regular basis. Some every week. Supposed to be every week, but some bi-weekly, some monthly. Then, once a month they have all these precincts and communities come together for the countywide meeting. And you not only have all of the precincts coming there from, you know, each community being represented, but you have all of the civil rights and anti-poverty organizations and economic development organizations. And everything in the black community comes in and comes together. And everybody give a progress report on what they have done and assess the last meetings. And then, if there are any problems, then these problems are thrown out before the county wide and they are thrashed out there. But major problems comes from the community to the FDP executive board. Then the executive board takes action. And if the action is negative or positive, then it has to come to the county wide for final approval. Now this is very much the way that the county's running.

De Vries: Does it work or is it cumbersome?

Clark: It has worked, but it needs overhauling, definitely. You know, the method is not outdated, but we need to add to it. Because, you know, when you have this type of democracy, this causes people to grow. You know, we might have started out some years ago with just a very few leaders, people that could serve in leadership positions. See, but when

you have this type of meetings in various communities, then individuals will grow. And you will develop new leaders. And if you aren't very careful you'll find your new leaders and your old leaders fighting. The old leaders will be fighting, trying to hold on and the new leaders will be fighting for position in leadership. But the reason I'm saying that it has to be updated is that we, the old leadership, got to make room for the new individuals that are trying to develop. In other words, they're doing something and really they don't realize how great it is what they're doing. They don't realize that they're developing other people. And once they're developed, they're not going to stay <sup>dormant</sup> ~~dominant~~, you know. They're going to want to become active. And it works.

Bass: Well, if you can work that out that would be a real contribution to human development.

De Vries: That's the problem with every political *organization*. Once you develop a leadership you got to put it someplace. You may have to relocate some other people.

Clark: Well, I think it's enough up at the top for a heck of a lot of folk to do. Positions. And if everybody were like me, you know, didn't mind sharing leadership, positions, and don't mind sharing decision-making and don't mind giving other individuals tasks and etc. You know, it wouldn't be no problem. Because I feel just like this, you know, the ship <sup>has</sup> ~~shifted~~ got to move on. And as long as I can be the captain on the ship, or one of the captains somewhere, I'm good. But when the waters become too tough, you know, throw me overboard and let the ship move on. But it ain't many that feel like that.

Bass: Are you a native of Homes county?

Clark: Yes I am.

Bass: And you were a school principal.

Clark: I had been a principal within a school system. I never have been a principal per se, you know, just with a school of my own. Like in a high school, you know, where you had building superintendent then you'd have a high school principal and an elementary principal. And twice I served in that position. But likewise I was a full time classroom teacher plus a coach at the time when I was drawn back. Taught for 14 years.

Bass: What do you do now in addition to serving in the legislature?

Clark: Now I don't do a damn thing but serve my people. In other words its a full time job with part-time pay. And that's what makes it very difficult because, you know, when a black person get in politics--you don't get in politics--at least in the early days you couldn't afford to get out there and just say "It's my job to go to Jackson. And I'm down there 90 days a year to write laws and that's it." But whatever the people's problems are, they're your problems. What I do, I advise the people and serve them. And that ranges from practicing law--which I'm not a lawyer--to social service programs and everything else. A person might want to come to me--he'd gone to a lawyer. A lawyer advises him on something. Well, you know, he doesn't have any confidence in, maybe he doesn't have any confidence in the lawyer. Maybe he's been hoodwinked before. . And then he's going to bring it by you. Maybe the lawyer's drawn up some deeds, ~~or~~

. He's going to bring it by you for you to check it out. Maybe he has tried to get on food stamps. The food stamp program. He's going to come by you for you to help him. He's trying to get on social security. He's going to come by you for you to help him. Or whatever he needs. Or *he has* an insurance case. If it has been settled or before he goes to settle it. He's going to come by you and ask you. Maybe getting a birth certificate. Lot of black folks don't have birth

certificates. It winds up being a full time job 24 hours per day.

Bass: You've been in the legislature now how long?

Clark: Six and a half years. This term here will be my seventh term in the legislature.

Bass: In your opinion, why have there been no other blacks elected?

Clark: The reason why no other blacks have been elected--its a compound reason I would say. Number one, lots of areas I would say have been gerrymandered in the respect where you have black counties, black majorities. Then districts have been consolidated with districts with a white majority which has lessened the chances of blacks winning. And in other areas where you have black majorities, those counties have been hooked with other counties that have black majorities. And the greater the area, the less the chance for a black being elected. That's one thing why many blacks have not been elected. Another reason is that I would say political immaturity, which means that the black politician--who strictly doesn't know what it's all about. Strictly from the school of civil rights and he's out there trying to campaign against the white community and the white community is very well mature in this thing. You better believe it. And it simply means that many times the white candidates come right in the black candidate's back yard and do a better job politically than he does and just beat the hell out of him. You see, many of our candidates and many of our campaigns are still run like they were run in the early civil rights days, when you're talking about people waving their fists or calling them up, ~~or telling them~~

~~or what have you.~~ But you can't kick people in the butt and expect them to vote for you, you know. If you go into an area, maybe the people in this area is pretty crazy about some white fellow and you know that. And they're pretty sewed up on him. Okay, you're not running against him. You lay off that. Don't say anything about it. But what



you do is talk about, you know, these are *problems* here. They got problems. But deal with the problems that they have and that you're going to try and solve. In other words, if you deal with the positive rather than with the negative, you know, we'll do better. Now those are some of the falacies I have seen *in* black politics and I've been involved in quite a bit of it. And *a* black candidate simply has a harder time winning in the black community than does a white candidate. A black candidate simply got to sell himself. He got to be almost flawless. If they can find any speck on him, there's enough blacks not going to vote for him for him not to be elected. They would rather a *crooked* white make it to office than a black that they think will misrepresent them. Now the reason behind that--you know, whenever I hear people make statements I don't go along with, I don't jump on them for it but I, you know, simply be cool and try to find out why. But if you disagree or get angry with them then you never find out. Well, their reason is simply this. If we elect a black man to office that can't do the job that will be a disgrace to us and the black race will be set back 50 more years. And we're not interested in being set back. And you know, sometimes like when I be helping people involved in black campaigns and trying to help people get elected, I don't make too many meetings like I used to. Talking about going around speaking at political rallies. I will speak at political rallies, but I would rather go into the black community and sit right on the streets during the day and deal with the people. That way you can actually find out what their problems are. Because when you go to the political rallies that they have--talking about black campaigns now--9 out of every 10 that comes to the meeting, he going to vote for that candidate anyway. You're not worried about them. But the ones you're worried about are the ones you're

not getting. And when I move into a community and begin to move around where the people are--the barber shops or just sitting on the streets--and began to talk about, you know, individuals. "I'm going to support this guy." "Why?" "Well, isn't he your brother, black brother?" "I hope he can do the job." "Well, don't you want to give him a chance? We've had others, and they *didn't do the job*." "Well, I tell you. We're struggling. And if we put this guy up there and he can't do the job it's going to be a disgrace on the black race and we'll be set back 50 years. And we done come too far to get set back." In other words they take what I would say is a liability and make an asset out of it.

