

This is an interview with Roy V. Harris,

This interview was conducted in Augusta, Georgia on April 22, 1974 by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries. Transcribed by Sarah Geer.

Jack Bass: You've been active in politics in Georgia how long, Mr. Harris?

Roy Harris: Well, the federal government was investigating us when, many years ago, one of them asked me that question. I said, "Ever since I was nineteen years old." He says, "Well, suppose we start back then and come up to date." (Laughing.) So I've been a little particular how I answer that question since. I landed in the legislature in 1921, and I guess that's when my beginning of my political activity and participation in state politics.

J.B.: Now, we're actually going to begin this book basically with 1948.

Were you involved in the Dixiecrat movement in '48? With Strom Thurmond?

Harris: Not . . . I supported Strom, but I wasn't very . . . I wasn't mixed up in it much. Not like I was in the Wallace campaign or in the . . . oh, what's the name of the senator that didn't get elected?

J.B.: Goldwater?

Harris: Goldwater's campaign. I organized . . . I set up the organization that carried both of those . . . Georgia on both occasions.

(Interruption for telephone call.)

J.B.: How old were you when you got to the legislature that first time?

Harris: Well, I remember they told me I was too young, and I was announcing I'd be twenty-six on my next birthday. That was my answer to it. I didn't do like Ed Rivers did. He ran for governor about my age back there when he was thirty-two. He said that . . . his answer to the charge that he was too young was that he'd got there as soon as he could. (Laughter.) I didn't think of that.

J.B.: What do you think have been the major changes in Georgia politics since 1948?

Harris: Very little. Basically it's been the same.

J.B.: And that's what . . . ? Do you think Georgia basically remains still a one-party state?

Harris: Yeah. Well, we're all Democrats, but we don't vote Democrat. We're fishing around, but trying to teach them all a little respect and tell them what we think about them. But, basically, you know, we were known as the old county-unit state.

J.B.: Right.

Harris: We're still operating under the old county-unit system. Not in fact . . . I mean, not legally, but I mean, in fact. That is, that this state is still controlled by the country county unit. In every election since they did away with the county unit system, the big counties have - about twelve or fifteen of the top counties - split. And these country counties swing it one way or the other. They've elected everybody that's been elected ever since that way. And everyone of them that have been elected has run over to Gene Talmadge, Lester Maddox kind of a platform when they got elected. We've had three that after they got elected on that

kind of a platform, three governors, that went the other direction.

J.B.: Who were those three?

Harris: Ellis Arnall, Carl Sanders, and Jimmy . . . .

J.B.: Carter?

Harris: Jimmy the present governor. All three of them. Now, Jimmy Carter, his platform was . . . . He says, "I'm just like George Wallace and Lester Maddox." He says, "All my people were Tom Watson people, and we've always believed that way." That's the way he got elected. And he turns out to be the most liberal governor in the South.

J.B.: How do you rate him as a governor?

Harris: Well, I've known intimately every governor since nineteen hundred and twelve. And he's next to the bottom. I think Cliff Walker was the sorriest one, and he's next to Cliff.

J.B.: What's the chief criticism?

Harris: How's that?

J.B.: What's your chief criticism?

Harris: Oh, he's got no ability at all. Hasn't done a thing but make a mess. He's passed through some . . . what he calls . . . . He brags about his re-organization, but the next legislature's going to undo every bit of it, just as quick as they can. I told him, he wouldn't listen, that I'd helped re-organize the state government three times, and neither one of the three had ever stuck. Only two things we ever did, in fifty years, and we created the present Board of Regents, and it lasted. That was in Dick Russell's administration in '31. And in Ed Rivers' administration in '37 or '38, we consolidated all the tax-collecting machinery in one department. And all the other re-organization moves and reform moves, soon

as the next administration comes in, they go back. And all I can see they accomplished, anyhow, you got rid of some officials and put your own crowd in.

J.B.: You think re-apportionment has had any effect on the legislature?

Harris: Yeah. Had an effect. But it's still controlled by the country counties.

J.B.: How do they exercise control?

Harris: They got a majority. Then, here, the next thing is, you take all these . . . . Well, take me for an illustration. I moved to Augusta from after country county twelve years. All my background has been with the country counties. And back in the old days, Richmond and Chatham, that was Augusta and Savannah, played with the country counties. And they still do pretty well. One of my law partners is a member of the legislature from a country county. Drives in here forty miles every day. And it's still controlled that-a-way. And the thinking. Take a lot of these legislative districts that are in suburban areas. There's just as much country in their thinking and voting as some county that's out here fifty or seventy-five miles from anyplace.

J.B.: People who live in those suburbs came from those country counties for the most part.

