

Interview with W. F. (Bill) Minor, Jackson Bureau Chief, New Orleans
Times-Picayune, March 25, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter
 De Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Jack Bass: That's right, you are one of the few liv--you've been
 covering Mississippi since before the Dixiecrat convention.

Minor: Yeah, my first assignment. . . . Yeah, the Dixiecrat's really
 started here.

J.B.: Did you just start here?

Minor: No, no, see I'd worked for the Picayune. I was in Tulane.
 I worked for them in '42. That was my last year in Tulane. Worked
 for them while I was in school. Then I graduated, went in the navy.
 Then I came back after the war and I worked in New Orleans before I
 came up here. And I came here in '47. There'd always been a bureau
 here. I came in August of '47. My first assignment was the funeral of
 Theodore G. Bilbo. So I made my career date from there [G]. You
 saw Bilbo's statue and didn't even know it.

Walter De Vries: Is that life-size?

Minor: That is larger than life size.

W.D.V.: It is?

Minor: Isn't that a monstrosity, though. He was a little bitty short
~~[shitting]~~ shit? you know. But that's an ugly statue, done by some
 German sculptor. And I think he did it with a vengeance or something.

W.D.V.: That's gross. It looks like he's about ready to give somebody
 a finger.

Minor: It is the. . . . I think it's symbolic. The day that that
 statue is moved out of there I think Mississippi will have made the
 turn completely. Really, because I think that's still--

W.D.V.: Why is it still there? It's obvious it's an ugly piece of work.

Minor: The reason why is because the secretary of state who is custodian of the buildings was a Bilbo-phile and he thinks that Bilbo was just the greatest, you see. And he's the guy that put the thing there. They had it stuck in a corner way down at the end of the hall in what they call the hall of governors. They had portraits, you know, all around the hall and they had this thing stuck away in a niche where you wouldn't see it too much. They had to move it out of there and put it someplace else, so he puts it right squat in the middle of the rotunda there.

J.B.: What do you think it's symbolic of?

Minor: Well, I mean, first I think it's an anchor to the past in Mississippi, you know. And this is the last vestage, I would say, of the reluctance to change and accept, you know, accept the dynamic changes of the '60s and the '70s. And I mean it's kind of a throw back. Too much. . . so much of a memory of the old political ways. And actually, few people in Mississippi anymore, I mean, think of Bilbo except in most derogatory terms. I mean it's part of the past that the people would like to forget. And yet it stands out, he stands out there still as a symbol of the past that they really want to forget. I mean if you took a popularity poll on whether to move the statue, I think they'd move the statue. But this guy who is secretary of state is like 70 years old, you see, and he's still--

J.B.: Do you think Bilbo's image in Mississippi today is one that causes embarrassment, or what?

Minor: Yes, I think it is. I would say by and large that would be the proper term. Because it is a part of the past that really they prefer to forget. Same. . . happening more recently with ^Ross Barnett. There's no defense of Ross Barnett's stance on the Meredith case.

J.B.: He was, of course, repudiated at the polls. Right?

Minor: Yeah, right.

J.B.: How would you summarize this whole period? You've been through the whole thing. You know, in summary, what is Mississippi like today compared--politically--compared with when you got here?

Minor: Well, politically, the state has not matured nearly as much as it has in race relations and in human relations. I mean I think the state is still naive politically. It's ~~appointed~~ ^{stunned}. I think they still nurture the desire to reconstruct the old confederacy. At least politically so. Not in the sense of being able to turn back the clock in civil rights or anything else. But there's still a great deal of that stand alone philosophy that. . . . I mean, you can look back at every time the state has had an opportunity to go for something, you know, a third choice, you see. The latest in '68, you see--that was Wallace's race. '68, '64, '6--. Well, the state had bolted the Democratic ticket, let's see, they bolted four of the last six elections. This is what it all started about, you see, in 1948, was the idea, you know, that the state had been, you know, loyal, most Democratic state of all and had stayed with the party through Al Smith and through Franklin Roosevelt and so on. And that the state didn't owe anything to the Democratic party. More that they had been loyal to it all these years. Actually, the average guy in Mississippi, whatever it be, you know, the redneck, the guy at the forks of the creek, you know, who decide political decisions in Mississippi, has been confused by. . . . Well, there was a real, I would say very artistic, job of brainwashing that was done on the redneck in Mississippi in 1948. And it was the high skilled, public relations, I mean advertizing man, named George Garden [?] who was among the key strategists in developing the Dixiecrat movement in 1948. And they knew that the only

way you could get the Mississippi--I mean dyed in the wool Mississippi Democrat to ever leave the party would be to prove to him that the party had betrayed him. So they did a selling job in '48 that is still in existence now. I mean, with the average Mississippian who really wants to be a Democrat. Is still confused about the Democratic party. He thinks the Democratic party left him, see, and that he didn't leave the Democratic party. This was the theory under which the Dixiecrat movement was begun in 1948. And this is the device, I mean it's been used with some variations in every campaign since then. With Ross Barnett in 1960. Then Goldwater in 1964 and then Wallace in '68. And of course when it got down to '72 they were all set up to vote Nixon. Purely a campaign of personalities, ~~which still~~