Bass: So then <sup>the</sup> effect the technique used in the civil rights movement, to exhort people into attack, those who don't go along--when you try using that same technique politically it results in dividing the people who must be united in a political campaign.

Clark: That's exactly right. Now many of our strongest civil rights leaders are good people. You can't beat them. Like Hartman Tunbow in <sup>l</sup>Homes county in the early days, you know, got out there to help organize FDP. Fannie Lou ~~Haymer~~ <sup>Haymer</sup>. This is one of the strongest individuals anywhere in the world. But people like that had difficulty when it came to the political arena because they had to do the things that they did, the tactics they used, they had to do that. And back in those days the black vote didn't have nowhere else to go. I mean you could afford to do it. You had to do it to arouse them. But in doing so, you know, they created quite a few enemies in doing it. They had to do it. But nowadays black folk have somewhere to go to because when you turn away from you the white community's standing there with their arms wide open saying "Come on to me." And all they want is to get a certain percent of the black vote and forget about the rest of them.

De Vries: Do you get any white votes to speak of in <sup>l</sup>Homes county?

Clark: I did get white votes.

De Vries: Enough to be decisive? Roughly what percentage would you estimate? The percentage of the white vote that voted.

Clark: I'd say maybe 2-5%. It's not a large number, but that's--in some precincts, you know, you get a pretty good block of white votes. In two or three precincts. In most every precinct in Holmes county, maybe with the exception of one or two, I did carry a pretty good block of white votes.

Bass: In addition to the gerrymandering, do multi-numbered districts also make it difficult for blacks to get elected?

Clark: That's what I said. Multi-numbered districts--

Bass: You said gerrymandering.

Clark: Yes, like joining counties together. Now for example down in the delta area you might have two black counties joined together. But their area is larger, see, which means a multi-number district. You might have three members from two counties. Therefore it is that if you just have to cut down to one county the chances would be less.

De Vries: Isn't it also difficult to recruit black candidates who can afford to run for the legislature?

Clark: They don't know that. Because they're running. You know, they see me out there and they think I'm living like a king. They don't know the hell I'm catching trying to make a living.

Bass: Well, how do you make a living?

Clark: I ain't. I'm going in debt every day I stay in office.

De Vries: Does your wife work?

Clark: My wife works part-time. She's a part-time bookkeeper. However I do have a very small furniture operation but the reason I have the furniture operation was because during campaign time in 71--before I simply had no office and noplac for people to come in and meet me and

I went into business so I could have an office and be able to afford to have a person who could sit and answer the phone. This business have not made me no money, me and my family. The only thing it does it takes care of overhead expenses and pay the individuals that work there.

De Vries: When you were first elected in 67 and you got here, was it a hell of a lot different than you thought it was going to be?

Clark: No, I was set for it.

De Vries: What was it like?

Clark: When I was first elected and came in they told me to come in the south entrance. I don't know why they told me to come in the south entrance, but somebody told me. Why they told me that was because senator Bilbo's ~~picture~~ <sup>statute</sup> faces the south and they said that Jim Eastland had told them to have me come in that way. That Bilbo was going to stop me. [laughter] And after he didn't stop me I understand Jim Eastland got on the phone and called Bilbo and asked him why he didn't stop me and what was all this about. Bilbo told Jim, said "Jim, when I left Mississippi I left it in your hands, best hands I thought I could find. I'm surprized that you're letting that nigger come in there." And Jim Eastland told Bilbo, said "Well, Bilbo when you left here we didn't have all these damn civil right laws and long hairs and everything. We got them here now and there isn't a damn thing I can do about it." And Bilbo said "Yeh, Jim, we got some damn nigger firemen down here, and there isn't anything I can do about it either." [laughter] So, we came in and they told me to go to the back of the capital, back of the house, and march to the front. I didn't know where in the world it was because I never had been here before. Find out later why they wanted me to do that. Cause that's where they had the cameras and things set up. One gentleman, Marvin Henderson from Philadelphia, who was here in the legislature during the time of Bilbo--old fellow--he broke up two

men. I didn't know what to expect. He was a big fellow, oh, about 6'6" and weighed about 260. And I didn't know if this guy was coming to throw me out or what. But I just placed myself and he was coming at a half trot, he was coming to greet me. He was from Philadelphia, but if I had known he was from Philadelphia at that time there's no way I would be standing there when he got there. [laughter] He got defeated this time, but however he was one of the best friends I've had. The first friend I had and one of the best friends I've had in the legislature. And, you know, when we would go to the *legislature* social gatherings and etc. at first I would go in, sit down at a table. I more or less had a full table by myself, with all the food, everything on the table. I guess that's why I picked up this weight--from 175 to 230--because I would sit at the table by myself. So finally, as I can remember, one night Bill Minor of the Picyune Times came and sat with me. Then gradually, one by one, and after a period of two or three years, things began to break down. And at first if I would get up and talk on an issue it simply means that it was defeated. If I talked for it, they'd vote against it. A majority would, all except maybe one or two. But then things began to change and there was, you know, three or four that would have nerves enough to vote with me, vote the way I voted. And now it's to a point where if I talk on something and if they're mind is made up, they're going to vote for it. They're not going to vote against it. I even went so far, when I first came here, if it was something I wanted bad enough, I'd get up and talk against it. I'd get up and raise hell talking against it. And then when voting time came around I'd vote for it. Guys could not afford to <sup>be</sup> my colleagues at that time to go back home, you know, and say "They voted with me on *this bill* ." And finally I would have guys come by my desk and tell me "Now senator Clark I wanted to vote with you on that. You were

right. But I want to come back up here. And I've got a hell of a lot of rednecks back home and if I do that, I'm just going to tell you straight, that they're not going to send me back." Well, that was kind of things, you know, I could understand. And I could understand some of the hostility. I'm not saying that I accepted it, but I knew what it was going to be like. And in many instances it was a hell of a lot better than I thought it would be. Like various times--like nigger and etc.-- I was here seven years before I heard that used on the floor of the house. That wasn't used on the floor of the house until this term of the legislature.

Bass: When was it used this term? What was the circumstances?

Clark: It was the death penalty, the death penalty bill was before the house. No, it wasn't the death penalty bill, but when one bill was before the house and being argued and one of my colleagues say "You mean, I had a nigger boy back home who took a club and just beat a white sheriff to death--and you mean that nigger wouldn't be put to death for that?" And he used the term three or four times, but it was something to do with the death penalty. And basically what he was trying to do-- now this did not carry with the house. And 99.9% of the members of the house resented him very much, resented very much him saying that. And I personally know after he used it the second time around--

--I personally know that several of my colleagues and maybe more have gone to him and told him "Damn it, don't use that term on the floor of the house no more. If you do, we're going to set you down." The basis of what he was trying to do--he was trying to play the old-time Mississippi politics. It used to be a time--like I remember when--if you came out as a white man and ran this time on your record and if you didn't get elected, the next time you come out you holler nigger,

nigger, nigger, nigger. You see. And basically, that's what this guy was trying to do. He was trying to win favor of the house. Thought if he used the term nigger. But due to the fact that black folk now have the right to mark the ballot, they are beginning to get the respect of the white politician. And speaking, they have a hell of a lot more respect of the white politician than they know that they have. They got power that they're not using. There's lots more things they could demand in the political arena if they'd do it. But for some reason they don't demand it. Sometimes--the black community is still a little hostile and don't want to become a part of the white political structure. But I feel like this: I don't care if you're white, yellow or whathave-you. If you're my sheriff, if you're my supervisor, and you spend my tax money, I'm going to demand things of you. Until the time comes for me to try to elect somebody else, whether I voted for you or not. You see, you're spending my tax money. Black folks, if they would begin to put pressure on elected officials, they'd get a hell of a lot more done than they're getting done now.