Harris: Well, and the next thing is, we've got a legislative district that my partner's in. I'll tell you, he lives in . . . he's got part of three or four counties in his district. Got part of Richmond in his district. Yet he's . . . his basic base county that he's always represented . . . . He's been in the house, this is his fortieth year, I believe, in straight succession, without a break.



J.B.: Do you consider yourself still a Democrat?

Harris: Well, I tell everybody that I'm a damn poor Democrat and no Republican at all. I don't know what that makes me. I voted for Strom Thurmond, and I got together a group and we organized and carried it for Goldwater, and we did the same thing for George Wallace. Now, when it comes down to being a Democrat like this crowd that's been running from up there ~~[for president from]~~ the United States Senate ~~[like the]~~ last two candidates, and the ones that look like they will and Teddy Kennedy. I'm not that kind of a Democrat.

J.B.: Do you see anybody in the Democratic party that you think could carry Georgia in a presidential election?

Harris: If they do, it'd be an accident. Unless they'll put George Wallace on the ticket, then he'll carry it.

J.B.: How about if George Wallace is not on the ticket, but actively campaigned for the ticket?

Harris: Well, let me tell you something. I find these people in politics will follow you, as long as you're going their way. And you cross them up and they're through with you.

J.B.: If Senator Goldwater had voted in favor of the civil rights act in 1964, would you have supported him?

Harris: I think so. I don't think there's any doubt.

J.B.: Do you think he would have done as well in Georgia?

Harris. Yes. I think he'd have done just about as well. They weren't voting for Goldwater. We didn't even like him. (Laughing.)

Those that were so out front didn't like him. We never did even consult him. We had no connection with him. We had a . . . we organized Democrats for Goldwater in Georgia, and I tell you, we didn't

even have any affiliation with the Republican organization or the Republican headquarters. Only one time that we ever had even . . . even called them on the telephone and talked with them, some fellow came along one day when I was up there and said he wanted to contribute to the campaign. And he was in the printing business and wanted to know if he could do some printing. And I said, "Well, everybody wants stickers. Print us up some stickers." Next time I went up there, there was a car load of stickers stacked up in the darn hotel, and we had no means of getting them out. We didn't even know what to do with them, we had so many. So I called up the Republican headquarters and told them if they wanted them to come get them. And the fellow I was talking to told me, he says, "Look, we'll get a taxi and come up and get them." I said, "Taxi, hell. I don't know whether one truck'll do it. You may need two." That was the whole connection we ever had with them. We didn't consult them from the beginning. They never came about us. And when the thing was over, they never thanked us or said a word to us, and we didn't either. And we were going . . . we were travelling over that basis. We let it be known we weren't Republicans.

J.B.: Why did you organize the Goldwater campaign?

Harris: It was just a protest vote.

J.B.: Okay, a protest against what?

Harris: Just a protest. Let the Democrats know where we stood.

J.B.: Well, suppose the Republicans had run somebody like Rockefeller instead of Goldwater. Do you think you'd have still done the same thing?

Harris: I doubt that it'd have been any different. Because nobody . . . . I don't know of a single person who was for Goldwater in our group, or even

admired him.

J.B.: What was it about Goldwater that they didn't like?

Harris: I don't know. I just never did . . .

of him was always just a cold personality to me. I never did warm up to him. Now, <sup>Bo</sup>~~Beau~~ Callaway used to tell me what a fine fellow he was, and how easy he was to get along with, and all that. But somehow or other, I never met Goldwater, never saw him, never heard him speak except on television. But he always left me as a rather cold personality. It wasn't . . . I never did warm up to him enough to even try . . . try to even meet the fellow.

J.B.: Did you support Callaway?

Harris: No, I supported Maddox. I would have liked to. Callaway is a good man, he's been a good friend of mine. And his folks have been. But he got me in the shape to where if he'd been elected he'd have beat my congressman, he'd have beat all my friends, and the only thing we could do to save our friends was go with Maddox. And my congressman up here at Athens, Bob Stephens, who is the nicest fellow you ever saw, he didn't have a chance until he got on that ticket with Maddox. If Callaway had run that off with anybody else, he'd have won, in the race. Ellis Arnall was in the race. If he'd have caught Ellis Arnall, why, he would have . . . . But Maddox is more conservative than he is, you know. Now, these folks don't like the idea of going Republican anyhow.

J.B.: There's a lot of talk in the South, especially among Republicans, of a re-alignment. All the conservatives becoming Republicans and leaving the Democrats, and the Democrats becoming the liberal party in the South, or the black party, or both. And all the conservative Democrats pulling

out and joining the Republican party. What's your view on that?

