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Interview with State Senator Pierre Pelham, Mobile, Alabama, July 13, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Jack Bass: What is reapportionment going to mean? This new legislature, single member districts?

Pelham: I don't really think it's going to have any significant effect on the legislative process in this sense. There may be more or less wrangling. My guess is there will be more wrangling, more conflict. For this reason. You've taken Mobile county. If I represent the entire county then I've got to represent the business community and balance their interest against the labor union interest, you know, and the farming interest and the banking interest. And I've got to work these things out myself. Now, we've got, for example, two or three legislators who come from districts that may be 80-90% union districts. We've got some from where you've only got 10% union membership. And these guys have got to stay firm and adopt one position that's pro-union. It's just that simple. They don't have to resolve anything. Now what I think this means is you're going to have a good bit of conflict by virtue of the limited constituency that a reapportioned legislator will have. Ultimate effect on what passes and what doesn't pass, the form in which it passes, of any legislation, appropriation bills--that sort of thing, I don't think there'll be anything significant. No significant effect. I do believe this. I think having more blacks up there will be desirable. I think that will tend to move us away a little bit from some of the things we've gotten preoccupied with in the past. Some legislative matters. I think having guys who are

responsible only to their working class constituency will be desirable because Alabama legislature, up until the last few years, has been pretty well controlled by your business-banking-utility establishment in the state. For example, Jefferson county, with a significant, large group of working type voter. They've had a seven men senate delegation. They've been completely controlled by the chamber of commerce or the equivalent of the chamber of commerce. I think this is desirable. But as far as having any real effect on changing any legislation that wouldn't [otherwise] pass, I don't contemplate that. Now Ray ^{Jenkins,} ~~Dickens,~~ whom I have great regard--I guess you know Ray, both of you. Thinks there's going to be a whole new world. But Ray's sort of a dreamer. I don't think so?

Walter De Vries: How about the organization and procedures of the legislature itself?

Pelham: Well, it creates. . . organization. . . wouldn't. . .

W.D.V.: Thinking about rules. . . .

Pelham: I don't think it will change the committee system.

W.D.V.: Staffing?

Pelham: Uh, I don't think it will. . . . Staffing depends on money. The public doesn't want you spending the fucking money on the legislative process. They're not for that any more than they're for. . . . They could care less whether a legislator makes \$5 a year or \$500 a year. They prefer that he make nothing, really. And they're not in favor of this business of these staffs, secretaries and offices and all that kind of stuff. That's not going to pass political muster any more with a re-apportioned legislature than it has with past legislatures. Besides, I'm not sure it makes. . . . As long as you have got a part time legislature

I don't give a damn whether you give the whole crowd, 141 or 140 of them we've got now--we lost one house member--a full time secretary and a full time assistant, I really don't think that would, again, significantly change the legislative process in this state. You will have one problem that is, really, in my way of thinking, not any big problem. That is on local legislation. For example in Mobile county we share a senate district with two other counties and share two house districts with two other counties. They will have to get together and decide how they're going to have to handle local legislation, which is a mechanical problem, which can be worked out. Local legislation. . . I don't know of any local bill that has been passed or been defeated since I've served in the Alabama legislature that had any, was of any import to the future of this state. Most of it's pay raises for local officials, that sort of thing. Nitpicking kind of stuff. I just don't see anything big coming out of reapportionment other than the climate of having--and I wish I could see this--having an able guy, black guy, in the state senate who is able to handle himself with a microphone right good. Think that would be desirable. What we have? 12, 15?

J.B.: 15

Pelham: I think there are a couple of them in the senate. I think this will be desirable if they are able. . . .people.

J.B.: Tell us a little about your own political background, how you got involved.

Pelham: I was born in politics. My grandfather was in it. My father was in it. My father. . . retired judge. Sort of fell into it. I graduated from Harvard in 1956 and I came back down here and ran for delegate to the Democratic convention in '60. Then I ran for Congress

in 1962 and I was defeated. Then I ran for delegate to the convention in '64. I was elected in '64. And again in '68. I was elected to the state senate in '66, without opposition in '70 and then I'm quitting. I'm tired of it. I was raised in politics. That's the way I got into it. I will be active. . . . I think. . . . The Democratic party has a national council of advisory officials. Something. I don't know what the name of it is. They are setting up some task forces and have one on the economy. Going to be chaired by Walt Heller. At Wallace's request I'm going to serve on. Because I think that these task forces will end up preparing what will be the platform of the Democratic party in 1976. But that will be the limit of my political activity.

W.D.V.: Why you getting out?

Pelham: It's tiring. Burnt out. Tired. You drink too much whiskey. . . the legislature's in session, stay up too late. Almost screwed my health up, so I decided I'd quit. I'm getting out as far as being a candidate is concerned. I'll still be doing some things. Perhaps some things [for/from?] Wallace.

W.D.V.: What are you going to be doing for him?

Pelham: Well, I'll be on this thing and. . . stuff like this. I'm supposed to appear on a panel with Goodell in Boston in three or four weeks. Apparently his, Goodell's polling indicates that the business community is taking an interest in Wallace's economic policies, whatever they are. And they have a group of bankers and insurance people. I've forgotten what they call them. Investment research directors, or something. An outfit in Washington called the Washington Forum Advisors. Goodell does the polling for the Washington Forum and I agreed to go up and speak to them, along with Goodell, on Wallace's economic policies.

And I'll be active in whatever he's going to do in '76. Within limitations, I'll be active. By that I mean as long as it isn't inconsistent with, doesn't conflict with something I'm doing myself. Namely, trying to make a living.

W.D.V.: What are his economic policies?

Pelham: Shit, I don't know. [I talked to him.] Said "Governor, what are your economic policies?" He said--I wrote them down, he made three or four points. One of them was about the federal government inflation. He thinks the government's spending too much money. And beyond that it was hard to make any more sense out of his economic policy than it is out of Nixon's eco--well, I know what his economic policies are--the Democrats in Congress, their economic policies. Or the predictions of your economists. Doesn't know. We talk about populism in this state. He has been a populist, he thinks. His interest rates not being more than 5%. When they get above that he doesn't understand it. He thinks utility rates are too high. Really believes this! This isn't bullshit for the *[public to consume]*. I don't. I think politicians about milk those cows. I think the days of cheap money, cheap food, cheap electricity and cheap gasoline are gone and gone forever. I think the smart politician of the day--of course Wallace isn't looking at, he's not going. . . he won't be in there much longer--is going to be the politician that tells the people the truth about these damn things. Instead of the same old bullshit game we've always played. Hope so, anyhow.

W.D.V.: You think he's going to be president?

Pelham: No! Don't think so.

W.D.V.: Think he's got a chance?

Pelham: Well, yeah. I mean you have to answer that question yes.