. I mean there's no loyalty to national party in Mississippi. And this has been undermined by the fact that no national political figure in Mississippi have tried to, you know, re-orient Mississippians to the fact that the national Democratic party is where their salvation is economically and on many other questions. And so consequently, if you have nobody showing, trying to rebuild the image of the Democratic party as the best friend, you know, of the South and the best friend, you know, of the benighted Mississippi redneck, you don't have any--you know, there's no justification then for them going Democratic. The dye that was cast in '48, I think, still pretty well governs our politics in Mississippi as far as national politics.

J.B.: What is Eastland's role in Mississippi politics?

Minor: Well he is the most powerful single figure in Mississippi politics. No question about it. And has been for years. Even though the average Mississippian doesn't even know that. You'd have to be someone who's a close student of politics or a journalist, someone like us, who really understand how he works and how all encompassing his political maneuvering

is. And he, of course, has not publicly identified himself in supporting the Democratic ticket since 1960 when he identified with Lyndon Johnson and Jack Kennedy. And that's the last time we've ever heard from him.

J.B.: Does he operate as a somewhat shadowy sort of figure?

Minor: By and large yes. He certainly doesn't do it through overpowering oratory or charisma. Because he has none. It's done through wire-pulling. I mean this is how he operates. He has a great many politicians in the state plus business people and others who are obligated to him. And he gets their IOUs and then cashes them in when he needs them. He's used his influence in Washington to help everybody that he can help. You know, help a guy in his income tax trouble or help a guy get a business loan or something like that who's business is about to go under. You know, they don't forget it easily.

J.B.: Now does his influence extend down into the legislature on state issues?

Minor: Sometimes it does. Yes, sometimes--

J.B.: Any exact examples of that?

Minor: Well, yeah, the most important change of guard that could have taken place in the legislature occurred after Walter Sellers, who was speaker of the house and the most powerful figure in the history of the legislature in Mississippi. He had been speaker for 25, 26 years and had been a member of the house for 50 years, I believe. Was a tremendously powerful guy. When he died, like in '66. . . . Of course everyone was not prepared. . . . Whether there was going to be a power struggle or a change of guard, you know. And Eastland apparently did come into the picture to see that the transition was not very cataclysmic and the person that took Eastland's place--

J.B.: Sellers'

Minor: I mean Sellors' place was someone highly acceptable to him and also perhaps under the old guard that Sellors had--

J.B.: Who did replace Sellors?

Minor: John Junkin--j-u-n-k-i-n--. He's still speaker but he's in very bad health now and he's been out this session.

J.B.: What were those interests that Sellors was representing?

Minor: Well, Sellors, of course, came out of the delta and the delta planter-staten-politicians have pretty well run the legislature here since, well, since the '20s anyway. Probably since Borderman [?] really. Before the '20s. Sellors was, you know, the gracious old southerner who was thorough convinced that the Democratic party was the opiate of the masses and that. . . . I think, I mean, he really was one of those who was building the transition to the Republican party eventually. But, you know, he was very--he was one of the key people in the Dixiecrat movement, see, in 1948. And of course he represented big business interest and big planter interest and so on. And Eastland's interested in the same thing. Sellors would be more. . . .

J.B.: Would it be more big planter interest than big business if the two clashed?

Minor: I don't understand that.

J.B.: If you had an issue in which big business interests and big planter interests clashed, would he have then represented big planter interests?

Minor: Yeah, but I don't think--you wouldn't find such a clash I don't believe in this state. Eastland would be a little bit more liberal than Sellors now. Eastland was more of a, is more of a practical politician, you see. He will accept certain things that a Sellors would never accept.

J.B.: We've been told that almost all the politicians supported Sullivan

in 1971 except for Eastland. And that Eastland supported Waller. And that this was a major factor. And that he supported Waller because he really was opposed to Sullivan. Is that basically--?