Harris: The Republicans aren't willing to do what's necessary to carry the South. And, you know, the race issue hangs over the South like the sword of Damocles. It does now and always has. If you eliminate that, there wouldn't be any difference in the thinking of the Democ . . . of the southerners and the Republicans. I mean, might be some, but, I mean, no material difference. But there's where the difference is, and the Republicans aren't willing to go get to the South.

J.B.: What do you think they have to do . . . ?

Harris: Now, Nixon. You know what Nixon did when he beat George Wallace and he got elected, kept it out of the House of Representatives in '68. Well, he came to Charlotte and made that speech, and left those people in North Carolina and Virginia, up in that area. He carried South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida with that one speech. And had our old friend Strom going all over the South making a speech saying that Nixon's just like I am. Just like me. And the Augusta newspapers came out one morning with a big headline, "Nixon is like me, Strom says." (Laughing.) But he convinced the people that he was in favor of free choice. And . . . in that speech in Charlotte, that's the way he did it. Otherwise, George Wallace had it. We were in it. Now, it made some difference in Georgia. It cut us down from about . . . I've forgotten now. Seems to me about like . . . it cut us from a good bit above fifty per cent of the vote to where we got a little bit better than . . . well, we got about fifty per cent. I figured that that speech cost us probably four, five to six, maybe five . . . anywhere from five to ten per cent of the vote. But we were so sorry, nothing could have happened could have changed this state. And, you know, the only politics

I've ever been in, mixed in that Wallace campaign, that I liked. We only spent fifteen thousand dollars on the whole campaign, and we raised that money ourselves. The campaign committee raised it. And I guess half of it was raised from selling, oh, these trinkets (?) they have during these campaigns. We were buying them out of Montgomery and selling them at the headquarters in Atlanta. Of course, we have to admit that the campaign cost more than that, but, for this reason. We carried on no propaganda campaign. We got the benefit of all of his television speeches and things of that type. We didn't carry a single ad in Georgia. So we had to get a petition signed, put his name on the ballot. And we submitted 225,000 names as quick as you know what happened. And we figured that whatever you had 225,000 . . . we had to have a hundred and something, and when they ran over us to sign the darn thing, we figured that for that kind of a campaign committee to need any money or anything else, nobody else would have it.

J.B.: Think Wallace would have done just as well if he'd run again in '72? In Georgia?

Harris: Yeah. Just as well. You mean on a third party ticket?

J.B.: Right.

Harris: Yeah. Of course, Wallace and these fellows, they've checked pretty carefully and they probably are right. They don't think the third . . . they can still carry half a dozen states down South, maybe, as a maximum. They don't think they can get beyond that. But we haven't changed much down in Georgia.

J.B.: What's Herman Talmadge's political role in Georgia?

Harris: Well, I don't want to be quoted on this.

J.B.: Okay.

Harris: Because right now, special personal reasons. Ordinarily I wouldn't mind. Because he and I have always gotten along fine, and I always said what I pleased and sometimes it doesn't suit him but he laughs at me and goes on. But cut that thing off a minute and I'll tell you why. (Interruption in recording.) Now, Herman Talmadge hasn't got the strength in Georgia he used to have. I don't think he'll have any opposition this time and he'll get by. And it will be more or less by default, because . . . . I was talking to one of his friends the other day. Herman was bragging that the polls are showing he had seventy per cent of the people with him. And he said . . . he told them, he said, "Herman, *[why are you]* bragging about having seventy per cent of the people with me, when you haven't got any opposition." (Laughing.) His people are disappointed. He hasn't been the fighter that they expected, and he hasn't scrapped enough for the old Georgia southern ideas they expected. He has openly played to get the Nigra vote, and a lot of us don't blame him, because somebody's going to split that vote some of these days. It's not going to stay solid like it's been. And the next thing is that if he's got a few of them with him, that keeps him from having opposition. Now, the Watergate thing . . . it hurt your senator from South . . . North Carolina, with the public generally. He was a hero for the first couple of weeks. They let that thing run too long. But Talmadge was able to sense it, and he ducked all those latter views. (?) He didn't ask any questions, and he wound up with the Watergate investigation helping him in Georgia. Helped him with a lot of young people, because the thing that these politicians don't know, as I told

Couple of years ago  
 Talmadge . . . / we met at a football game and he told me, says, "A bunch of women up there in your town . . . " It was September, it was a year ago. Said, "They was wanting to know how I stood on busing." And he said, "I told them everybody in Richmond County knew how I stood on busing." I said, "Well, Herman, half the people in Richmond County don't . . . don't . . . don't even know how you stand on anything. And I'd say a fourth of the people down there never heard of you. You been up there now seven or eight years and this picture changes. Those damn kids down there don't even know who Herman Talmadge is, much less know how he stands." And I said, "You better do something to get your name out in front of them, because that might be the margin you'd need." He's been making speeches in Georgia ever since. And he built his fences up. Talmadge can't say that he has a movement now like he used to, or like George Wallace can say. Talmadge can't say that he has a movement like his father did. Talmadge's strength now is purely personal. He's got a lot of friends, a lot of connections. Next thing is, he's lucky enough to have all the big corporations with him, because he usually follows the                      Company and the Coca Cola Company and all these folks that have got the real say-so in Georgia.