I mean if you asked me and I think ^{Edwin}~~Edmond~~ Edwards has a chance, I'd say yes. Of course. And with the uncertainty you have now as far as what the voters are going to do, it's damn hard to exclude anybody who is governor of a state. I think there are people who have a better chance than he does. I think Kennedy has a better chance. I strongly suspect that Dale Bumpers, if he makes the impression he's capable of making, will be the southerner they'll pick. I don't think it will be Asquew or Carter, Edwards or Benson or any of those people. Yeah, Wallace has a chance. But it seems to me like it's probably not. . . . The trouble with this is that--and I told him this--is that Wallace has got to have delegates to be a force, in my judgment. He's got to have delegates. And whether he will be physically able to. . . . Now this is. . . what I'm telling you. . . I don't care about your book or anything, but this is off the record as far as anything immediate. You all aren't putting any of this shit out now.

W.D.V.: No. This doesn't come out until '76.

Pelham: Okay. I find that--I may be wrong--but I find it doubtful that, given his paralysis, that he's going to be able to make. . . . He gets his delegates by his speeches, by his appearances. And I don't know whether he's going to be able to keep up the pace or not that will be necessary for him to get a substantial number of delegates. And I think he's going to have to have a substantial number to have an impact.

W.D.V.: Do you think he's being led down the road on this thing?

Pelham: That's possible.

W.D.V.: One analysis is. . . well, you know. . . keep talking about bringing him into, keeping him in the Democratic party and so on and then comes the convention, well, screw him. And it's too late for the AIP to

be revived.

Pelham: I think they're going to screw him if they can. Well, look at it this way. You got Asquew, who's got his domain. You got Edwards. You even got Waller and his domain. ^{Carter}~~Carmen~~ [?], John West and Briscoe. All these guys. . . I mean, they really basically resent Wallace because all Wallace can do is ^[interfere] with their little political set ups in their own states. So they're not going to give him the fucking time of day if they can get out of giving it to him. And then you have your national Democrats, from other parts of the country, who are still not sure whether it's better to have Wallace with them or not. They're still not certain of that. They know it's better not to have him out damning them, but they don't know how close to bring him in. Yeah, I think he could really get screwed on this thing. Yes sir. Say that a number of times. Haven't told him that. I've not discussed it with him. But. . . yeah.

W.D.V.: What's his hold on this state?

Pelham: I guess. . . what do you mean, hold?

W.D.V.: Well, he's been in politics since 1958. There are very few politicians in the South running for statewide office of any significance that are still around after all that time. Been governor

literally--well, except for that three year period--since '62. Most politicians, after having been governor that long, or been involved in that office that long, go down hill. But here he is--

Pelham: Well, of course, you can't distinguish his hold on this state from his appeal nationally. I mean, he started when, in '63 I guess, leaving the state of Alabama and making. . . . Of course, it's not that long. He [led?] the field in 1958. And at the beginning of the

'62 race he did not look like a winner. You've got to make 'hold'--sort

of loosen up on that word a little bit, because in 1970 he had a hell of a race to beat Brewer. But his appeal is, I wouldn't think, different here than it has been when he gets involved in these presidential primaries. But in addition to that, Wallace has been a pretty good governor. He's not a day to day kind of man, but he's an imaginative kind of fellow. Smart as hell. And he's given free text books to school children--

J.B.: When did that program begin? Did he start that?

Pelham: Oh yes. Jim ^{Folsom} ~~Fulsome~~ tried to pass legislation but he couldn't do it.

W.D.V.: Was Alabama the last state to do that?

Pelham: Oh no, God no. Of course the first one was Huey Long in Louisiana. I think we were the second state to do it.

W.D.V.: He must have done it early, then.

Pelham: He did it early. I guess it was in '63. And he has been a pretty good governor. On the interstate system. . . we've moved pretty well on that. He has set up this trade school, junior college program which has meant a great deal to your kids who grow up in rural areas. And were it not for that program, they would not learn whatever kind of trade they teach in the schools and they would not get the benefit of whatever benefit that may be of a junior college education. You've got

. Established this second medical school in Mobile, which we passed back in 1971. Competitive bid law. Wallace has been a pretty good governor. He's had imagination. He knows, because he was born and raised in politics himself and knows the Alabama legislature well and he knows how to get these programs through. He's done a pretty good job and this has had something to do with what you described as

hold.

W.D.V.: Would you assess his overall impact on the state as good?

Pelham: Oh yeah, no question about that, no question about that. No one else could have passed some of the legislation that he's passed. No one else.

J.B.: Such as?

Pelham: Well, free text books, hell. Such as, back in 1971 we passed the first bill that had ever been passed here that would put some limits on the utility rates when the utilities go before the Alabama Public Service Commission. That sort of thing. Nobody [else could have?] passed legislation. And then we put a tax on utilities. Hell, nobody could have done that. Made banks pay. . . I mean this is obviously what they should do. . . pay interest to the state on state deposits. Absent the popularity Wallace has with the mass of the people in this state and hell he couldn't have done that. There are many pieces of legislation that Wallace has passed that no one else could have done. Fellow like Fulsome would have wanted to do it, but he would not have had the strength that Wallace had and I guess mainly that strength was based on Wallace's participation in national politics and his apparent success there. Competitive bid law. Shit, every county governing authority, every municipal governing authority in the state was opposed to that damn thing. You have to have competitive bid on any purchase over \$500. It's traditional in rural counties that a guy's serving on your county board which builds roads, they pay him--I guess it's gone up now--maybe \$150-200 a month. That they get supplemented. Nobody else could have passed that. And he could not have done it had he not built up this popularity based on his participation in national

politics.

W.D.V.: What about the allegation that he could have done a lot more. That he's institutionally one of the strongest governors in the country and has a lot of control of the legislature, a lot of popularity. And yet really no serious efforts at tax reform, overall tax reform, or executive branch reorganization.

Pelham: I'm not sure I know what you mean by tax reform. We put a number of taxes on back in 1971. We have had an unfair tax system in this state by virtue of your insurance companies, your banks, your corporations and your utilities defeating legislation that would sort of equalize. But back in 1971 I guess we made our only real stab at tax reform in increasing the tax on corporations and insurance companies, etc. Tax reform means one of two things. Either reduce taxes on somebody or raise taxes on someone else who has avoided paying taxes in the past. And of course it's unrealistic to talk about reducing taxes in any state.

W.D.V.: [Something about an attempt to amend the constitution and something being most regressive.]

Pelham: Beg pardon?

W.D.V.: Make it less regressive.

Pelham: Make what less regressive?

W.D.V.: The taxes. Made income tax more progressive.

Pelham: But what you mean by more progressive, Walter, is increasing our taxes in this state.

W.D.V.: Right.

Pelham: Well, that's what you mean. I'm not saying that's more progressive to increase income tax.