De Vries: You think that the change in the attitudes of the legislators in the last six and a half years reflect a change that occurred in the state or are they atypical?

Clark: Yes sir. There is a change in the legislature, and this change in the legislature came because there was a change in the state. Now for example, this little bill right here that doesn't mean very much to some folk. But that means a hell of a lot to me. I've seen time when a bill like that would not have gotten out of committee. A consumer protection bill. We know the essence of that bill. We know what it's trying to do. We know who the folk are that's too lazy to work and get in a car and go around and hoodwink the poor folk. We know who the folk



are that going to run down our community and set up their own store and charge folk a hell of a price, high price for their goods. We know that's just white folk hoodwinking black folk. You don't see black white nowhere in that bill. But every legislator here know what that bill is saying to them. So this within itself, you know, to a person like me, shows me that there have been a change in attitudes in the legislature.

Bass: And do you think that bill passed solely because blacks are now voting?

Clark: Solely because blacks are now voting.

Bass: But do you think blacks generally would perceive that?

Clark: Many will not. But every opportunity that I have gotten, you know, I have talked about it. It's not that I'm trying to pretend, you know, that the legislators are so great and they've done so many things for black folk. But I think whenever you make progress you need to know about it, sometimes. You don't need to always be beat over the head. And I think that the black population of this state needs to know that the legislature has passed a bill dealing specifically--you know, it's going to deal with everybody who misuses anybody--but that deals almost specifically with black folk. Where white folk have been manipulating ~~[niggerating?]~~ black folk. They need to know this and if you once realize that you're making progress then, you know, you'll move forward and make more progress.

Bass: Is there any sort of a state-wide black political organization?

Clark: At the present there is not. I'm very sorry of it. We had state wide FDP that met the last time 5 years ago. And the FDP basically had to be carried by people who was, you know, working in various other programs, but ~~various anti-poverty programs,~~ etc., it made it difficult for an individual to continue to live off

nothing, like I've had to do, like I've tried to do--my first four years in office I ran all over the state for free. But, you know, I would like to go to Biloxi, ~~or~~ , or Greenville whenever I'm called. And that's everyday if I go. But you simply can't go off for nothing, you know. *You* write him a check to get gasoline and hoping that you have some money to cash the check before it gets back to the bank. That's the kind of life you have to live if you're going to-- you know, talking about trying to keep a state wide black organization going. But FDP has not functioned on a state wide basis in the last five years. About the nearest thing to a black state wide organization you have--and I would not want to implicate them--is the NAACP. This is one of the ways which black folk get their wishes, you know, communicated on a state wide basis. You have the loyal Democrats, which is 99% black. That was the coalition group, which I'm a member of also, that unseated the regulars in 1968 at Chicago, national Democratic convention. And again in 72 we got the call and represented in Florida, Miami. But the regulars, the state Democratic party, they have the election and we have the call. Now, I've mentioned the NAACP and the loyal Democrats. You have various anti-poverty programs that come together. Various agencies that comes together from all over the state. For example, you have your Head Start Association. And these individuals are not only concerned when they are off their job, not just when they're on their job. They're not only concerned about Head Start per se, but they're concerned about the development of the total community. And it is through a series of organizations like this where now black folk are trying to get their wishes. And you have some programs like MACE-- Mississippi Action Community Education--that have economic and social development programs in about 19 counties. And you have Delta Ministry in approximately 20 counties. And organizations like this sets up a

network of blacks. However, I'm not satisfied at all with the work that's being done on the grass roots level. Grass roots organizing. The thing that made Mississippi famous, you know, back in the early 60s and mid 60s--now this is not going on now. And why, where it is-- I realize that we can't just do nothing but organize. But you can't never cease to organize. You have to let organizers be a part of your overall activities. But resources are very limited. Now I would like to--I wished I could when session was out--I wished I could just go into areas, down to the black areas, not only predominantly black areas but areas of the state and begin to deal with black *problems*, and begin to get them organized for the 76 election. I feel that I have some expertise that other folk in the state have, you know, lot of other folk--I'm not saying I'm the only one. But I definitely have some expertise that I could pass on to many of the campaigns that I've seen. You know, it's simply a matter of fact, of human relations. How can you deal with those people who stands for a good cause .

They want the same thing you want. They're trying to go the same way you are, you know. But they're just using a different approach. Or maybe using a different route to get there. He wants to approach it this way and I want to approach it that way. It doesn't make him bad, or it doesn't make me on the toe because we want to use different approaches to do the same thing. The thing I want to do is to be able to move into the community to teach black folk to work together for the good of themselves. And even in areas where you don't have a black majority, I mean, you've got to rally behind one candidate or the other. You know, it's definitely got to be as much a bloc vote as possible. And, you know, just because you don't have a black majority doesn't mean that these blacks should be thrown away to the dogs. You know, get behind any candidate, the best one, and when you put him in office, let him know

you put him in. And I guarantee he'll be responsive to you.

Bass: Do you in effect have a state wide constituency? From the standpoint, do blacks from other counties other than Homes county come to you with problems dealing with state government?

Clark: Very much so, they do. However the problem is not as great now as it has been in the past for coming to me because I own a series of state wide television programs, you know, across the five year period-- here in Jackson, in Greenville, Meridian, on the Gulf Coast and other places--that is one thing that I have emphasized: you elected your senators and your representatives, whether you voted for them or not, they're yours. And use them. You elected your sheriffs and deputies and etc. So use them. This is one of the things some of my colleagues say "Clark sure turned the people loose on you." I'm not turning the people loose on them, but you know when we're down there in session we get \$100 a month to run our office. And the way it is, you know, I'd like to go to Clayton county and take care of people's problems down there. I'd like to go to Jasper county. But this \$100 a month simply won't allow me to do it effectively. So as many of the black folk can make their elected officials serve them as possible, that will make for better government on a local level, get more black folk involved and it will lessen the responsibility that I have. I'm not dodging the responsibility, but there are just simply too many. I caught hell trying to develop a staff. I've given up on that. You know, every time you try to invite the staff get ~~monies~~ monies from someplace, you're too political. They'll ask me "What are the other, white representatives doing?" Well, see, my position is far different from the other, white representatives. My position is no different from that of the governor of the state of Mississippi. Because they're looking to me in Jackson, , Collins, at ole Miss., Delta state. I've got constituents there. They

want me to come there, to do things for them. My position is more like the governor's rather than just another representative. And I still, you know, do what I can for the black folk on our side of the district but I have cut down a lot on my travel through necessity. For example, some of the things they might want me to do, like the Green bill or what have you--after talking to them or getting a letter from them, now rather than trying to do it myself, I'll pick the phone up and call some white official in that area. I say "This is some of the things some of your folk want done over there." And then I pick the phone up and call them back and tell them "Check such and such a one. He's going to take care of that for you." Well that's good. That's all they want, they just want to get it done.