Minor: Yeah, well, I wouldn't say all politicians, but most of them, people in the legislature, for example, who picked a candidate, I mean they were for Sullivan. And he had by and large I guess the more politicians in the state. And business interests too. I mean, he had the business interests. And Eastland was, though a strange set of circumstances had decided a few years ago that he didn't like Sullivan. There's literally no specific incident in anything that really brought it about except that Sullivan apparently had made some remarks--best we can figure out--at some cocktail party or something where he had a bit to drink or something and he threatened to run against Eastland one time. Oh that got back to Eastland and apparently Eastland made up his mind from now on that he didn't want Sullivan to get anywhere in Mississippi politics. He didn't even know Waller. The first time Waller went up to see Eastland, he'd never met him before.

J.B.: Was that when he was a candidate?

Minor: Yeah. It was in May of '71 as a matter of fact. He went up to get annointed and. . . .

J.B.: What was the effect of that?

Minor: Well, you see, Eastland did not do it openly. See, his support for Waller was never in any way. . . . They don't brandish this kind of support, you see, out in the open. I mean, how it was done is that Eastland turned loose some of his major sources of political campaign money and made them available to Waller.

J.B.: That was after this meeting?

Minor: Yes.

J.B.: You know how the meeting came about?

Minor: Well, Waller, I think, ^{went} out to see him. He knew Eastland was looking for a candidate. And actually, Eastland had half way endorsed two people prior to the first primary. But then when it became evident that Waller was going to be the best chance, well then he, of course, shifted to Waller. But this took place after that. I mean he did get some of Eastland's main bankrollers to guarantee enough money to hire this little squawker. You know, the agency got it from up at Memphis and that turned out to be a real stroke for Waller because he put on a very shrewd campaign for him.

J.B.: Is that the first real media campaign ever waged in Mississippi?

Minor: Well, no, we'd had media campaigns before, but he put on the shrewdest media campaign.

J.B.: Was that the first professionally run media campaign?

Minor: I think so, yeah. Although there've been some pretty high price media people out of Texas come in here for the Republicans in the governor's race in '63 and '67. They didn't put on anything nearly as effective. . . . The way Walker was so smart, he didn't have Waller speaking very much. Because Waller is a lousy speaker, you know, but he doesn't have a redneck, northeast Mississippi red clay, hill twange which people like. Gives them identity anyway. But he didn't have him saying very much. Just show a long film with Waller would say a few words or something like that. Then in the second primary is where I think he played his cards really smart, because, see, Sullivan had led the ticket pretty handily in the first primary. And Waller had a heck of a 60,000 some margin to overcome. And Walker handled Waller in such a way that they put Sullivan on the defensive immediately and Waller just didn't say a thing hardly in the second primary and let Sullivan. . . tear himself to pieces.

J.B.: How do you mean, put him on the defensive?

Minor: Well, because Sullivan ran his first primary campaign ignoring all the other candidates. And suddenly he does an about face in the second primary and starts attacking Waller, you see, and calling for Waller to face him in debates and to come on out and say what he really means. Walker just holds Waller back, doesn't answer any of the Sullivan charges and just ignores Sullivan, more or less, in the second primary. And it worked beautifully for Waller because he had Sullivan, you know, firing all these demands for debates and response from Waller, you see, and Waller was just not answering anything. It worked very well for him. Of course he concentrated on a lot of visual aids. He used Waller's face an awful lot.

J.B.: How has Waller been as governor?

Minor: He's been a tremendous surprise, really. He has no really strong convictions but he has an opinion on everything and he has sort of a country boy's fascination for playing with everything, every facet of state government. . . . Everything's new to him, see. One thing about him, he has no hang ups about anything that's gone on before him. It's all brand new to him. He doesn't mind tackling sacred cows or the shibboleths of the past. He's challenged the legislature which is something which is very seldom done. In fact nobody other than J.P. Coleman, and that's back in the '50s, has really challenged the legislature. The legislative branch of government has been the most powerful branch of the government, perpetuated by the old guard Walter Sellors. And Waller has very effectively challenged the legislature. The governor in Mississippi. . . you know, weak governor concept. Everything is written, even in the state constitution, to limit the power of the governor. There are numbers of limitations place on his power by the state constitution. So he has a weak governor concept to begin with and then, you know, if the person that occupied the office is sort of, let's the

legislature push him around. . . . You have little programs and we've never governors that really come forward with a program particularly everytime the legislature meets. Waller has broken that pattern. He's come forward with. . . . ~~For example this program you have of~~

a legislative program. This is unheard of for a governor of Mississippi to come forward, you know, with a detailed, lengthy program, controversial in many aspects at mid point of his administration. Just hasn't happened before. And he's talking about things like gubernatorial succession, which is, you know, this has been one of the never never lands in Mississippi. Governors have never--I think maybe only one governor in a great many years, you know, ever talked about amending the constitution to allow a governor to succeed himself. And Waller's been talking about this. He hasn't gotten very far with the legislature about it yet, but he's not through with it. He is. . . the guy. . . I mean he has no handles. I mean it's very hard for the legislature or anybody else to grab ahold.