W.D.V.: Well, progressive in the sense that you raise the rates on upper middle income. [Unclear.]

Pelham: Well, that's not a valid complaint because. . . very simple reason. There's no way in hell to reduce sales tax in this state. Very simple reason. This money goes to pay school teachers' salaries. And you can't reduce it. It can't reduce it.

W.D.V.: What about taking it off of food and drink?

Pelham: Shit. Those people. . . all you have to do is spend one day in the Alabama legislature and watch them when they descend on the legislature and see what happens. We proposed. . . . It seems to me like in, back in 1970 that I did put something in Wallace's program. I drew up his. . . . you know, little thing like what somebody running for office has, little program. Seems to me like I did put something in there about taking it off food and drugs. Damn near everybody that runs for office says that. But to begin with, you're talking about an enormous amount of money. And you're talking about opposition. Now they won't come out and say they're against it. They'll say they're against it unless you replace that money with money from some other source. We don't have an ideal tax structure in this state, but it's about as fair as any state in the union.

J.B.: What kind of corporate income taxes?

Pelham: That we have here? Now this is bad. This is in the constitution and shouldn't be in the constitution. We ought to take it out. They put a limitation. It's 5%.

J.B.: That's personal and corporate?

Pelham: No, it's corporate. The personal is. . . I've forgotten what that is, but it's about the same, maybe a little lower than that.

And neither of these should be in the constitution. But back when they put the corporation tax on, your utilities and your major industries in this state saw that it went into the constitution so that they would not have to deal with each legislature in removing it. Of course an income tax is not the only way you can tax corporations. We increased the franchise tax on corporations back in 1971. Not as much as I wanted to, but we increased it. And we also taxed--and this hit corporations. I guess 95% of the levy went against corporations. We taxed leasing equipment in the state. We imposed these taxes mainly to finance medical school and mental health program. It's easy. . . and of course you keep reading this. . . this sort of shit you get from folks like Ray Jenkins. I don't mean this critically. Well, I do mean it critically, too. I told him I think he's wrong. Say we've got a 6% sales tax therefore we've got a regressive tax structure therefore things are bad in the state of Alabama. That's all bullshit. You know that. If you look at our tax structure, compare any state, shit, New York, Massachusetts, North Carolina. Ad valorem taxes that we pay. It's about as fair as within political reality you can get it. Could be better. But it's tough, man. Because I passed some of these taxes in 1971. The franchise tax and the leasing tax. And I passed the bills aimed at controlling the utility rates when they went before the Public Service Commission. Very much spent a whole session on that sort of legislation. And when I reflected after it was over with, I wondered whether it was worthwhile or not. I guess it was. The tax measures were probably worth while. But overall we have a pretty fair system. Don't like 6% sales tax, but. . .

J.B.: How much of that is state sales tax?

Pelham: 4.

J.B.: And the other two optional?

Pelham: Well, in Mobile we have 6%. There may be some cities left in the state that have not taken the. . . haven't put on 2%, but damn few of them that I know of. Very few of them.

W.D.V.: How about the reorganization of the executive branch?

Pelham: What do you mean by reorganization?

W.D.V.: Consolidation. You've got what, about 140 separate organizations and commissions.

Pelham: Now if you want to criticize Wallace, now this is where you ought to criticize him. Not on all the usual crap you hear. Back in, soon after he was elected in 1970, we had this firm out of Chicago where they come in and they get industries to furnish the expertise and make a study of state government. And about a year and a half later they did come out with a study that he has really not followed through on. Now we did pass, oh, 18 or 20 recommendations, but they've got about 200 recommendations in there. No, our state government is not efficient. No state government is efficient. Very simple reason. We've added a department of education in Montgomery and we've got 700, 800 employees over there. We need about 300. Got a lot of deadwood that ought to be fired. But it's a little bit hard for an incumbent governor to. . . take 300 employees you ought to get rid of. I don't know whether Wallace will admit this or not, but it's true. That's just an example. You ought to get rid of. Well, how many votes are you talking about? Well, their families. How many other state employees are going to get nervous and say "He's against state employees."? So it's not very smart politics to go in and fire people. But yes, we're just as inefficient as any government is. The worst, I guess, is state highway department.

There are seven or eight thousands employees but it's sort of a form of welfare. If these people were not working for the state highway department they would probably be on welfare. So there's respectable welfare and then there's welfare that's not respectable. And working for the government, in many cases, is a respectable form of welfare. But, shit, has any politician done that? Asquew hasn't done it. [Unclear.] But I wish Wallace would do it in his last term. He's not going to run for re-election. I wish he'd do it. Because they did make some damn good recommendations that will save us money, a lot of money, the state. But save it for what? You're not going to reduce taxes so what the hell you going to do with it? Here's a key. . . what goes on in my mind sometimes and I know it will go on in Wallace's. What the hell you going to do with the money? We talk about saving tax payers' money. Well, we're not going to reduce taxes. What are you going to do? Give it to a god-damn university? Talk about efficiency. Examine the budget of a university in this state or any state and look at the infernal waste of money that they have. So I'm not sure really that that guy who got defeated, superintendent of education in Kusa county and gets a job in Montgomery, some jack off job in department of education. Or that guy who can't hardly read and write who's working for the highway department. I'm not sure that isn't about as good an expenditure of public funds as most of the alternatives that are suggested. But he could do. . . . Some of those recommendations should have been adopted that were not adopted. Now he'll want to blame the legislature on it, but I think 60-70% of them could have been adopted by executive decree. And he may do it. He told me he was going to do it this time when he wasn't running for re-election.

W.D.V.: Is he going to have the time and energy to do it the first two years?

Pelham: I don't know whether it will be. . . it won't be. . . he'll have the time and he's got an enormous amount of energy. That's not the question. The question is whether he'll have the interest or not. And second question is whether he. . . I mean Wallace is a complete politician. And this is really going to be going against his grain, to follow some of these recommendations. We ought to have central purchasing in some of this goddamn stuff. You'd save a lot of money that way. We've got mental hospitals all over the damn state that buy separately and I don't know whether you know anything about buying drugs or not, but you can. . . the cost of drugs goes down fantastically when you buy in large quantities. That would save an enormous amount of money. A lot of things that should--

J.B.: Let's talk about something like central purchasing. What's controversial about that?

Pelham: Well, goddamn, every little pissing operation you've got is going to get sore, you know, because this guy's got his own little deals going, his own purchasing. We've got a hospital up here, mental hospital, up north of Mobile. We've got a mental health center out here. All these operations. . . you've got your Mobile University of South Alabama Medical School. You've got your medical school in Birmingham. You've got mental health facilities all over the state. They don't want to forfeit that power, you know, of having your own purchasing agent who deals with these people. That's where the problem is. It ought to be done, it ought to be done.

J.B.: Could that be done by executive order or would that require legislative--?