De Vries: Are fear and intimidation part of the reason for blacks voting for whites?

Clark: No. In a very few areas of the state you still have fear and you still have intimidation. Now I have argued this point on the floor of the house, when we passed a resolution sending to Washington, D.C., asking them to lift the 1965 voters act. Some of the representatives got up there and said there will be no intimidation. But I'm sure they was honest. They simply didn't know. They're lawyers or doctors--

De Vries: Weren't the legislators themselves intimidated? Because only five voted for that resolution. Weren't the legislators intimidated because only five of them--I guess you were one of them--only five of them voted against that resolution.

Clark: No, I don't guess they were intimidated. They thinks that when they go down and vote that morning everything's going smoothly. Then when they get a report on intimidation, when people around the poll tells them "Those niggers don't do nothing but lying," they simply don't believe. But in many areas of the state--some areas of the state, we

still have it. In other areas of the state you simply don't

Bass: Is intimidation and fear still much of a factor in blacks not voting?

Clark: With some of the older blacks it is. It's very hard for a black man from my age up, when he walks into the booth, not to get nervous. It's very hard. I mean because it's associated with the past and when we walk into a white community, and more or less a white environment, that's very unfair to a black voter to expect him to be normal and to go on and vote his wishes. In particular, many of the blacks, you know, still quite a few blacks who can't read or write. And if they can, these long ballots like in a general election is very hard for them to understand. And lots of times rather than let a white person help they'll go ahead and try to do it themselves and <sup>maybe</sup> mess it up. Make a mark of two in the *box* and in the same bracket a mark outside the box, things like that. I've introduced, for the past three or four years, a law that would allow any individual who wanted to to let a member of his immediate family help him to mark his ballot. And in this case every individual, you know, that possibly couldn't understand the ballot would have a kid in his family, maybe sixth or seventh grade, go in the booth with him and help him to mark his ballot. But this bill has not been, has not gotten out of committee either time. There was another bill introduced--

Bass: Why do you think it hasn't gotten out of committee?

Clark: I simply don't know. Many members on the election committee have told me this is a good bill. They think this and that and the other. But this has not come up. I hate to speculate because if I did speculate it would be a negative speculation. The only thing I would say is that it would give blacks a little more power because it would assure that a black man's vote more than likely would not be a spoiled ballot. For

example, *in* of the district I ran in this, last year--I mean in 71--in one of the precincts there, they was nice, they let people break the rules and everything and wasn't no intimidation whatsoever. But on the average, 75% of the ballots was thrown out. 75% was thrown out. Black folks came out to the polls and voted, but black candidates got their butts tore up in that particular precinct because of throwing out ballots.

Bass: On technicalities?

Clark: On technicalities. And if you had a person's child go down helping their mother or father to mark the ballot, then these ballots would not be thrown out and possibly other blacks would win.

Bass: Do you think the legislative reaction against the bill is primarily a fear of offending local election officials or do you think its deeper than that?

Clark: Let's talk about the election committee because it never has gotten to the total legislature. But the local election officials need intimidating because we don't have election laws in Mississippi. We got something on the book. But again, I've introduced legislation for the past six years that would require the Attorney General of this state or somebody of this state to hold workshops on elections and require all of these election managers to attend these workshops. Because you go from one district to another and you'll find the election being held in a different manner.

*I am* saying this is the proper procedure for voting and etc. then you go down to the polls and find it just the opposite of what they know it is supposed to be. I say they need intimidating. When I say intimidating I simply mean training. Elections should be held in a similar manner so a person, when he goes to the poll, can know what to expect. There was another bill that passed the Senate--I started to tell you a few minutes--



that came to the floor of the house which means it would give an election manager authority to ask for any kind of identification he wanted to. In order to, for you to be able to vote. And if you didn't have that identification, he could deny you the right to vote. That passed the senate. It came out of the election committee. It came before the house for a vote. And I got up and argued against the bill and we sent the damn thing back to the committee from whence it came. Didn't pass it.

Bass: If you hadn't been there there's no doubt in your mind that that would have passed?

Clark: If I had not been there, there is no doubt in my mind.

Bass: That was this year?

Clark: This year.

Bass: Do you consider that bill designed to do anything other than intimidate black voters?

Clark: Not a thing in the world but to intimidate black voters. That's all it was designed to do.

Bass: So when we hear from other legislators that race is really a thing of the past, not really a factor any more, how do you react to that?

Clark: It is not as strong as it has been in the past. All of us would like to put it behind us, but we can still see it. We know it's there. Now for example, that particular vote. If we had had to press the machine that bill never would have been sent back to the committee. But see, when one of my colleagues got up and moved--after all this talking--that we send it back to the committee from whence it came, they took that on a voice vote. Now, if the speaker had said, you know, the nos have it, and we're going to vote on it. Then if they had punched the button, there would have been about five or six of us punching the

button against it. This resolution that passed--one of my colleagues made a motion that that be sent back to the committee from whence it came and, you know, we voted on it. And the yeas for sending it back were about ten to one. But the speaker said "The noes have it." And when he said the noes have it, that took a rollcall vote. And with the roll call vote they simply was not going to vote against it. A thing like this can show you that race, to a certain extent, is still there. What I'm talking about--we don't have what we had in the past. People going around and saying "You're a nigger and we're not going to stay in this hotel with you, we're not going to allow you to come up here to the capital" and all like that. But you can see it as you move around the capital building here. We don't have a single black person employee here other than the custodians.

. They're nice to me and they are effecient. But things like that show you that racism is still a factor.

Bass: No black pages?

Clark: You know, a page just come once a week. And we have a black page occasionally now.

De Vries: They're not hired. That's an honorary--

Clark: Yeh, he get's paid--he gets his per diem while he's here. But you see, legislator has two weeks he can bring a page. He can bring two pages while he's here and a page stays for a week. We've had a few black pages other than mine, but I'm talking about high positions.

From the first floor of this capital all the way to the fourth floor.

Bass: Well now the governor's office has at least one black.

Clark: He's got one black. He's got Jerry ~~Wington~~ there. You've got him there on the poverty side of it.

Bass: What is his salary? Do you know?

Clark: About \$6,000.

Bass: That's all?

Clark: That's all. And you know, custodians make more than that.

Bass: Other members of the governor's staff, I presume they make more than that.

Clark: I would assume they do. And if he's going to get a man, let's get a man and pay him a professional salary.

Bass: How is Ronald viewed in the black community? The first black aide on the governor's staff.

Clark: There's a split view I would say. Many feel that he's being used by the governor. But I see this in the black community, even on the local level, on lots of local levels.

(end of side of tape)

*There is a* job to do and he's going about doing that job the best way he can. And he's done a good job. ~~The only problem with his~~ when the governor first introduced him he would often refer to him as James, by his first name. Things like this, when a guy's telling you racism ain't still a factor. You know, things like this will tell you it is. I'm talking about--things is a lot better--but I'm talking about total ~~and total~~ respect for a person, I don't care what color he is.

Bass: You normally referred to by your first name? By other legislators?