J.B.: Has he gotten anything substantive through the legislature?

Minor: Well, of course he takes a lot of credit for a highway program that passed in 1972--a \$600 million highway program which has not really gotten underway, yet. Not an awful lot. I think he's prevented some things from happening though around here. There's always been a lot of programs that the legislature's put through. He's gotten through a little bit of stuff. But I don't think you'll find an awfully lot of big programs that you would have to give him credit for. The highway program I guess you'd give him credit for because he did get it financed when it looked like it was not going to be financed.

J.B.: Was this a bond issue?

Minor: Well, authorized bonds, but then they had to raise an awful lot

of taxes to--

J.B.: Gasoline taxes?

Minor: Yeah.

J.B.: How much?

Minor: Well they raised the gasoline tax one and a half cents, I guess. They raised a lot of other taxes to go along with it. I mean, there was a whole tax package. Gasoline tax was one of them. Everything including the beer tax , cigarette tax and diesel tax.

J.B.: Well, what are they going to do with the money?

Minor: Well, the idea is to build 1,500 miles of four lane car roads. See the state is lacking four lane highways other than the interstate. The idea is to build these four lane corridors across the state. But it's just been real slow. You see, in Mississippi one of the problems of course of every governor is that every other state official is elected independent of the governor, you see. And of course the legislators are elected independent of the governor. Nobody runs on the ticket.

J.B.: How many state wide people are elected?

Minor: Oh lord, they have this terribly long ballot. At least 15 state ^{oners} officials are elected, including highway commissi/. That's what I was getting around to. You see, the highway commissioner is elected by districts and they are highly independent. So much so that they kind of thumb their noses at the governor, see, and come and go about their own business. So he's been having a constant battle with the highway commission and he's been very critical of it and has threatened to get the thing, you know, the system changed. He hasn't had any success with it yet. It isn't yet reorganized. Just an example of some of the things he has not been able to do. His influence in the legislature, see, is not too wide spread. This is part of the old system here of not--the governor does not have floor leaders, you know, and whips and people who,

you know, can flag a governor's program through the legislature. They just don't have that. So his influence is individual legislators who may go along with him. And he does not have very effective people who are helping him in the legislature now.

J.B.: How does his administration compare with all the others from 1948 on? Is it more activist, is it caretaker? Is there some way to describe it?

Minor: His is not a caretaker administration. No, I think he has. . . . Well, the first thing, he's the first governor to ever really bring blacks into any *any board or* commission of the state. First time. And he now has blacks appointed on some 25 state boards or something like that. He's the first governor to bring in a black assistant in his office, you know, on his staff.

J.B.: What kind of blacks does he bring in, Bill?

Minor: Well they're not, you know, they're not highly acceptable to the--

J.B.: Were any of them active in the civil rights program?

Minor: No, except. . . yeah, well, I mean, in a way. One of them is Cleve McDowell who was the second black to enter the University of Mississippi. He was one of the targets of the Ross Barnett period, you know. And Ross Barnett harrassed him so much that they finally got him thrown out of school. Back in the '60s. Cleve McDowell was able later to go ahead and finish his education someplace else and he has him, for example, on the state penitentiary board. Waller put a black on the penitentiary board, and the parole board--places where certainly nobody'd ever. . . . And there've been more blacks appointed, really, than any other state--

W.D.V.: *Would he* see that as a most significant accomplishment?

Minor: I think it will be, yeah. He's been a surprise in that score.

He's been a surprise on his attitude about the national Democratic party. He's the first governor since J. P. Coleman to proclaim that he is a national Democrat. He doesn't really quite understand what he's saying, but he says that he is a national Democrat. And of course he made. . . I think it was a rather strong effort in 1972 to get recognized and get the regular Democrats--which he heads, you see, in Mississippi, nominally is the head of--to get them back into the national Democratic party. And he did, you know, undertake to negotiate with the loyalists Democrats who are recognized by the national party. The negotiations reached I think a rather significant point. I think it established some foundation on which the party's factions can be merged eventually. I mean I think this was evident that a good foundation was established. But he had no background for. . . . I mean we had no idea how he stood on national politics before. He had never been identified with any of the bolt movements. I mean he'd not been identified with Ross Barnett's unpledged elector movement, you know, in the 6th area [?] in 1960, and he'd not been identified in the Wallace movement or any of that. But, at the same time, he'd never been identified with any kind of national Democrat, either.