J.B.: There was a story that he wanted to come back and run for governor a second time                      and the corporations, in effect, told him he'd better stay where he was.

Harris: Well, it was a little bit more than corporations. He would have bucked the corporations, but the type of people that hit him is . . . one called me just after he called him, and I expect a half a dozen . . . they were small time business people who, every time he runs, give him around . . .



give him probably a thousand dollars. And they called him up and said, "Herman, if you run for governor, I'm through." Now, they were the folks who whipped him. It wasn't the big corporations.

J.B.: Why did they oppose him? I mean, was it the same reason, they wanted him in Washington?

Harris: Coming back here? Well . . . .

J.B.: Sort of heard that the corporations wanted him up there because he could do them more good.

Harris: That's true, and that's the reason these people wanted him there. The next thing is, they messed up the local politics. You know, when you go out and get out to local politics and then come back, the other fellow's already got him another horse, you know.

J.B.: Did Talmadge get involved in gubernatorial elections . . . .?

Harris: Stays out.

J.B.: Stays out completely?

Harris: Stays out pretty good. Dick Russell was a master at that, and Dick just tried . . . I mean, Herman's tried to follow Dick.

J.B.: In staying out?

Harris: Yeah.

J.B.: Now, in Mississippi we heard that <sup>Eastland,</sup> ~~Eastman,~~ for example, does get very much involved in a very quiet sort of way. Effective, quiet sort of way.

Harris: I think Talmadge would under conditions. But so far he hasn't He's stayed out.

J.B.: Is there anybody who sort of is a controlling influence within the Democratic party in Georgia?



Harris: This darn thing is wide open now. Just wide open.

J.B.: Would you have expected to see your friend Bob Stephens a few years ago supporting OEO legislation?

Harris: No. I get mad every time I see him. But, you know, Bob was educated to be a college professor, and that's what he is. And then he decided he didn't like that, and he studied law and practiced law. And his nature and disposition right now is not a lawyer or a politician. He's a college professor type. But he's a swell fellow. But he's always been more liberal than I am, I reckon. Although I might have supported OEO in the beginning. I don't know. I sure wouldn't now.

J.B.: Am I correct that you did support Edward McIntyre for the county commission?

Harris: Yeah, and not only that, both of these . . . oh, we've got two men in the city council that supported . . . Dents. Two Dent brothers. And one of them's in the legislature and one's in the council. I supported both of them.

J.B.: Anybody twenty-five . . .

Harris: Of course, one thing that isn't known very well, their mother and I were born on the same plantation. And we got a long connection all the way back.

J.B.: How about McIntyre?

Harris: McIntyre, he's . . . McIntyre . . . I practiced law at Lewisville twelve years. Lewisville, Georgia. McIntyre walks in here one day and he says, "Mr. Harris, my mother knew you down at Lewisville." Told me who she was. "And she says for me to come tell you that she would like for you to support me." And I said, "Well, if she says so, I have and I will."

J.B.: If anybody had told you twenty-five years ago that you'd be supporting black political candidates in Richmond County, what would you have said?

Harris: No. No, never has . . . that wouldn't. . . that's never bothered me. You know, I've always advocated giving them everything we've got, except I don't believe in nesting together. I draw the line when it comes to social. I think they ought to have their churches, their clubs, and organizations, and we ought to have ours.

J.B.: How about schools?

Harris: Yeah, I do too. In the lower level, I think . . . I don't think you can afford to in the university level.

J.B.: But you can afford to have separate when you get to the university level?

Harris: Oh, yes. I mean, below that. Well, you can in some sections. You take . . . we got counties in Georgia there's not a Nigra lives in it. You've got other counties where there're two or three families, when you get in the mountain areas, you know. They . . . up until this movement to the cities, they . . . . The black belt in Georgia was right across here. (Indicating on map.) You got to the extreme parts you'd find very few Nigras. You go north of Atlanta you find very few. I'd say it would stretch from, oh, right along about this area here.

J.B.: The Hart and Elbert County area?