Pelham: I think it would probably require legislation, Jack. Back

where they put in central purchasing several years ago. And it saved them a good bit of money and they had some lady down there who was secretary of state. I don't remember her name now. She's fairly well known. Who promoted this and they put it in and they saved a lot of money. I think legislation. It seems to me I concluded that legislation would be necessary. That's just one example. There is no agency of state government--or federal government or any city in this state--where you don't have inefficiency and that you can't do something about. If you're disposed to. But there are some more obvious things than firing people that can be done.

W.D.V.: You said the question is whether or not he has the interest. What did you mean when you said Wallace is a complete politician?

Pelham: Just exactly what I. . . . What do you think I mean?

W.D.V.: I don't know. All right. I will. It's my impression that he loves to campaign and loves to win the election. But that, you know, the extent of it is the campaign is the fight, that sort of thing. It is the politics that results in the election. But once you achieve the office, then there's not that much interest in it.

Pelham: No, no, that's not accurate. Wallace. . . I mean he enjoys manipulating the legislature. He enjoys everything related to politics. He does not enjoy the day to day bother of running the state government, which can be a hell of a bother. He is a complete politician in. . . I don't know how to. . . some people use the phrase the political animal, which I don't like because it's misleading. Every decision you make, of a complete politician, is couched in terms of how is this going to effect the electorate and as far as I'm concerned. All of your actions and all of your decisions are controlled by the impact on the next election when

you're running again.

W.D.V.: Or your perceptions of the consequences of it.

Pelham: Sure, sure. Which is not a . . . I don't say that critically, but I just disagree. I told him this. I think--and I may be all wrong. . . . The guy is. . . I mean he's a marvel to watch. You know, folks who like politicians. But I suspect that the successful politician of the future is going to be a guy who instead of following--you know, politicians always follow the people--is going to be a guy who is going to lead a little bit. And I think part of that's going to be to get off this hypocrisy and bullshit and play it straight with the folks. We have always thought--at least I have--that the last thing in the world you want to do is tell the public the truth. Because they won't hear the truth. They don't want you to level with them. And I believe that was a valid rule of politics to follow but not any more. I think they're so frustrated now that the guy who is going to level with them and play it straight with them, he's going to be the complete politicians for the next 10 or 15 years. Going to take guts for a fellow to do that, because politicians never have done that.

J.B.: So what does that mean for the future of Wallace, because his record is really not that, is it?

Pelham: Well shit, no politician's record is that, Jack.

J.B.: I think Asquew would come pretty close.

Pelham: Shit. Asquew, when he was running--get Wallace to tell you this story--when he was running for office--when was he elected, back in '71, right?

J.B.: '70.

Pelham: '70 or '71? '70. Are you sure it was '70? That's right,

he's running again this year. He was calling up here trying to get, to

find some second cousin of Wallace's. Get Wallace to tell you the story. Ask him didn't he and Asquew have a cousin. I assume he'll tell you all that. I mean didn't he have a cousin in Florida that Asquew wanted to get Wallace's cousin to be some kind of campaign director for him. Well, he like to worried the shit out of Wallace going to Washington. And then they had a southern governors' conference in '71 over in Atlanta. And Wallace went to it and Asquew, shortly after he got elected, he came up and made one of these New South speeches and all that and said that Wallace represented the Old South. Wallace came back from that, and he said he told Asquew this, he said "Son of a bitch, I was in the New South when he was looking for my cousin here about three months ago down there in Tampa. My second cousin." He's no different from the rest of us. I'm scared of Asquew beside of. . . . And I'll tell you why. I'll never forget. . . . You know who Billy Sol Estes was, don't you. I have a story, a fellow I know in the securities business in Dallas. About six months before Estes went under this bank out of Chicago sent a man down to Dallas and they had some relationship with the securities firm my friend worked for. And they flew out to ^{Pecos,} ~~Pineas,~~ Texas, and visited Billy Sol Estes. And everything looked perfect. He was trying to borrow two or three million dollars or something. Everything looked perfect. You know, his records. You remember, he had the soy bean meal and phoney warehouse receipts and all that kind of stuff. And they got on the plane after visiting out there and started flying back to Dallas. My friend asked this guy who represented the lending institution what they were going to do. And he said "I wouldn't let him have a penny." "Why?" "Well, I realize everything looks good, but here is a man who has got two swimming pools in his back yard. He's got one of them for little girls and one of them for little boys. That son of a

bitch has got to be crooked." Which is another way of saying he's protesting too strongly. This Asquew's too fucking good to be true. I've never known one in politics that is as clean as this guy apparently is and as pure as he apparently is. Unless there's something somewhere [that/it] ain't quite right. I'm scared of those people in politics. Well, look at Hughes. When Hughes got that way. . . and I think he's sincere. . . he got out. And I think he made a right decision. I can't believe that guy. . . there's something unreal about that and I'm scared of these unreal sons of bitches in politics. But he looks good. And maybe he is real. I don't know. Maybe he is.

W.D.V.: How about Bumpers?

Pelham: I think he's the cream of the crop. I think he is the cream of the crop.

W.D.V.: Is he any more unreal than Asquew?

Pelham: I think less, I think less. I haven't heard all this shit about Bumpers . Bumpers does drink a little bit and I assume he's probably chased a pussy somewhere in the past. I don't know but I just sort of look at him and figure that. Maybe I'm wrong in my analysis of Asquew. Maybe I'm right. If I'm right, we probably won't know for ten years. I don't get that unreal impression about Bumpers. Don't get that. I'm just guessing about Bumpers. You just guess about all the people. Just like the American public guessed about the fucking Agnew and look what they found. What else you all want to know about Alabama?

J.B.: George Wallace and race.

Pelham: What about what?

W.D.V.: What we're hearing now is that--

[End of side of tape.]

W.D.V.:--perception of him has changed. He's not the racist that they once perceived him to be. Three, you've got blacks who are supporting him, or did support him in this past election. That there's a changing perception of Wallace. And the question is, has he really changed?

J.B.: Or has he adjusted to changing circumstances?

Pelham: What difference does it make whether he's adjusted to changing circumstance--

J.B.: I knew you were going to say that.

Pelham: --or whether he's changed? Oh, I think he's, hell, he's a politician like all of us and obviously it does not help him nationally to be called a racist. It's better to say he's not a racist. So I don't know. Look at. . . . Do you read the Boston Globe? Do you know what's going on in Boston right now with busing? Look at that fucking ~~Canon~~ Kevin White. That phoney son of a bitch. Look at--course, I don't know. I just think he is. I don't mean that critically. As a politician that's a fair characterization of a politician. But those guys might change, too, you know, since they got that busing problem. Which is a hell of a problem. I guess probably he's changed. To begin with--

J.B.: Let me rephrase it a little. Has he changed because circumstances have changed and there's no longer any political profit in working on the race issue, or has there been some sort of change because of his brush with death and more metaphysical reasons? What is the effect of his being shot?