J.B.: Am I correct, what he was best known before was as ^{prosecutor?} ~~the prosecu-~~
~~tive delay Beckwith?~~. Was that an elected prosecuting position?

Minor: Yeah, he was the district attorney for Hines county, which is this county. Yeah. The effort that he put forth in that campaign, I mean that trial, was I think pretty widely accepted, even by national press and everyone who was here as being a genuine effort.

J.B.: Does he use the veto more than any other governor?

Minor: Well he's veto has been one of the more active vetoes, yes.

Certainly he vetoed more pet bills of legislators than any governor.

Only one to compare with would be Coleman and I think he's beaten Coleman

on that. And he likes to go at bills, I think, that he knows are going to upset or annoy certain legislators. And by doing this, I mean, he keeps them off balance. And he doesn't particularly get anything, no quid pro quo about the thing. He doesn't get any return but he gets the satisfaction of keeping them off balance. And then eventually I think he's going to get something out of it.

J.B.: Is this mostly little special interest legislation of a minor nature or. . .?

Minor: No, not altogether that way. Like last week he vetoes a bill to create a trust fund for the revenue sharing money, you see. He's had it in mind ever since revenue sharing money was made available that the governor should determine how the money is spent. The legislature, of course, gets here and they pass a bill to create a revenue sharing trust fund that they decide how the money will be spent. This is the second time he's vetoed a bill. . . He vetoed one last year and he vetoes one again last week. And he uses all kinds of reasons for vetoing it, but the basic reason is that he wants to try to retain control over the money. It's being operated now under an executive order that he issued in November of 1972. And it gives him a sort of veto power over how it's spent. And I think he wants to retain. . . . So he and the legislature go around I think about a number of things. One where the legislature has tried to extend it's power into the executive branch of government. It's already extended much to far in Mississippi. I mean, under previous governors the legislature has gone really headlong into the administrative branch, I mean the executive branch of government. The legislators serve on, gee, just a number of boards that are actually in the executive branch of government. So Waller, I think, has met them head on on that score. For example there's a very powerful investigative arm of the legislature called the Peer

Committee, which was just created last year. And had a hard time getting Waller to agree to sign a bill that created this, because it involves legislative post audit and there is a state department of audit, see. Right. So two weeks ago he vetoes the appropriation for the Peer Committee, just like that. Cuts off their funds.

J.B.: And this veto was then sustained?

Minor: The veto was not overridden.

J.B.: Does that suggest that he's got a fairly strong support in the legislature, the fact that they don't--

Minor: No, no.

J.B.: Why don't they override it?

Minor: No, he's using the negative power that the governor has. I mean it takes two-thirds. In other words, you either have to have two-thirds. . . . In other words he has power equivalent to two-thirds of the legislature. Which any governor's always had.

J.B.: He's got to have basically the support of at least a third of the legislature.

Minor: Well, yeah, except. . . . Now this is the strange thing about Mississippi legislators is, there's a goodly number of legislators that are just floating somewhere in the middle. Like sheep. And they will run in whichever direction they think the power is. And they have been the ones that the old guard have dominated all these years. And suddenly here comes Waller and using the negative power of the veto and a lot of these sheep in the legislature have tripped over on his side. But he has not been able to cultivate them to then take that and build on it in order to use that as an affirmative power.

J.B.: But they perceive him as being strong and they don't want to cross him.

Minor: That's right. And they're afraid to cross him because they may want something on some of their really personal pet bills, you see.

J.B.: Do you know if there's any quid pro quo between him and Eastland in so far as running the Eastland seat?

Minor: No, I don't think so. Yet I think he will probably run for the Senate when Stennis. . . . Stennis, unquestionably, I think, will step out. Even before he was shot at I think he had made up his mind to do that. I think it's just absolutely certain now. And that seat will open up first and I think that's the one Waller will run for. Because that will come up in '76. I think he would have run for the Senate if something had happened to Stennis when he was shot last year.

J.B.: Do you think Waller will get this situation resolved between the regulars and the loyalists this year?

Minor: I would doubt if Waller could do it. I would imagine if Robert Straus came in here or sent some good, clever, forceful mediators, I think it could be settled, yeah. And I think there'd be a lot to work with. I think the trouble with Waller is he's too heavy handed and he's too. . . . He really is not a clever politician. And he's not shrewd. And he does not really know, I don't think, the real ground rules. And I think he's really out of his element in the kind of politics that he's playing with. But I mean I think his intentions are. . . . Well I think you ought to give him a certain amount of credit for having good intentions. And certainly he's risked alienation with the people who elected him, the rednecks in Mississippi. I mean the fact that he publicly identifies himself as a national Democrat. That in itself is not highly acceptable to most redneck Democrats in Mississippi. They're not ready to identify with the national party. And he thinks that Mississippi can really be brought back into the Democratic party. But he's not a good negotiator, I don't think. I don't think he has good

people that are representing him in the negotiations.