Harris: Yeah. Right across to above Columbus. See, here's Columbus right here. See, it didn't come square across. It come right here, see? I can remember when this area here wasn't settled, most of it, really. I remember riding a horse and buggy all across, along about 1906, and you

couldn't see a thing but the original forest trees and wire grass, and about every five or six miles you'd run across a house out there somewhere.

J.B.: How do you assess the Republican party in Georgia at this time?

Harris: Oh, I don't think we've got any of any consequence. They've got an organization, they're well organized at the top. But they haven't got any privates.

J.B.: All . . . more chiefs than Indians?

Harris: Yes, sir. Now, in Georgia the Democrats are almost the opposite. They haven't got any chiefs. Now, you've got a lot of would-be chiefs. A lot of people try to be chiefs, but you haven't got many. There's only one strong political factor in Georgia today, and that's Lester Maddox. Just almost a personal thing.

J.B.: You think he's going to be elected governor again?

Harris: Without a doubt. They haven't got a chance to beat him, unless he cuts his own throat.

J.B.: What do you think is the key to his strength?

Harris: Basically, it's the race question. Then, there's two other things that give him an added strength. As you know, people generally . . . they don't have confidence in the politicians any more. And Watergate has finished up the little bit they did have, and all this mess that's come out of it. The people believe two things about Maddox. They believe he's sincere in his religion, and they believe he's honest. And I don't know of another politician in Georgia that can measure up to him on those two things. Because every . . . he doubts all of them, religion and honesty.

J.B.: How important is the fact that Maddox is religious and that people

believe he's religious and is sincere in it? How important is that politically in Georgia?

Harris: Well, you've got country Presbyterians and Methodists and Baptists in North Carolina, haven't you? And I know lots of them. And I tell you, whenever they get with you, you've got the finest political organization you ever saw. You can't call it an organization.

J.B.: How . . .

Harris: You go out there and talk to these country preachers, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, around these . . . on the edges of these cities. And then in the country areas. They'll fight you about Maddox.

J.B.: How important is it, say, for Richard Nixon to have . . . in the South, to have Billy Graham sitting in his corner?

Harris: It'll help, but Billy Graham, he doesn't have the personal grip on people Lester Maddox has.

J.B.: Well, they've got a different position on race. Is that the big factor on that?

Harris: I don't think you would have if they didn't. Course, I can remember when Billy Graham's position was as strong as mine on race. His father-in-law, old Dr. Bill, and I carried on a running correspondence for years. And Billy ran a revival in . . . he ran one of his revivals in Atlanta when Herman Talmadge was governor, and it was segregated. And he later announced to his friends that to have a world-wide influence he'd have to be for integration. And that's when he went on.

J.B.: When McIntyre ran for county commission here, didn't he get a fair amount of white support?

Harris: Had to be elected.

J.B.: Okay, how do you explain that?

Harris: Well, McIntyre ran once, and got beat. Two years later he ran again. And he . . . McIntyre . . . . Do you know him? Have you met him?

J.B.: I met him.

Harris: Do you know how black he is?

J.B.: Right.

Harris: He went around here and hired him . . . and got him, rented some bill boards, and he put the blackest damn picture up there you ever saw. (Laughing.) And, you know, it caught the attention of folks. And they said, "Well, he's one nigger isn't ashamed of his race." And it did. It caught fire. I . . . . People, some people, when they found out I was for McIntyre, they kidded me about it and wanted to know how I explained it. And I said, "Well, he's the right color." So are the Dents. The Dents are the right color. They're just as black as they can be. There's no white blood in them. But of course, that was said facetiously, but I'm not so sure it was as facetious as I thought it was at the time. But, anyhow, McIntyre did, and the next thing, these Dents. These Dents, when any of these folks around here that they'd been associated with, supported them in politics, when a member of their family dies they show up, and they come right in just like everybody else. They don't hesitate. When somebody's in trouble, you'll see them. But you don't ever see them trying to push themselves socially. Next thing about McIntyre, he's tied up with this Pilgrim Insurance crowd, and that's an exceptional bunch of Nigra people. They . . . . Two or three people started that, along about 1890, and it has been one of the strong . . . It's

just one of the strongest and one of the most reputable insurance . . .

Nigra insurance companies you'll find anywhere. And they stand . . . well, as a matter of fact, I've been practicing law here forty-two years, and I've never seen a suit against one of their policies in court here.

J.B.: I believe . . . is that an Augusta-based firm? The home office is here?