Clark: We usually refer to each other like that. Sometimes I'm referred to as Robert, sometimes Representative Clark. We often refer to each other as, for example, speaker pro tem--we just call him Buddy [?].

Nobody going to call him Johnny, unless it's some of the older fellows.

~~ourselves just call him~~ ~~I have no~~ ~~problem with that. I do~~ ~~respect~~ ~~We along~~

Bass: But you address them the <sup>same</sup> ~~say~~ way they address you?

Clark: Same way they address me.

~~Bass:~~

~~Clark:~~ That's right. Now at one time there was a representative, Cal Kennedy, kind of an old fellow. Understand he's a *judge* now, so I'm told, from over here in Ranker's county. Kind of old fellow. Well, most everybody calls him Mr Cal. And, you know, I just refer to him as most everybody else refers to him. Because in my own conditions in the black community when you refer to a white person by his or her first name, that's showing Tomism, you know. But I have no problem *with*

Mr Cal because that's what everybody else calls him. But under normal conditions I wouldn't do it, you know.

Bass: How do you assess the effect of Charles Evers campaign for governor? We've had some people tell us that it took a lot of support and effort away from other black candidates and therefore cut the total black effort in electing officials. Another version is that it had the effect of generating a great deal of interest in the black community and bringing out the vote.

Clark: I hate to assess that because I think the value of these two forces is going to wind up being equal. I mean it's not going to be negative or positive. Charles ran a damn good campaign. That was a good campaign. He generated a ~~hall~~ of a lots of interest in the black community. But you can rest assured that he tore the white community up. He had every white sister and his brother coming to the poll to vote. And when he generated interest in the black community, likewise he generated interest in the white community. Which caused, you know, the turn out in the white community to be heavier than it normally would have been. And therefore it balances itself off. I'm not going to say Evers' campaign hurt the black community because the strategy at that time, that everybody accepted--I did not object to it but I went off on

my own campaign--was that, you know, Charles is going to be running for governor and he's going to turn all the black folk out in this town and that town. All right. We did turn out a record number of black folk. But in so turning out a record number of black folk, those black folk did not vote for the local black candidates. Now I've heard people, you know, tell me "I wouldn't mind voting for a black if I could vote for you or Evers or somebody like that." Well that's after Evers had been on television--6 o'clock news. Evers come through beautiful on television. Come through beautiful. And then 8 o'clock you go out to your local meeting then you got a candidate standing up there, doesn't know what to do, and insecure and what have you.

And then by Evers coming through so good on television, that really kind of turns many local blacks off from their candidates.

Bass: They'd rather have a poor white than a black they felt wouldn't do the job.

Clark: I have always--now I didn't object to Evers' campaign running for governor. I supported him 200%. And I hope he runs again.

De Vries: Would you like to see him run again in a Democratic primary or general election?

Clark: Black community needs to just get one election and that's it. These two double banner elections are too tough, you know to get folks to come back the second time. They go vote one time. That's got to be done, but you've got to have resources to do it. But if it had to be done again I would rather see more work done on the ground roots, ground roots level. I would like to see more of Mr Evers' staff and the resources that he has be put, you know, out into the boondocks and deal with organizing on the local level. And do about one-fourth of the work that was done on the state level. Let that still be done, and three-fourths of the time that was put on the state level, put that into

individual community organizing. Now for example they gave me--several kids came here. Evers campaign and they gave them to me and I had them working out in the fields ~~and what have you~~. They wanted to be sitting up somewhere in an air-conditioned office, you know, and going to news conferences and being seen on television and all like that. They didn't want to get out there and hit that dirt and hot sun. Organizing. That's what it takes. And if Mr Evers runs for governor again--and I hope he does--I hope lots of emphasis from his campaign will be focused in that direction on the ground roots level.

De Vries: You want to write in as an independent candidate in a general election.

Clark: If he runs again, though, it is my understanding--he hasn't told me, but it's my feeling that he will run in a Democratic primary where he will have lots of folk in there. But black folk can't be running as Democrats or Republicans or nothing, they're just going to have to run. I'm associated with the Democratic party. I'm chairman of the loyal Democrats in <sup>l</sup>Homes county. I'm chairman of the regular Democrats. In <sup>l</sup>Homes county. Both Democratic parties. But some of the Republicans in <sup>l</sup>Homes county are some of my best friends and supporters. And I run as an independent. If I run again I run as an independent.

Bass: Rather than as a Democrat?

Clark: Yes sir. I can't get any luck in my running in the Democratic primary. We don't have a party in Mississippi. Really we don't. I don't know what others will tell you, but I know as much about ~~it~~ as anybody. We don't have a party in Mississippi. If you believe you've got to declare yourself a Republican, or declare yourself a Democrat and see what kind of machine, party machine you're going to have come to support you. You aren't going to have one. You've got to get your support

from where you can.

De Vries: Last time you ran as a Democrat.

Clark: No sir.

De Vries: You ran as an independent?

Clark: Independent.

De Vries: You always ran as an independent?

Clark: Always ran as an independent.

De Vries: That's interesting. Chairman of both Democratic parties and run as an independent.

Clark: That's right. Because there ain't no parties.

Bass: Are you the only person in Mississippi who holds that sort of dual position of having a foot in both Democratic parties at least as they exist--both the regulars and the loyalists?

Clark: There may be some people in Washington county, up in Hodding Carter's home town, West Watkins. Wes may be in a similar position.

~~But I don't think he always~~ .

De Vries: Are you the only independent candidate in all of Mississippi.

Clark: Yes I am.

Bass: What do you think is going to happen on this loyalist-regular split. Are they going to come together before 1976?

Clark: I don't see it.

Bass: What do you see as the stumbling block?

Clark: Nobody wants to give. First of all, the governor, who has done more for blacks--not near enough, though--still has appointed them on boards and etc. Politically, the governor has played his cards very poorly. See when they first started talking about getting together, the first thing he said "Charles Evers is talking and he doesn't represent nobody but himself." And he began to lambast all the people at



the head of the loyalist party and create hostility. And you can not negotiate when you have created hostility. And due to the fact that the loyalists have a quality of conviction. That's the only thing that they have. And the governor of this state is going to have to be willing to give something. The loyalists have the call and they're not just going to go and say "Here, Mr governor, we're going to hand you the call and now you deal with us and select the one of us that you want." The governor's going to have to give and the loyalists are going to have to give. For example if the loyalists, you know, they merge with the regulars, Mr Evers, Miss <sup>(Pit Denier)</sup> Dale Ann, Mr Henry, Mr Carter, Mr Wes Watkins, Mr Charles Young--it's going to be impossible for all the people at the top of the party to hold the same or similar positions that they have. Unless they get co-positions or something. Somebody going to have to give something up. I'm hoping that we could get one Democratic party, just for the sake of unity. But just so far as Mississippi is concerned it really isn't going to help the everyday man in Mississippi because if we did have one party it simply means that these individuals, they're going to still support the person that they're going to support when it comes around to election. Independent, Republican or what have you. But having that party label behind you is not going to effect one vote when it comes to the political--

Bass: Would it effect it to the extent that blacks that are now affiliated with the loyalists, in a merged party, then they would then have greater influence with the internal political structure of the state.