J.B.: Does he perceive himself as being a potential vice presidential candidate?

Minor: No.

W.D.V.: That's the first one.

Minor: He's the only southern governor I think that's not in the running.

W.D.V.: Can we go back to the initial question about the last 25 years and you've described the change in terms of national politics. What do you see in terms of state politics? What's occurred in those 25 years?

Minor: Yeah, well I think state politics have changed a good bit. I think that you have more professionalism now in politics. I mean I'm talking about in terms of introducing professionalism in the job. The quality of people, I think. . . with a broader spectrum. . . has improved considerably. You find very few of the old time, really, you know, ~~snapping~~, back slapping and cigar smoking kind of politicians in state government. There are a few of them. I'm not saying they're all gone by any means. And I think Waller's election-- I mean, we been talking about. . . have to bring that up as an example. That is a turning point in Mississippi politics.

J.B.: Would Sullivan have been a different. . .?

Minor: Well, Sullivan is a little more skilled in state government. Sullivan probably would have not been as moderate as Waller. Waller can afford to be more moderate because he had no labels before he went into office. But frankly, the two finalists in the Democratic primary in 1971 were two people by Mississippi standards who could, you know, be classified as moderate and who did not employ, I mean the old, the emotionalism of politics of race. And did not take a couple of opportunities of some of the events that took place during that campaign that they

could have let everybody, I mean. . . to the precipice again about, I mean. . . busing was an issue then and it was not really raised in the campaign. There was a shooting, the RNA, Republican New Africa shoot-out took place right here right during the campaign. They could have created a whole new issue out of that, or tried to. No, I think the campaign ran off on rather moderate grounds for a Mississippi campaign. So I think that represented a change in style in Mississippi politics. Certainly it was the first time where there was a very conscious effort not to alienate, turn off any black voters openly, publicly. The tragedy of the campaign was that the appeal for the black voters, the real bid for the black voters took place behind the scenes too much. I mean both sides were scared to, for example, hire blacks in campaign positions where they were visible and all and make any real overt bid for the black vote. I mean it was far too subtle and too much of it was behind the scenes. And maybe we'll at least progress some from that point. But, yeah, state wide--

J.B.: It's more professional and the style has changed and race was not an issue and probably might not--

[End of this side of tape.]

Minor: I'd have to say from the standpoint of the legislature there's no doubt about it. It's at least increased the urban representation in the house of representatives. And this has been one of the biggest improvements, I would say, in the professionalism. . . in state government has been in the house of representatives, which formerly was overwhelmingly rural. It's no longer that. And there's a real strong nucleus of maybe 40-45 younger, aggressive, intelligent legislators in the house of representatives that are really, I think, providing some potential good leadership for the state. And maybe from that group will

come a lot of other elected officials. However, I haven't seen too much success in that yet. Yeah, reapportionment has definitely helped. I think one of the things is the state as an economic. . . I mean the factor of money, the availability of revenue. . . . I mean the amount of money the state is dealing with has just increased tremendously in the last ten years. There's no comparison with what the budget was. So, I mean, they have been more or less forced into adopting some more practical, businesslike methods. For example, like going to an annual session of the legislature. A limited session of the legislature. Formerly had unlimited biannual sessions, you see, and that was a very loose way of appropriating money and estimating revenues and so on. Required a lot of special sessions and everything. So far have been able to avoid special sessions pretty much.

J.B.: Who makes the revenue estimate?

Minor: Well, there's a state budget accounting commission which is made up mostly of legislators. They do the estimating.

J.B.: Is there any individual that does the estimating for them?

Minor: No. . . .

J.B.: Like a state treasurer?