Harris: Yeah. Home office is here. It's an Augusta bunch, an Augusta group. And one family controls it. But there's a lot of others in it, you know, and of course, what they've done, they've brought a lot of people in here to help run it. It's all Nigra and there's no whites in it. No white stockholders, even. I represent the president of Pilgrim. And I try to steer him around so he won't lose control. (Laughing.) That's the main thing, he and his family. That's a funny thing about me, you know. I never lost a Nigra client yet, and I got lots more than I had. I got a tax case I'm settling now, and the IRS talked about prosecuting him ~~two~~ or three years ago, and I went up there and I said, "Well, look, how do you expect to prosecute a Nigra for fraud? Down in the federal court in Augusta where the head of the Citizen's Council representing him, and his chief witness is a Jew auditor? You know damn well you can't whip that combination." (Laughter.) So they didn't prosecute us. I don't know whether that had anything to do with it or not, but it was settled anyhow. In a few days, I think.

J.B.: Other than the governor, who are the most powerful people in the state politically? How powerful is the speaker, for example?

Harris: How's that?

J.B.: How powerful is the speaker of the house?

Harris: Well, the speaker . . . the present speaker . . . . Now, we had a

speaker there that was in the legislature for a long time. He was there when I was there. He was there when I was speaker. Always took credit for training him. And he died last year. Now, he was pretty influential because he'd been there such a long time. The present speaker is a nice fellow, and, of course, he's got a lot of power as a result of speaker.

J.B.: Does speaker appoint all committees?

Harris: Yes.

J.B.: How about committee chairmen?

Harris: Yes. Every one of them.

J.B.: He appoints the chairmen?

Harris: Everybody. I was speaker under two different governors, and one of them, Ed Rivers, way back. He and I were close enough friends, we said what we pleased to one another. Every time I wouldn't do what he wanted, he'd cuss me out. "Damn you," he said, "You have more power than the governor, when the legislature's in session." But, he says, "The day it adjourns," he says, "I can make you dance." (Laughter.)

J.B.: Does the governor have much voice in the election of a speaker?

Harris: Sometimes, and sometimes it doesn't. You know, we're pretty much like every other state. When you've got a strong personality as governor, he's almost got unlimited influence. When you got a weak governor, he's got practically none. Of course, if I were running for speaker, I'd always want the governor with me. And the times I did run, I had. But I had . . . . When I was in the legislature, we have ganged up on the governor and beat him, either the president of the senate or the speaker of the house.

J.B.: Now, the lieutenant governor, does he appoint . . . . How do committees in the senate get appointed?



Harris: They're appointed by the lieutenant governor.

J.B.: Chairmen also? Seniority is not a factor?

Harris: Oh, both sides, they've got a semblance of seniority that they go by, but you're not bound by it. Don't have to. But it's generally . . . it's kind of customary. Now, if somebody's dead set against you, don't give a darn how long he's been there, he's not going to step up to chairman. They fought Maddox . . . they with Maddox this last time because he took an old chairman and put another fellow in as chairman over him.

J.B.: But he got away with it, right?

Harris: Oh, yeah. In my day, we played a little game. A fellow ran against me, and I appointed him chairman of the committee on halls and rooms. (Chuckles.) Finally, he beat me and got to be speaker, and he made me chairman of the committee on halls and rooms. (Laughing.) And it was a standing joke.

J.B.: Who has real power in Georgia, from the standpoint of somebody that who . . . organizations/have influence in the legislature. In most states, we find a few big banks, power companies . . . .

Harris: Probably right now the banks have got more influence than all of the rest of them put together. I mean, if it come down to shove. Back in my day, and up until now, pretty much, at one time the bus and truck people . . . . Of course, when I first went to the legislature, the railroad and insurance companies controlled it when they wanted to. And then they saw them go down, so the bus and truck people come up, with all the telephone people and the power people come into prominence. And we saw banks come in. And, of course, in Georgia in all my day, the



Coca Cola company has been one big factor.

J.B.: Do they remain that?

Harris: And they're pretty strong now, for two reasons. Two or three reasons. First reason is they weren't regulated. And number two, they didn't mind spending the money on politics. And number three, that group that owned the trust . . . that controlled the Coca Cola company . . . (Interruption in recording. Side two.) . . . that had control over at least one big bank in every town. In the bigger towns, see.

J.B.: And they were controlled . . .

Harris: They had financial . . . .

J.B.: . . . . by Coca Cola, the same group.