Pelham: You need a psychiatrist to answer that sort of question, Jack.

J.B.: Yeah, but you've been close to him before and since and seen him and so forth. You know, you should have some sort of--

Pelham: About this getting shot up there, the only difference I've seen is before he couldn't fire anybody and now he's. . . after that he's a little bit tougher. Before, at least he had some ^{diversions} ~~[divorce/diverse?]~~ from politics, not much. But now he's got no ^{diversions} ~~divergence~~ from politics. I mean it's complete with him. There's nothing else in his life but politics. He's really more of a politician now. And you're asking me to pick a man's soul and find out whether a brush with death, say. . . something wrong, and use that word in a moral sense. in the way I've handled the race thing politically and therefore I better stop doing it. [He is putting these words in Wallace's mouth.] Shit, I don't know. Nobody can answer that question.

W.D.V.: Yes, but its an important question in terms of national politics, because if the perception is he did change, then it means a hell of a lot.

Pelham: Well, I don't think there's any question that he feels much more comfortable with the new perception of him than he did with the old perception of him. Wallace did not like this business of being tagged racist. Back in 1958, when I first got involved with Wallace politics, I remember a speech he made on television one night where he started working on the Ku Klux Klan. The night riders. It was a hell of a speech. But, of course, Patterson defeated him in that election. Of course, as the legend goes, he said he wasn't going to be out-, seg. . . out. . . nigger. You know, I never heard him say that. That does not sound like Wallace. He may be thinking that they're not going to beat me that way again, but I mean that does not sound like him to come out with a statement like that. But I'm certain that he feels more comfortable. . . . He's not a bigot in the sense. . . . I have known some people--very damn

few of them--but I have known some that I felt were really anti-black. Because, I guess, because of the color. You never know why. You know, who are really against black people in politics. One of them is this guy Tom Turnipseed [???] who left here and went to South Carolina. I got the feeling Tom really was a racist. Do you know him?

J.B.: He run for attorney general? Yeah, I know him

Pelham: How's he going to come out in that race?

J.B.: I don't know.

Pelham: Has he changed? I really felt Tom Turnipseed was a racist.

J.B.: Hell, Tom's out there addressing the state NAACP.

Pelham: Shit. But in answer to your question, yes, I think in that sense it's fair to say there's been a change. I think it's more accurate to say that he feels more comfortable now. That he doesn't. . . . to be called a racist creates problems for you. Political problems for you. Not to be called a racist avoids political problems and I prefer to say that he feels more comfortable.

J.B.: Has he done anything to warrant the changed national public perception?

Pelham: For example, what do you mean?

W.D.V.: For example, the last Harris poll shows that the perception of his integrity has gone up. They read the statement George Wallace is a bigot, or something like that. People who said yes has gone down and no has gone up. That sort of thing.

Pelham: Has he done anything? Well, let me put it this way, he has not done anything that would refute or discourage the findings of this poll.

J.B.: When I say done anything, I mean done anything in so far as taking substantive action as opposed to changing his style of rhetoric.

He's obviously changed his rhetoric, and that, I think, is reflected in this. . . . But has he done anything of a substantive nature?

Pelham: I don't know. You mean by way of appointments and that sort of thing. Let's see whether he has appointed anybody or not. I don't--

J.B.: He's the only southern governor without a black on his staff.

Pelham: My guess is he'll have one this next go around. Hell, we got county commissioners in Mobile, tax assessors in Mobile that have appointed blacks in their offices. And my guess is that he will. If you call that doing something that will find its way to--

J.B.: Well, appointing blacks to boards and commissions other than what . . . he's appointed six or eight. . . a few token appointments.

Pelham: He will probably do that this next go round. But I don't know of anything that he has done other than by silence and inaction to cause the poll results that you referred to.

W.D.V.: But no rhetoric is a form of action.

Pelham: That's right.

W.D.V.: You can go back to 1969 and that resolution and then I guess his appearance on television telling parents that their children do not have to go to schools in the districts to which they were assigned. That was not doing anything in the sense, I guess.

Pelham: That's right.

W.D.V.: Is a form of action.

J.B.: How did you react to that Pritchard speech, the '69 speech?

Pelham: Shit, which one was that now?

J.B.: The one where he told parents over there that they could take their kids to the same schools they did last time, don't have to go to the new district.

Pelham: Oh, I passed a resolution up there. Was that when Brewer was governor?

W.D.V.: This was in '69.

Pelham: Yeah, Brewer was governor and Brewer got sore at me because I passed some resolution for Wallace and it was. . . . That's when they just started busing and there was a great deal of unhappiness over it, the busing. Yeah, I think that was 1969. I was right in the middle of it. What do you mean, how did I react to it? Shit, I was like all the other politicians. Trying to keep one jump ahead of the people. That's what they all do and that's what I keep coming back to. I think the successful politician of the future is going to change that style.

J.B.: You think that's because the public is changing or what?

Pelham: Jack, I just think that the public is so frustrated and disgusted and distrustful. They heard, for example, Wallace tell them that he was going to. . . curse the utilities and reduce utility rates. People running for office. Well, that's bullshit, man. Nobody's going to reduce utility rates in this damn state, or any state for that matter. The average politician says they're going to reduce interest rates. Well, they ain't got a goddamn thing to do with interest rates. That's not true. Tell them . . . damn near everybody running for the legislature says they're going to take the sales tax off groceries and drugs. Well, they're not going to be able to do it. And I think you've reached a point where that old pap your selling to them just doesn't sell any more. People won't swallow it. They won't. . . . What they're really looking for is leadership, like this Time essay talked about. And I think part of that leadership is going to be let's get away from that old hypocritical approach to politics and play it straight with folks.

Let's talk straight and tell them the truth. I think they'll be responsive. Politically responsive. I may be wrong. Of course I won't have a chance--I don't intend to test my theory. I'm going to recommend it to some other folks and see how it works. I don't know whether I'd do it or not if I stayed in there. Wallace says he's going through his last four years. Don't tell him I told you. Says he's tired of all this shit. People coming up there lobbying. School teachers talking about quality education and they don't mean quality education they mean more goddamn money for school teachers. That's all they mean. He's tired of that. And all these phony college presidents coming in there and talking about if we don't get all this money our professors are going into Mississippi and Louisiana and North Carolina. Duke's going to hire them all. He says he's going to stop all that stuff this last four years. I doubt it, but that's something we like to sit around and talk about doing. He'd love to do it.

J.B.: One impression I've gotten of Wallace is that he is the type of personality that really likes to avoid confrontation.

Pelham: Yeah, he doesn't like it, doesn't like it.

J.B.: I mean when you talk about a tough political fight and when you've got to get in there and. . . you know, to get a state purchasing agency set up you've got to go fight all these agencies. He really doesn't like to get into a battle, particularly one where he might lose.