Minor: No, the director of the budget commission. . . . He has no great power. It's the budget commission speaking whenever they estimate the revenue. That so. . . the governor has to pretty well. . . he doesn't present an independent budget in Mississippi. The law says he's supposed to, but he is opposite the budget commission budget which is made up, as I said, of mostly legislators. And it's been highly, well, traditionally conservative. One of the odd things right now is that, you know, there's been a reversal in the trend of revenue. The state began building up tremendous surpluses here about four years ago as a result of increased taxes and going to the withholding income tax and

suddenly the surpluses just burgeoned here and they had money available in the treasury like they had never had before. And also catching the rise in the state economy. And so suddenly the state was dealing with a budget of like quarter of a million dollars and suddenly the things gone way over half a million dollars a year. I mean this is general fund budget. And also building up some tremendous surpluses. Well, the recent, you know, the energy crisis and the national economy being in the state it is, there's been a change in the trend and suddenly now the fear is that the state is not going to collect the kind of revenue that the budget commission is estimating. So they're trying to pull back and the surprising thing is the legislature doesn't want to pull back. They want to still appropriate like there's a bottomless pit. So now the budget commission is trying to put the brakes on and they can't seem to have much success with the legislature. But I would say, you know, dealing with a great deal more money and revenue that the state is now possible to do things that it never could do before. And so they are entering into many programs that they never did participate in before. And the influence of federal funds, too, in the state, has been very. . . . They're going to have to change a lot of attitudes of politicians. They love to spend that federal money. They don't turn it down. W.D.V.: Has most of this change occurred in the last ten years? In terms of politics--

Minor: I think yes. I really think yes, since Ross Barnett. Ross Barnett possibly killed off a whole generation of progressives in this state. Because once he was elected it sort of changed plans of a lot of people in this state who would have gone into politics but didn't. It was discrediting, you know, to any progressive that Barnett could be elected. And not only that but almost become, be made a hero during

ole Miss. And the course Barnett had taken was, you know, really repudiated when Ross ran for governor again in '67 and ran a very poor fifth in a seven man race.

J.B.: Was that the real turning point then, '67?

Minor: I think partly '67, although I don't think, I mean, the state did not elect someone who turned the state around. I mean I think we're still in the process of change. But I mean repudiating Barnett was one thing which, I think, finally brought on a new crop of politicians who have some hopes, you know, that you can be a moderate or progressive publicly and maybe succeed in Mississippi politics. The one person that stands out through all this period, the symbol for moderate politicians is William Winter, who is lieutenant governor now, but who did run for governor in '67 and did not win, you see. Although he made a very good race and he was in the run off and led the ticket in the first primary and got beat out. And I think that was probably the last race in this state, the last gubernatorial campaign that would really be decided on the politics of race. I mean that was the subtle undercurrent that really decided the election.

J.B.: How does Winter relate with Waller?

Minor: Well, not very well. I mean they've been cruel to each other. And Winter has tried to take as much of an independent course as he can take. Intellectually I mean the two are not at all compatible.

J.B.: What do you mean by that?

Minor: Well, Waller, I would certainly say, from an intellectual standpoint, would not stand very high. In other words, what appeals to Waller would certainly not appeal to the average intellectual in the state for one thing. But I'm talking about mental capacity, though, and being able to understand and assimilate facts and philosophies and so

on. I mean I don't think Waller is too. . . . Kind of shallow, no question about it. Winter, on the other hand, is a very bright person and intellectually sound.

J.B.: Where was he educated?

Minor: He's a graduate of ole Miss and a graduate of law school at ole Miss. But I mean--

J.B.: He just has more intellectual depth.

Minor: Certainly. I mean he was president of the student body. He graduated first, I believe, in his law class. And Waller, where he stood was way down in his class.

J.B.: How do you evaluate Winter's chances of succeeding Waller?

Minor: Well, as I said, he is the one figure, moderate figure, that stands out over this period. And he will be a candidate I'm sure again in '75. And his chances are fair to good, but no better than. . . . I would say that he stands somewhere in the 50% bracket as far as his chances are concerned.

[Interruption in tape.]

Actually, it's not a bad place at all to live any more, I guarantee you. And I went through my trauma, you know, in the '60s. I mean and god, that's when a hell of a lot of friends of mine left the state and a hell of a lot of other people left the state that have never come back. But really, in Mississippi now, they're just about at a stage where a person can have a great deal of individual freedom and a hell of a lot of intellectual freedom and also make a lot of discoveries along the way. And it's still, Mississippi's still in the frontier now, there's no question about it.

J.B.: How important was the Voting Rights Act?

Minor: Tremendously. I mean it went from suddenly the black registration

went from 30,000 to 300,000, you see, within a period of just--

J.B.: Is that really--

Minor: Five or six weeks.

J.B.:--what explains that '71 governor's race?

Minor: A lot of it, yeah. That has a lot to do with it.

J.B.: That politically you could no longer afford to ignore blacks.

Minor: Right. The one thing though that's. . . it's evident that a black cannot be elected to any state wide office in Mississippi. I think the old prejudices will work to that extent. But blacks can be elected to a lot of local offices in Mississippi and can be brought into the decision making process that way. But if you present a black on a state wide basis, I just don't see any time in the foreseeable future that he could be elected.