Harris: Same group. And the same group that owned the trust company, the Coca Cola group, another group of them owned the First National Bank of Atlanta. And it has its chain all over. Then, we had another chain, the Mills Lane crowd, with the C and S Bank, all over the state. And . . . but when you get down to it basically, I'd say the old Coca Cola crowd's still in there. And they own so damn many other corporations. So I'd say the old Coca Cola crowd's all . . . has always, from year in and year out. Then they had *[one other]* thing too, they had a lawyer up there that just died two or three or four years ago, who was the most intensely practical politician I ever saw, by the name of Hughes Spaulding. Hughes was a devout Catholic, and was calling the shots for a bunch of Protestants (Laughing.) all over the state, all the time. But that never did make any difference.

J.B.: Was he associated with the Coca Cola people?

Harris: *[His law firm]* represented the Coca Cola people and the trust company of Georgia, the Cox *a [newspaper]* enterprise. Atlantic Ice and Coal Company.

Oh, all those big cotton mill chains, and by darn they represented mighty near a third of the money in Georgia.

J.B.: But how did he operate?

Harris: Quietly as you ever saw.

J.B.: With whom?

Harris: Different people. And I imagine . . . I doubt that he ever dealt with over a dozen.

J.B.: Did he have an entree with every governor?

Harris: Yes.

J.B.: What . . . How did he actually affect things? What would be an example?

Harris: Well, he didn't want but to be let alone. That's easy.

J.B.: How about on taxes, for example?

Harris: Just be left alone. They used to . . . . He used to take this view. See, I levied the first taxes ever levied in Georgia. We got to . . . . When I first went to the legislature, the total budget was ten million dollars. When Ed Rivers was elected in 1936, we'd gotten up to about twelve or fifteen. And Ed run on a ticket of spending money, every damn thing else, cooperating with Roosevelt, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, free school books, homestead exemption and every damn thing in the world. Increased appropriations for the public schools and everything. So I called him up one day and told him, I said, "Ed, we've got elected, legislature going to meet before long." I said, "And you're still going around making speeches, ain't doing nothing else. How are we going to pay for all this stuff you promising?" He said, "Hell, you're going to be speaker of the house. That's your job." Well, I didn't know what to do, so I went to Atlanta and the

boy in the Revenue Department . . . We all had a lot of confidence in him. So I told him I wanted him to get the group together and work us out a program. Called me up one day and says, "I can do it if you'll let me get the head tax man for the telephone company and one for the power company. They're the best in the country. We'll work you out a plan, won't have any trouble." Well, they worked it out and we took it and put it through the legislature, and before I could get the legislature adjourned the Coca Cola company had hired my man. (Laughing.) So, well, anyhow, we boosted the revenue up to about forty million dollars. When you consider that it . . . the legislature just adjourned and adopted one worth a billion, seven hundred million you can see what's happened. But . . . and we came back through later and put in the sales tax and all. The tax structure in the state hasn't been changed since. It has just, with the growth and development and the inflation in the state, it jumped from around fifty billion dollars a year . . . fifty million, I mean, to a billions.

J.B.: Who finances campaigns in Georgia, basically?

Harris: Well, different people. It all depends on who's running. Gene Talmadge taught us all a new lesson when he came along. He taught his folks to pay the bills. He didn't need so many big . . . all the big folks came along. But you take what we do, we just start taking up a collection from everybody all over the state.

J.B.: How much support you got in, say, a senate race.

Harris: Now, you take Maddox, for instance. We got a list now, we're trying to get 250,000 people to contribute to his campaign. We'd rather have a dollar from 250,000 than to have a hundred dollars from that many.

Because you got more than money can buy when you get them, see, and you get them going. But it does . . . and you'd be surprised, you'd be surprised, at the folks who will give you a check for a thousand dollars, two thousand, four or five thousand dollars. And all they want is to get on the state executive committee or some honorary commission of the governor's staff or something of that kind. only thing in the world except a little recognition, and maybe he's made a little money down at Bohunk (?) and he would like to have a little prestige. His wife would love to go to Atlanta for a few big dinners or parties or something. They'll yank it out. Now, it's hard to get money out of the utilities. Tough. About the only way you'll get it out of there, somebody has to . Somebody has to pad the expense account. So you got three or four commissions, watching them all the way up and down the line.

J.B.: How about Coca Cola?

Harris: Nobody. The only thing is, you can't deduct it from your income tax. That's the reason that Coca Cola has been so powerful. There's no restraint on what they can do. Of course, there's a general law says a corporation can't contribute, but I think it's a damn shame they're convicting these folks now for it, because it's nearly a universal custom ever since they've been here.

J.B.: How much influence does organized labor have in Georgia?

Harris: Good bit, good bit. But they're not controlling, and they can't control their own folks. When the issue comes, we're seeing somebody like George Maddox . . . George Wallace or Lester Maddox or the Talmadges, they can't . . . labor can't control them.

J.B.: So what can they do, put up manpower and . . . ?