Pelham: Well, of course, I was his floor leader during this past term and he let folks like me do all that stuff, mix it up, you see.

J.B.: How much did he get into it himself?

Pelham: Very damn little. But I wouldn't say that he would be disinclined to get into it if he had to. But I mean, if you've got a. . .

I mean if I were in his position and I had half a dozen guys who'd go out and do all the dirty work and make folks sore and bear the confrontations and suffer the conflicts, then I'd use them, too. I wouldn't do it myself. I don't know about that. I've never thought about Wallace in those terms, whether he shied away from hard conflict.

J.B.: We just keep hearing of Wallace's populist instincts and his economic liberal. . . and some people even compare him to Huey Long and yet his record just doesn't show that much. You point up some things.

Pelham: That much on what?

J.B.: Oh, you know, he hasn't really attempted to change the fundamental tax structure of the state. . . . You know, get into something like that. Changing the state constitution. With his popularity, if he really went out and stumped the state on something like that, wouldn't he be in a position to get that passed?

Pelham: Change the state constitution. What are you talking about?

J.B.: The limits on income tax and things.

Pelham: Well, that would be pretty stupid for a guy to go out and. . . if you go out and make that an issue, that you're going to remove these limits on income tax in the constitution, then what are you for? You're for raising taxes. Well about the dumbest thing a politician can do now is identify himself with increasing taxes.

J.B.: Tax reform. You're saying how can you take off the sales tax on food and drugs? You can take it off there by increasing it somewhere else. That would be one way of doing it.

W.D.V.: How about a new constitution?

Pelham: Who is that who tried. . . . Oh yeah, I'll tell you who tried that. Henry Howell tried that in Virginia. Did you follow that race?

J.B.: Yeah. [Unclear.]

Pelham: I don't know, Walter. This is the sort of stuff I think's all horseshit. I mean I watch Louisiana. They got a new constitution. Big fucking deal. I watched this crowd in this state. They say they're going to improve the constitution. We got too many amendments to it. I just can't--and I suspect that Wallace feels the same way, whether he puts it in the words that I put it in--I can't get excited about this shit, about a new constitution. Oh, we got a new judicial article in this state now. We've just amended our constitution. We've made a better court--horse shit, man. Our court system is not substantially different from what it was before except the supreme court's got more power than they did before. We have not really improved the administration of justice in this state one fucking bit. So 90% of what you talk about when you talk about a new constitution to me is just bull shit kind of stuff. You know, it's kind of theoretical stuff. Oh, they need a new constitution. But I'm really not interested and I don't think the average guy's interested in it. You might have some political scientists up there at the University of Alabama tell you how fucking bad we need a new constitution, show you how many amendments we've had to it. Maybe some of these goddamn lawyers who don't have anything to do will tell you that. We do have some problems in this state that Wallace, that we have not done anything about and something ought to be done about.

J.B.: How would you enumerate those problems.

Pelham: Well, one I think is mental health. Now he's done a hell of a lot but goddamn it somebody is going to have to raise the money. We still don't have the money. We're either going to have to raise additional

funds or we're going to have to choke it out of these ^{greedy}gritty goddamn colleges and universities and stop their wasting it, in order to get enough money for the mentally ill in the state of Alabama. Now up until a couple of years ago this Parklow [?] would make you sick to your stomach to go to the school for mentally retarded, over in Tuscaloosa. We did pass a \$52 million this year--I forgot how much of that money went to mental health--but we don't have enough money in this state and I passed the last tax measures that were passed for funding of mental health. We don't raise enough money in this state for the mentally ill. It's a real problem. You've got a lot of families who've got children who are emotionally unbalance or retarded or mentally ill in some form where those kids are not receiving treatment and they ought to receive it. Now we've made a lot of progress. I think that's our number one problem. Along with that is a need for doctors. We have established a second medical school. But we're not going to get more doctors if whoever the governor is doesn't stay on top of the medical association and make these sons of bitches go on and train doctors. They'll tell you they can only take a new class of 100. I think they could take 250. I think it's all bullshit. Another big problem we have in this state is prisons. They're just damn jungles. And this is not. . . prison reform is something. . . . I mean somebody's going to have to tell the people the truth, that if they don't spend money to make these prisons into some sort of humane institutions then all it's doing is costing them money in the long run. We need that badly. Those are the things we really need and Wallace does--I noticed the other day--on a substantial portion of the money he gets from revenue sharing, goes for either the mental health or to improve our prison system. That's what counts to me. I

think that's what means something to the people. This talk about. . . vague conversation about tax reform. Shit, I don't know what you mean, and I know about as much about our tax structure, I think, as anybody in this. . . well, no I don't either, but damn near as much as anybody does. Give me a day to study it and I'd know as much as anybody does. Refresh myself on it. I don't think we have any glaring inequity in our tax law. Yes, it would be desirable, Walter, to have a good, pure, clean constitution that political scientists and lawyers who don't have anything to do can get their rocks off on, but shit that's something a politician can't really get his guts into. Because it's not going to affect the average guy a damn bit. Won't help him any with his problems. Judges are happy as hell they got the judicial article now. They're using that to avoid compliance with the ethics bill. They say we don't have to come under the ethics bill, because we've got our own, separate thing. Shit. Those are things. . . where you're talking about reform and making the state a better place and every state's got some

.

W.D.V.: One of the things we're trying to do in the book is look back over the past 25 years, 1974 back to '48, and look at the trends. One assertion that we hear is that the basic social changes that have occurred in this state have come about because of the federal courts period.

Pelham: I think there's a lot of truth to that.

W.D.V.: But it's not been through the state legislature or the executive branch.

Pelham: Goddamn sure not the state legislature. I mean I've been there. Your legislature has done. . . . I figure that we started to throw off the control that the business-banking-utilities had on this

state back in 1971. The first time. To really do something about it in the Alabama legislature. But no, your legislature, hell, they wouldn't reapportion. I spent a year trying to get them to reapportion. They won't do it and then they cuss Frank Johnson when he reapportioned. I think this is largely true. On mental health. . . and also, our problems we've got in our prisons.

W.D.V.: Taxes, too.

Pelham: Yeah, sure.

W.D.V.: How do you feel about that? The role of the court in that.

Pelham: In what?

W.D.V.: In those changes.

Pelham: Well goddamn it, if your legislature won't do it, if the people don't demand it of your politicians. . . and I feel about it, I'm glad to see it happen.

J.B.: Doesn't that suggest though that Wallace has failed in leadership? I mean he's been governor of this state, more or less, since 1962.

Pelham: Well, no more than any other governor of any other state in the union has failed in leadership. Because every state's got these problems. The only way we're unique. . . not in our governor, not in any failing in leadership and not in any exhibition of leadership. What we're unique in, we've had an unusual federal judge in Alabama. That's where we're unique.