Clark: I don't see it. Unless guarantees was built in. Now this has been some of the conflict in the past. I was active at one time in the negotiation of the merger. But if blacks don't have built in guarantees of leadership they won't be there. It simply means they cannot have any input into the internal operation because they won't be there.

Bass: But who can bring this together? Why should either faction want to bring it together?

Clark: Why should either want to bring it together. Well, you got your political patronage ~~of~~ that \_\_\_\_\_ come from the national Democratic party and I would assume that the state as a whole is suffering because, I would assume, some of the patronage that's supposed to come in, nobody's getting it. And the governor definitely would like to say when they go to Mississippi to the Democratic convention, you know--he's sitting back here saying I'm a Democratic, I'm the governor of the state, and still I can't even be there and have a say so nothing about what's going on in my state. I can see why he would want *to*. But the loyalists really don't have no reason to want to come in more than just to try to satisfy the national Democratic party. When Robert Strauss send down something, all the loyalists got to do is worry about satisfying the mandates of the national Democratic party. You know, you have an open meeting. Put it on the radio, put it in the newspaper. You know the whites not coming. Eventually though if I was there might come and take it over. They could. But they're not coming. Then you get these clippings and radio announcements and bills for radio announcements and send it back to Robert Strauss and he says "Yes, the Democratic party in Mississippi is open. But the other folk just refuse to participate." Then the loyalists still got the call. That's all they got. They don't have nothing to gain by it. A merger. The governor of the state is the only one that has anything to gain.

Bass: You mean this governor or the next governor?

Clark: Next governor. Incoming governor. Who ever it is.

Bass: Who do you think it's going to be?

Clark: It's up for grabs. In as much as this book will not be published until, when, 76? What time in 76? That's all right, 75 is

*the election* . William <sup>*Winter*</sup>~~Willis~~ should be the next governor of the hell of state of Mississippi. He's a man who could do a/lot for the state. He's open-minded, he's very fluent. But due to the fact that, you know, he is a country boy, country Mississippi boy, just like all the rest of us. But he does not come through like a Mississippi boy in his appearance or talking, ~~or he doesn't have the~~ and what have you. This is what he'll have to overcome.

Bass: Would he have black support?

Clark: I would assume he would. He had black support when he ran against John Bell. However they didn't have an alternative that time. And I don't see anyone coming up now that could take, you know, take blacks , .

De Vries: What happens if Evers runs?

Clark: That's a different case, different situation, if Charles Evers runs. Now some blacks aren't going to vote for Evers because they feel Evers shouldn't be out there. They feel that we should put our eggs in a basket behind a man that can collect, you know, get one of the whites. However, I don't share that. If a black can run and make an impression, let him run. And let us get the best man we possibly can. Now William <sup>*Winter*</sup>~~Willis~~ [~~Winters?~~], you know, he really should be next governor of the state. It's a possibility of Brad Dye might be the dark horse. I don't know how hard he's going to push for it. But Brad Dye definitely could make a run for governor and would be a serious candidate. And he might be a compromise candidate between the forces behind Jim Buck Ross. In my estimation, knowing state politics as I do, I feel he's a definite candidate. A. F. Summer is a definite candidate. Either one of those men could make a hell of a run for governor. It all depends on the backing and support that they get. A. F. Summer is Attorney General [?]. I

could see either one of those men, either one of those three, being a compromise candidate between, you know, from the William Winter forces and that. You know, they could get together, put their forces together and could knock Winter out. But it's a tragic thing, you know, to have a man like him and have just little insignificant things that seem to be a battle maybe stand in his way. Just little insignificant things.

Bass: What are the sort of things that would stand in his way?

Clark: Just the image he has. Whiskey or Mississippi, you know. The image that he has. He doesn't have the image of the Mississippian.

Bass: You mean in so far as appealing to white folks?

Clark: That's what I'm talking about.

Bass: But if Evers were to run wouldn't that be a serious blow to any chance Winter has?

Clark: Not necessarily because William, when he ran against John Bell in 68, he carried a hell of a lot of white votes. You know, got to have a lot of white votes. Now the white folk of this state--I've moved around over this state--they want William Winter for governor and there's a lot can transpire between now and then. But if they decide to forget about that image, I don't care who going to run, he going to beat anybody. If he can just over come that barrier. I don't know if he's tried or what. You know. But I'm sure, him being a politician, I'm sure he's aware of it. Because I hear things time to time, day to day, and I'm sure he's putting out feelers .

Bass: You were saying before, that legislative district. . . . Earlier you said that in a county where blacks were a minority that they should get together and bloc vote for the best white candidates so they could have some input, influence later. But you seem to be saying something different insofar as the governor's race is concerned.

Clark: In what respect?

Bass: Here you're saying you'd still like to see Evers in there, even though he would end up having a minority vote, that he couldn't win. Rather than having a block vote behind the better white candidate for governor.

Clark: I was talking about in a minority area where your blacks are a minority for areas where you don't have a black in the race. Now we used to get out there and run just for the sake of running. We had to prove to other folks that a black could run and wouldn't get hung up by his neck. We'd get out there and run. But we've reached the point now where when we run we're running to win or running for something else. And Mr Evers, if the political situation at that time is right so that Charles can run--not just to say Charles Evers is running for governor--but if the black community can benefit by it, certainly he should run.

Bass: They could benefit how? By one, him generating interest and people coming out to vote and two, in raising issues?

Clark: Those are great, those two things that you've mentioned. I would say more for raising resources and getting help to go out to the communities to work on the grass roots level. In other words, a hell of a lot of the things I would get done if I was running for governor and had the resources he has would be off the television and it would be somewhere out in the community in the boondocks organizing. And you have the resources to do it.

Bass: What's the political effect of Channel 3 in Jackson?

Clark: What do you mean by that?

Bass: The fact that the group that now controls that station does control it. It's not a black oriented station but it's a community wide oriented station. It certainly has a lot of programs that would not be on before and a lot of faces that would not be on before.

Clark: I say it's more or less of a community station, you know, where everybody seems to be getting an opportunity--black as well as white. And all kinds of programs get an opportunity to come on the air. That's very important.

Bass: But do you think that has any effect insofar as political moderation is concerned?

Clark: I'm sure it does. I couldn't, you know, speak directly to that, to the effect that it has, this soon, but I'm sure it has. Maybe you could elaborate further on it. Now so far as the group controlling it, if you didn't know, you'd never know that Kennedy and etc. has the station. Other than that, you know, you see a lot of blacks on as newscasters and what have you. And you see blacks get an opportunity to be on a program, various programs. And when this occurs this has put pressure, I assume, on Channel 12, <sup>me</sup> 16. . But if you move into other areas of the state you don't see as much of that.

Bass: But what effect do you think it has in the Jackson area? Because of the fact that here are blacks who are on in the art programs and this is a station that is received in the white community as well. It's not a black oriented station. What effect does it have in the white community?

Clark: Well, it definitely will soften up the white community some and prove that blacks can do a job. And it will make more for the acceptance of blacks than before.

Bass: If single member districts are ordered before the 75 election in these urban counties, do you think that will result in more blacks in the legislature?