Harris: We got up . . . we got seventy-five per cent of the labor vote for George Wallace in Georgia, with every labor official in the state fighting us hard as they could. We had the Republicans telling them a vote for Wallace was a vote for country. And the union crowd was telling the unions a vote for Wallace is a vote for . . . a vote for Nixon. But that didn't make any difference.

J.B.: What's going to be the effect of Maddox's attack on Martin Luther King, on his portrait?

Harris: That'll elect him governor, that one statement. You know, a lot of us are hypocrites. I think a lot of . . . we old folks are more in a hypocritical age. I came up in the boot leg age. I still would feel better if I could go in the back door to buy my bottle of liquor, than going in the front. I think that's just something in the nature. But these damn people will stand up and tell you that they're for race mixing and integration and, by golly, every damn time one gets in the ballot box, he'll vote for segregation in spite of hell. Nobody knows about it. See, it's kind of socially the thing to do, is to be for integration. They don't have to argue with the preacher, they don't have to argue with all these do-gooders. They're going to keep their mouth shut and play hypocrite. You know, I don't know whether you ever saw it or not, the New York Times made a tape for public broadcasting in which they had this other Daniels who married Truman's daughter, and a reporter from New Orleans and one from Atlanta, quizzing me and Julian Bond. And somebody tipped me off in that newspaper crowd in Atlanta that they were laying for me. So they gave me a opening right at the first thing. They asked me if I still believed in segregation, or

something like that. I said, "Yes, sir. I do. Always have and always will." And I said, "You folks do too. You folks here, you newspaper people here, every one of you, when a Nigra moves in the same block, you head for Maryland or Virginia one. All of you run. Every one of you run. All of you are a bunch of hypocrites." I said, "You just advocate this thing for somebody else, but you're not willing to practice it." So Daniels turned right quick to Bond. He says, "Mr. Bond, what do you say about that?" He says, "Well, as bad as I hate to, I've got to agree with Mr. Harris." So we started off, both of us calling them a bunch of hypocrites to start with. And so we had a fairly decent program. And Bond and I, there were very little difference in our views, except he was for total integration and I was for total segregation. (Laughing.) As a matter of fact, Bond is smarter than they give him credit for.

J.B.: Was that the first time you ever sat and really talked with him?

Harris: No, no. I had been on another program with him a time or two before. I knew his views. Atlanta Magazine, the New York Times, Atlanta Magazine, they taped and ran an interview between he and I. And part of it was taken while we were having dinner at the Bunny Club. And they ran it in Atlanta Magazine and the New York Times got it and they serialled it and sent it all over the country. Not as fully as that. But I knew Bond. I had the advantage of him because I knew Bond's views. He used to tell me, he said, "There wasn't any difference between you and the rest of them." He said, "The rest of them are a bunch of damn hypocrites. (Interruption in recording.)

J.B.: What do you think now is the impact of black voting in Georgia?

Harris: Well, they have never yet been able to vote their strength.



The only way they can get to these Nigras, for the average Nigra to vote, to register, they have to pay him to go register. . The only way they can get him to vote, they have to pay him to vote. Now, I don't mean they have to buy his vote, but he just ain't going to quit and get off the job to go and vote. And if they haven't got the money . . . . I remember when we were . . . had this fight here for Wallace and Humphrey and Nixon. Couple of days after the election, we were going out, a bunch of us, together. This lawyer friend of mine handed up the Democrat vote. And he was telling me, he says, "We were spending all our money with the niggers." And says, "Five o'clock on the afternoon before the election they come up here and told us they had to have fifteen thousand dollars more, and so we had to go to the bank and borrow it." I said, "Well, Joe, you mean you've got to buy them to vote on their side?" He says, "Yeah. Here was Nixon and George Wallace both against them, and they won't even go out and support their own man." I think they spent about thirty some odd thousand dollars, getting them out to vote. And then didn't get but a handful. They can't vote their full strength to save their neck. They have to have . . . they won't turn out to vote for one another, unless they got some money. I don't know how they work it. I don't know whether . . . now, when they first started voting, the preachers got all the money, and they voted the congregation. But they got too smart. They can't do that now.

J.B.: How about the blacks in the legislature? What's been the effect of them?

Harris: Well, of course, they got some pretty good legislators among some of them. But as a whole, they vote as a block, and they're not very effective, although they got fifteen or twenty. (Interruption in recording.)

J.B.: Do you think that race is still the controlling factor in Georgia politics?

Harris: I do. The Nigras vote on . . . . if it controls the Nigra vote, they control the majority of the white vote.

J.B.: Is there anything else you wanted to add that we haven't discussed?

(End of interview.)