W.D.V.: You suspect that what Johnson did in the federal court is going to have some impact on what the judges in the state courts do now? In other words, if you want redress today, you go to Johnson's court, or you go to a federal court. You think this is going to have any impact on

the state system?

Pelham: Oh, it might make a judge or two a little more adventurous or a little more imaginative in applying the law than he has in the past. These judges are elected by the people and they are like all politicians, they run scared until they realize that it's good politics for them not to run scared. Which I don't think is good politics to do any more, but I may be wrong.

W.D.V.: Is it an oversimplification when you hear the statement that Johnson's had more to do with the social changes in the state than Wallace?

Pelham: I wouldn't say it would be an oversimplification. The question is whether it would be accurate or not? And I don't know. I don't know. I mean the impact of each has been so different. I don't think it's accurate.

W.D.V.: Well, if you're looking--say in the last 15 years--and you're looking for people who had most of the impact on the state--

Pelham: Oh, it's got to be Wallace. Got to be Wallace. Johnson's got to be next to him. Who else? I don't know.

J.B.: What do you think's going to happen after Wallace leaves the state political scene?

Pelham: Oh, all these young Turks. . . they're all going to be. . . they're running right now. They're going to be running. They're going to have a hell of a scramble. I mean. . . what will happen. I mean you know how to answer that question. You have a bunch of young people-- I say young people--have a bunch of folks who are younger than he is who will be scrambling.

J.B.: What would happen if some guy like Frank Rose were to run?

Pelham: Shit. About the same thing that would happen if you ran.

W.D.V.: How about if Cornilia ran?

Pelham: Get serious. Frank Rose. . . fucking Elmer Gantry. They ought to chase. . . . phony bastards. Don't . . . wash your face. . . college presidents. . . I'd rather be a bunch of whores than college presidents and I've dealt with them. [I think he is mimicking Rose.] I don't know about Cornilia. That's interesting. She's a very appealing woman. You can't exclude the possibility that she could be a candidate. I think it's improbable because. . . for this reason. I think when Wallace winds up his political career that that will be it for him. I mean I think that if he has any possibility of going on that it will either be running for United States Senate or something like that. I can't believe--

W.D.V.: Can you visualize him quote winding up end of quote his political career forever?

Pelham: No.

J.B.: Can you see Cornelia--

Pelham: That's the reason I see Cornelia. . . that prospect. . .

J.B.: Yeah. If she runs, would you see her running differently then from Laurleen?

Pelham: Yeah, I mean they're two different people. Laurleen was a very shy, withdrawn sort of gal. And Cornelia is not shy and not withdrawn. She's more outgoing, more expressive. Whether this is good or bad, politically, I don't know.

J.B.: But if she ran for governor would it be perceived as just she's running and that George would be governor for four more years?

Pelham: Well, of course I know Cornelia and he wouldn't be. But whether it would be perceived or not--

J.B.: But with Laurleen he was.

Pelham: Oh yeah. Whether it would be perceived or not would depend on how Cornelia'd handle it. My guess is that toward the end of that campaign the suspicion would creep in that she wanted to be governor herself and fuck George. I don't foresee that, really. I don't think she'll be a candidate because as long as Wallace can survive politically--and this assumes his survival--then he's going to be the candidate.

J.B.: That would mean the Senate, right, assuming [unclear]

Pelham: Yeah.

J.B.: Could he get elected to the Senate?

Pelham: Yeah. If he could get elected to anything. I mean, assuming that his health remains constant, or his physical condition remains constant.

J.B.: How is his physical condition? Is it getting better or worse or stabilizing?

Pelham: Heck, I think it's stable now. Back in. . . last year. . . you could never tell about Wallace. He'd have people in there, you know, trying to get appointments or contracts or jobs and he'd give them this shit. But he just wanted to get rid of those damn people. I mean I know this. . . a lot of times, because I've watched him too damn many times. And he just wanted to get, you know, the fuck out of there and leave it alone. He's tired of that stuff.

J.B.: So he'd just grimace?

Pelham: Yeah. I asked him one time. He said "Yeah, I have some pain. Hell, it hurts like hell. Not all the time. But I do have a good bit of pain." How much pain he has, I don't know, but I think his condition has stabilized. But still, it's got to be highly uncertain

condition. Organs that are not functioning. The fact that. . . I doubt . . . you know, whatever medicine he has. . . I don't know how it will effect his . . . antibiotics . . . Anybody who has suffered through what he's been through has got to be uncertain of their life expectancy.

J.B.: To what extent is his present popularity based on sympathy?

Pelham: None. That's bullshit, man. Folks aren't like that. I remember back in 1970. We argued this thing. They were talking about Laurleen. The governor didn't want to use. . he didn't want to mention Laurleen in that damn race and I agreed with him. I thought he was absolutely right. People are shitting you. You think the average guy out working his guts out. . . he's got all the problems he can handle, with young'uns and a wife and stretching that pay check. He ain't got no room for sympathy.

W.D.V.: One Republican told us that the injury had deified Wallace.

Pelham: That's bullshit. Goddamn. I wish it has deified him with the Alabama legislature. In 1971 we went through hell. All year long we were in session

.

J.B.: We're talking, you know, after the shooting.

Pelham: I understand. I'm fixing to tell you. In 1973 it was the same goddamn thing with the legislature. They were getting up and cussing him and raising hell about him. We talked about this, again. I said "Governor, I don't think they're going to cuss you quite as much but they're going to be cussing folks around you like Taylor Harden and me and Harry Pinnington and people like that." But they ended up, before it was over with, cussing him down there as much then, you know, folks in the legislature against him. But that sympathy shit. I wish

somebody could--course I don't know whether you could test this by a poll or not--but, shit. . . . I mean I could look at local races here where you'd think sympathy would play a role. The electorate may feel sympathy, but I don't believe they express it in the way they vote. I think there are other factors that are much, much more important in shaping how they vote.

W.D.V.: *[We haven't]* mentioned the word Republican. Tell us about the Republican party in Alabama. Where do you think it's going?

Pelham: Walter, they've--of course you know who they have elected. You must assume that since the people down here have embraced Agnew and Nixon with much more enthusiasm--I mean the Republican politicians have--than in most other parts of the country, that a skillful opponent, Democratic opponent, could knock off damn near any Republican, I think. But you don't have many skillful people running for political office any more. They're getting out of it. I think they're *[the Republicans]* are sort of on the decline in this state. I think it started--of course you know when it started up with Goldwater and they thought Goldwater was somehow right on the race thing and other things effecting them. But then I think, since they have elected Republicans and the world hasn't changed and the state hasn't changed and problems largely remain the same. A lot of people thought Winton Blount last year was going to do a hell of a lot better against John Sparkman than he did. Sparkman beat the hell out of him. I think your Republican party has. . . well, through Eisenhower's years and Nixon's election. . . . I think they've seen their better days for a while in Alabama.