Clark: It will result into about five blacks in Hines county. See you don't have about two counties there, which I opposed that stronger than hell. I worked along with the civil rights and I came here and I fought for same member districts and I had many of

my colleagues say "Bob, what the hell are you fighting for? We ain't bothering your district." And I say "Well I'm going to be a statesman. I'm for the whole state." And I introduced some plans that started at the northeastern section of the corner and came diagonal all the way across to the southwestern corner. With same member districts. After the legislature was out of session, when I read on news media where civil rights attorneys had gotten together and gone with the judge [?] and dealt for two of the urban counties and said to hell with the rest of them. And I was very disturbed, very disturbed. Because if this is what we is going to do, going to play ball games, maybe I wouldn't have had a double county district today. See I had first Homes county.

. They didn't bother my district.

But it was sent to the federal court, circuit court in New Orleans where . . . Cole <sup>was</sup> sits on the bench. Former governor. ~~At that time, that's when they hooked~~ county on to Homes. ~~Which definitely made it more difficult.~~ If I was going to play games, and trade off, I would have set my foot down--up there those two or three years fighting--and I would have dealt with those folk for my county. And I feel in such dealing for them for my county I could have still, I believe, have protected, even in the federal court just like I was protected here. So due to the fact that I was going through that and they came up and didn't do a damn thing for the delta. I'm very pissed off at them. And frankly speaking if the same thing would occur again from the action they have taken I don't know if I would get up and fight like hell

. You know, for the plan, state wide plan. And if any dealings going to be done, since I'm here and a part of it, they'll let me do the dealing.

Bass: Who are the lawyers handled that?

Clark: Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. It is the group that



Tex Wilson heads. But the gentleman that was there before Tex was the guy that handled it. Frank Parker. Now he's the senior attorney on the staff; he's not the head man. I can't think of the man that was there before.

Bass: Wasn't \_\_\_\_\_?

~~Clark: No, wasn't Arnold.~~

Bass: They went to the 5th circuit and in effect negotiated this plan?

Clark: No, the plan that they have coming up now--I don't know what corner it's in--the plan that they have pending. But you see, what the legislature passed--I mean we passed a law, redistricting law and my county was left alone, just as it was. But the 5th circuit didn't approve that plan. They throwed it out. All right. They throwed it out and instituted their own plan. Then this civil rights group, lawyers' group, went into court--some court--and their trade off was "We're going to deal with two counties." Now I can see them being very partial and very damn partial because they're located in Jackson. They know damn well they done, ain't going to get no black elected down on the Gulf coast. So they said the two populace counties in the state. You know, the two urban counties. That's Hines<sup>d</sup> county and Harrison or Jackson, which ever one it is. And they put those two counties together solely because they could get five from Jackson. You know, I got no grips with Hines county. Some of my best friends live here. *There is a* possibility *[Rhodes]* *[Berry]* Thompson, mayor Bolton will be elected. Possibility Al *[Rhodes]* *[Berry]* friend of mine, who's state director of STANB *[Systematic Training 2-2 Redevlopment]* *[?]* will be elected. These are my buddies. I ain't got nothing against them. But why in the hell trade us off? You know, use us as a pawn up there in the Delta where we have black majorities.

Bass: If they had single districts state wide you'd elect a lot more blacks.

Clark: A hell of a lots more blacks. That's right. And their rationale to me was "Well Bob, we can't get a state wide. Let's go for what we can." Well, you know, if any damn compromise

at least let me be in on the play. Because I had carried the ballot for three years and we had worked side by side. I cast a ballot for three years in the legislature. Then you get ready to make a play, a change, why not let me be in on it.

and this is a part of my everyday profession, let me have something to say about what we're going to change or ask for.

Bass: Do you think it will take the rise of the Republican party into being a real threat to force the Democrats into a solution on the loyalist-regular split?

Clark: It won't have an effect one way or the other. Because I don't care, just like I told you. You don't seem to believe me. Ain't no party in Mississippi. Because when you didn't have the loyalists,

, in the same election, maybe two  
Republicans and and the rest Democrats were elected. Look at 1964, Barry Goldwater. The Republicans always have--

Bass: My question, though, is that if the Republicans develop a party of their own, isn't that going to force the Democrats to develop one. And to develop one, they have to resolve that conflict.

Clark: No, because the Republicans are not going to develop a type of party that can threaten the Democrats. Because the Republicans and the Democrats are one and the same. A guy might run as a Republican this

time, or supposedly a Republican, but the next time around he *may be*  
*a Democrat*.

. That might seem very strange to you coming from up north or wherever you're from. But it doesn't stand for anything in Mississippi. There is no party loyalty in Mississippi. Like Trent Lott, he was elected on the Gulf coast,

elected to Congress last time around. They weren't elected because they were Republican. They were elected just because, you know, people rallied behind them. And you take--Trent Lott was elected off William Coleman's machine. He's one of the former aides of William Coleman, you know, who was a Democrat.

Bass: Let me ask you your opinion about <sup>Cockran</sup>~~Cockran~~'s race. If McBride had not been in that race, where do you think his votes would have gone?

Clark: Cockran. If he had not been in the race the votes would have gone to Cockran. ~~He didn't~~

~~. The type of votes that McBride got would not have gone to~~  
    . They would have gone to Cockran or to Brown. And Wallace Brown was out of the race so they would have gone to Thad.  
~~Perhaps you'd of heard that maybe he beat~~

Bass: I heard some people say that. I questioned it, frankly, but I'm not close enough to tell. ~~But I think you are and that's why.~~

~~Clark:~~

Bass: It was our view that these were people who were basically sophisticated voters because they were ticket splitting and because they were showing political sophistication because of Bodron's image and record. That Cockran at least was making some overtures for black support. That they likely would at least split, and quite possibly a majority more than split, more going to Cockran. Am I correct on that assessment?

Clark: That's right. I don't think it would have been an even split. Bodron might have gotten a few of the votes                      hell, I don't care I'm going to vote for him because he's blind. But, I would have liked to see Bodron get elected because on human issues, welfare issues Bodron has, you know, served as chairman of the finance

committee in the senate. And the course of years which I found out-- which I didn't know--that if we got anything out of the house

senate that we wouldn't have to go after Bodron on those particular issues. And I respect him for that. You know, like on welfare appropriations that we could get out of the house, once it got in Bodron's committee / , /

Bass: That being the case, then why was there so much opposition to Bodron?

Clark: As you will note, <sup>every</sup> ~~these~~ members of the Mississippi legislature that ran for Congress got beat. The opposition to him was that he's a part of the old power structure and that's it. And definitely Bodron never had before this election made an overture for the black community. And that's why there was opposition.

Bass: Did that same feeling prevail in Trenton Lott's race?

Clark: In Trent Lott's race very much the same thing. Now you had--

Bass: Is that the explanation of Trent Lott getting what black votes he got?

Clark: Yes it is.

Bass: And he got a fair amount, am I correct?

Clark: Yes he did. However--I wasn't as close to that campaign as I was to the one in Jackson, but I never understood why the senator-- what was the senator's name?

Bass: Stone.

Clark: Stone, didn't do better in the black community than he did. I never understood that. I don't know if Coleman [?] didn't have his finger on some of the key blacks down there who turned people towards Trent Lott or not. But Stone should have done better in the black community than he has. He has a record, you know, as a personality, and a

record to stand on, you know, to have done good in a black community.. Maybe it's because he was a part of this body. I definitely expected, you know, for him to be elected.