J.B.: Has Watergate hurt them?

Pelham: Oh, hell yes. Goddamn yeah. Clark Reed's full of shit, friend. You all talk to Clark yet?

J.B.: Yeah.

Pelham: He's full of shit. He was telling me. . . . Clark's thesis is. . . and I guess he's still passing that crap around. . . that Watergate has strengthened the Republican party in the South. That's nonsense. I mean goddamn. . . every guy that I have talked to who ran for office in Mobile county, legislative offices in the recent elections, who got out and campaigned to the people. I mean who got on the street and walked up, going into every business on the street. Or went into a small town and went into every business. Has told me the same thing. That once you talk to a voter a little bit, that he's pretty fucking sore about Watergate.

J.B.: How do you explain Walter Flowers then? You know, coming out with all this. . . .

Pelham: Walter's never been the brightest guy in the world.

J.B.: He hasn't been out talking to the people, is that it?

Pelham: Well, I don't know. Now he ran down here. He may be assessing this thing based on the cards and letters he's received. Now the anti-impeachment will write. The pro-impeachment people are the folks who are sick of the whole goddamn thing and think Nixon is goddamn cheat and a liar and a disgrace. They're not going to write. But if Walter would talk--not only to Mobile county and Tuskaloosa county--if he'd talk to a couple. . . . I talked to three of them. Pretty perceptive guys who ran who conducted hard campaigns on the ground. They all told me the same thing. That once you scratch that average voter a little bit, he's highly pissed off about Watergate. The tax thing. They don't like that worth a goddamn. Man, the involvement in Cambodia and stuff, that doesn't make much of an impression on them, but

the tax thing, that's got him pretty sore. I believe this, too. It makes sense to me. Getting back to your question, Walter, I've got to figure that the Republican party has got some bumpy days ahead of it down here. Of course there'll be individuals who will be able, by virtue of other appeals, remove themselves from the stigma of Watergate. But I just don't believe the South--they keep saying these polls show that the guy's in much better shape down here than anywhere else, but. . . . Maybe he is. But I haven't felt it. I haven't been around that much, but the candidates who have been out talking tell me that they sure as hell don't see it. I don't think we're going to have to worry about those turds. Some of them'll be elected but don't think they'll be a force. The day of Jim Martin, for example, I think that day is gone. I don't know what's on Walter's mind. You're talking about that 19-19 speculation? I think those guys are playing games up there. I noticed yesterday and in the morning paper, there's some guy that came out and he said "There's only one word I can use to describe Peterson's testimony. It was dynamite." Did you hear this?

W.D.V.: Saw it in this morning's paper.

Pelham: Yeah. And then you see what the rest of them said. It was on television as well as the newspaper. And then St Clair said he thought it was highly favorable. And then the other guys--I think they're really playing games with the press when they come out of there. I never felt Walter was sophisticated enough to be playing those kind of games and saying the count might be 19-19. I don't know what he's doing. Hell, he might be right. How would he know? No way he could know.

W.D.V.: Two guys already said he was crazy. That he couldn't pre-

dict anything.

Pelham: How can he speak for Cohen, for example? Now you've got to assume Cohen is going to vote for impeachment. At least everything indicates he's going to, so far. Then how can he speak for the other two, one of them from Tennessee and the other from Arkansas?

J.B.: Jim Mann and Ray ~~[Songman?]~~ *Thornton.*

Pelham: Yeah, where are they from?

J.B.: South Carolina and Arkansas.

Pelham: South Carolina and Arkansas. How in the hell can he speak for those guys?

[Interruption on tape.]

W.D.V.: --principle, when he did his study on southern politics, which was that if you understood the politics of race in the South, you understood southern politics.

Pelham: [Unclear.] That's been largely true. It's been largely true.

W.D.V.: It's still true?

Pelham: Well. . . not in the sense in which I think Key meant that. Race is still important, but there is a difference. Six or eight years ago a guy was running for office in Mobile county. He would have to deal with one group to get the black vote. And you had a single black leadership. But this is no longer the case. Now you've sort of got tribal warfare going on. In Mobile, for example, you've got Jay Cooper, who has his following. Then you got an old time civil rights leader named John Floor. Both of them good friends of mine. They'll never admit it, but they're developing into bitter enemies. Each got their own spheres of influence. Then you've got other small groups. You've got a labor union here, IIA, made up largely of black people. So that you don't

have a bloc vote. It's split up. But sometimes they'll get together on a race. Most of the time they're going to be on different sides. But still race is awfully--and at one time the white people, as soon as they found out how the blacks were going to vote. . . . Hell, you could change 30% of the white vote in this county if you could get out the black ballots, you know, and show them how the blacks were going. That's not true any longer. That's not so any longer.

W.D.V.: How about the open exploitation of race as an issue?

Pelham: I think that day's gone. It's gone. I had a curious thing happen though. Fifteen years ago my home county, which is Washington, and we've always had a heavy black vote there. They never had any trouble registering in Washington county. There was no stigma attached to. . . . Let me don't go back that far. Let me go back about 12 years. There was no stigma attached to the black vote up there. They've got about 40% black vote in Washington county. It's immediately north of Mobile county. But in this last election, the white people went against every candidate the blacks were for. My mother was telling me about it and I was really surprised because they've never done that before. They've always. . . I mean they used to be like they are in this county now. I mean, hell, they don't care how the blacks vote. But again you get back to the folks that, shit, they got all the problems they can say grace over without worrying about or affording the luxury of voting against somebody because somebody else is voting for him. But it's still a factor in politics here. It's still something that's tough to deal with. Moneywise. . . spend money on them. Most of them, not all of them. It tests a candidate. If he can handle a black situation running then I've always said he's qualified to hold a

public office. Because it's a real challenge to deal with them. And then--

J.B.: What's the money [hold?] in Alabama politics with blacks?

Pelham: Talking money, man. Have to pay. You do down here and I've heard it's true in other places. Course they don't say it to you "Look, you've got to pay me to get my vote." You got a list of people there. [I'm ^{not} saying it's illegitimate?] I don't know whether it is or not. But they've got names. Say "We've got to give this guy \$15 to haul workers. Our printing bill for our ballot we're going to put out is \$300." They'll have a list and it will total up say \$6,280. And they've got 12 races. They'll divide that figure by 12 and you're one of the candidates going to be endorsed and you put up your proportionate share of the money.

J.B.: But that was an itemized budget in paying costs.

Pelham: Fuck, I can itemize a budget too. Shit, man. I mean I don't know! Who knows? If you're on the ballot and you want the vote you give it to them. You don't ditpick with them and say "Well, you're really giving John--

[End of tape. End of interview.]