Bass: This is a delicate question, but how much of an effect can money play in swinging black votes in Mississippi?

Clark: If money is used correctly it could perhaps swing the black vote. But when I say money used correctly it means that black candidates are going to have to get out there. That white candidate is going to have to get out there and sell themselves to the blacks. There's no such thing in Mississippi, nowhere that I know of, where a black will come and stand up and say "Now this is the man we're going to support. And let's support Mr so and so because he's a good man." When one black come and stand up and do that for a white, that's the kiss of death in a black community. The black community's smart enough to know that that somebody has given that man a pay-off and that man is voting for him, you know, going to bat for him. But now if that black man comes in a different manner and say, you know, "This is a person that has asked for our support and I've checked his record and his record looks good to me and we're going to turn him loose on you all or turn you all loose on him, and let you all decide what you want to do." And if that man proves out, then, you know, blacks'll vote for him. But now I don't call that money swinging votes. I call that, that's the individual swinging votes rather than money. But now it might take some money for the white candidate to contact key people, to get a chance for them to prove themselves to the people. But there's one thing I got to say. The black vote in Mississippi is very intelligent. I mean I'm crazy as hell about the black vote in Mississippi. Very intelligent. And like when I was telling you about some blacks they

won't vote for. I use that term and say they're too intelligent sometimes. When they get so intelligent there are certain blacks they won't support.

Bass: There's a southern state that I won't name, but I know it, know the black leadership fairly well, and in certain areas of the state-- well, there're two things. One, a certain amount of money passes hands for very legitimate purposes--hiring car pools, paying gas, hiring drivers to get people out to the polls. Is that done in Mississippi? To an extent. By white candidates.

Clark: It is done, I would say to a large extent. But it's done more or less on local levels. It's not done on a district wide basis or a state wide basis. It is done more or less on a local level. After a candidate will have sold himself. But if a candidate has not sold himself, that's money wasted.

Bass: He's got to sell himself not only to the leadership in that community. He's got to go beyond the leadership. He's got to come personally.

Clark: He got to come personally. He's got to go through the leadership, through the leadership, but he's got to come personally to the people.

Bass: But the leadership can't deliver?

Clark: The leadership cannot deliver.

Bass: Is that true state wide?

Clark: That's true state wide so far as I know and I know the state very well. The only place that I might would hesitate--I'm not sure of-- would probably be on the Gulf coast. I'm not sure what Gil Mason and some of the others do down there at this time. But a white candidate got to go directly to the people, you know. I've seen it. I've been involved in

campaigns. I've got a chance to, you know, see all kinds of white folk, all kinds of supervisors, j.p.s and and everything else. And I hear some almost daily or nightly--out at social parties, gatherings and things--this is where I'll be gathering together my education as to how certain individuals went into x community and went to the leaders and paid them off and thought they was going to deliver. And maybe he got his butt beat. And I hear others talking about where they went into a community and went out in the country and got with the people. And such and such a candidate the other city and paid the big folk off and they won and, you know, the ~~other~~ one lost. We talk as fickle about the black folk. I was in a meeting earlier this week at one of my colleague's apartment where we had quite a few guests there. And this very question was asked, you know, And I told them "No, nobody got the black vote in their pocket.

. If you expect to get elected like that you're going to get your butt beat. You know, if you're looking for the black vote to put you in." Then, when I said that, then there was others around--there was 15 or 20 of us there-- I was the only black one--there was other whites around that cited two or three examples and it supported, basically, what I had said. This didn't teach me anything I didn't know. But this simply re-enforced, you know, the pattern of my thinking already.

Bass: Is it expected though that white candidates, after they sell themselves as candidates, is it more or less accepted or expected that they will help finance their campaign in the black community in terms of money for gasoline, this sort of thing?

Clark: Yes sir. And if a white candidate campaigns against a black candidate on a local level and if he's found popular, you know, this is what gives black candidates, you know, a little bit of a rough time.



Because the white comes in and gives \$20 to the church. He comes in and gives money out. And here the black candidate coming along asking for money. But I've made it a policy of mine, you know, just to run my campaign the best I can. If I have to sell a pig or hog or something, but I don't go around asking for hand outs. You can't do it. And whites coming along giving it out, then you go along asking. Go to a church and speak and then maybe a white cat will spend \$20 apiece then you want to get up and raid the alter.

Bass: How are James Meredith's political efforts perceived in the black community?

Clark: Do I have to?

Bass: Want me to cut it off?

[Bass does cut the tape off for a while]

De Vries: Could you have been able to predict what was going to happen with the massive integration of 1970's. Would you have seen that that could come about without having the whole state go to hell in a hand basket.

Clark: No I could not. Frankly speaking, when I was in graduate school in the mid to late 50s in Mississippi State, my prediction was that this thing was 30 years away. And we were at a stage less than 10 years what I predicted it would be 30 years before we would even get there. Because, you know, I knew the hostility in Mississippi.

De Vries: To what do you attribute <sup>the</sup> ~~that~~ rapidity of change and the acceptance of it?

Clark: Strictly <sup>the</sup> federal government. That's, you know--

Bass: There's been no basic attitude change?

Clark: Not at that time. No sir. That's why you have all your private

schools in the state now. If we had to go back through the same thing again we would not have the private schools that we had, that we have now. When I first came to this legislature I introduced laws that would create local committees, local advisory boards, and these boards would in term be required by law to work out, you know, a plan that would be suitable for that school district. But they wouldn't hear me. And many instances, ~~like in~~ ~~area~~ where the federal courts came in--and we thought it was the white folks' plan; white folks thought it was our plan. So that's white folks went to private schools, then we finally got together. You know, "You white folk ran from this and this is you all's plan." "What the hell you mean our plan? You all developed this plan. You all gave it to them." "No we didn't give it to them." And we found out it was a plan that they had come down and stayed a half a day and developed and said "Here, this is the plan for Homes county." Well, now if we had to go back through the same thing again whites would realize what they had no way of knowing, that they would have to sit down across the table, look blacks in the face and deal with their problems on community level. And if we had to go back through the same thing again we would not have so much massive leaving schools as we had before.

Bass: How do blacks and whites relate in political matters now in <sup>l</sup>Homes county?

Clark: There are extremes on both ends. There are, you know, whites who do not deal with blacks. There are blacks who do not deal with whites. Then there is a major portion of the white political structure that thrives because of their association with blacks. And some of those officials are accepted by the black community. And if Dr Martin Luther King were to come back he could not beat some of those officials. Or

even if I were to run against some of them, I could not beat them. Those folk are my strongest supporters but also, you know, they are strong supporters of some white officials also. And this is in some of your strongest black areas. This is what I talked about a few minutes ago, earlier, when I said political immaturity. I didn't mean--I'm not degrading the black community and I want you to understand me. Because we're new in this thing. But what happened when those white politicians--they have not been in politics--you had the old die hards, the mean boys there. All right. Then you had the real radicals, SNCC kind of black folk. All right. Then here come this little [liberal] white man. He sees a gold mine in the black vote. And here he comes in and cater to the black community. I'm talking about seven years ago. He came in when things was just coming out of the hot days and he grabbed them.

(end of tape -- end of interview)