J.B.: What's the explanation for the fact that there's only one black in the legislature?

Minor: One of the things is that blacks made a--I'm looking for a gas station, do you see one?--blacks did not choose to put up a strong people in the legislative race. That was one mistake that they made. Another one, until we get single member districts, see Mississippi does not have single member districts, blacks would have a hard time being elected in the more metropolitan areas. And that's, you know, one of their best places that they could win office.

[Interruption in tape.]

--didn't run their strongest people for the legislature. That, along with the fact that single member districts were not established. There was a federal law--

J.B.: Will they be established next time?

Minor: Yeah, they will be.

J.B.: State wide or just in Hines county?

Minor: No, just in maybe possibly four counties. Could be more than that though. You know, there's a law suit on it, but it was postponed until after the election and that's killed it for that time.

J.B.: How do you characterize Coleman's administration?

Minor: By and large it was a progressive administration. Certainly he advocated things which I think deal with basic reform that the state has got to have to really do some of the things that it needs to do. I mean, it still is working with this outdated constitution. And he tried to have a constitutional convention. Failed in that. He was progressive on some things. I mean he was certainly against, you know, any mistreatment of blacks and he took the side of justice. One of the key things he did, of course, was invite the FBI in to investigate the Mack Charles Hargood lynching. And the citizens council, of course, was screaming just the opposite. You know, that we're being invaded and everything. So Coleman, on the score of decency and justice was on the right side. But as far as really black participation, black civil rights movement, he did not really have a real understanding of it at that time. But he was also one who. . . . Faubus was governor in Arkansas at that time and the defiance that Faubus attempted over there-- Coleman was just the opposite. He did not believe in defying the federal government at all. He was a strong advocate of public education and against abolishing public education as any sort of device for maintaining segregation.

[Interruption in tape.]

. . . acceptance of ideas now that were never acceptable before. It's sort of heartening to see. . . you can present an idea now and you'll find a certain number of people who will accept it who formerly would reject it out of hand--

J.B.: . . . one example of that, the appointment of blacks to important

positions in the state government. Predictions were that all hell would break loose and nothing has happened.

Minor: You talking about when Waller took over, you mean?

J.B.: Yeah, we were talking to the press secretary this afternoon and they expected just a deluge of letters and phone calls. . . . Nothing happened. One letter.

Minor: Right. For example, he declares Medger Evers day in Mississippi. Which was a Look, you couldn't have picked out one thing if you wanted really to touch the hearts of the black community and drive hackles up and down the necks of the citizens councils--I mean, that would be the way to do it, see. And Waller comes along and does it.

J.B.: Why did he do it, or how did it come about? Do you know?

Minor: Nothing. There was no sign of it. I mean it was just one of these things out of the blue. That's the way he does a lot of things. I mean he's unpredictable as hell. When he does something you have no idea that it's coming.

J.B.: Symbolically, what was the importance of declaring Medger Evers day?

Minor: Symbolically. . . . He had released from the penitentiary, ~~penitentiary~~, a guy named Charles Pickett Wilson who was convicted in the Vernon Dayman case. Black civil rights leader in Pattersburg who was killed in a fire bomb by the Klan, see, in 1968. And Wilson was one of those convicted, one of the klan members, see. Well, Waller had let him out of the penitentiary on a work-release program and had some commitment, apparently, to do that. So when he let him out, of course, I mean this infuriated the black community. Well. . . and he knew that he had done something that really hurt him. So apparently he was looking for something that would, you know, give some

pride and, you know, also restore. . . remove some of the hurt from what he had done. So he popped this thing out. . . . Also there was a little byplay that took place between him and Charles Evers.

Charles, of course, was his opponent for the governor's office. I think for a long time he'd wanted to do something of a little positive nature, you know, with regard to Charles. So that also gave him the opportunity to do that.

J.B.: What did Medger Evers day actually amount to? What occurred on Medger Evers day.

Minor: Well there was a program here. You know, ten years after the assassination. Charles was the principal speaker.

J.B.: Were the two on the platform together?

Minor: No, Waller didn't go. Wallter did not go.

W.D.V.: Was there any reaction? From whites?

Minor: Sure, the declaring of the day. Lot of angry letters and. . .

W.D.V.: To the governor?

Minor: Well, newspapers. . . . Actually, he got away with it. I think he got away with it pretty well. how the mail ran in his office, but I think he got away with it pretty well.

J.B.: What kind of a governor was Johnson?

Minor: Well, Johnson was not a bad governor except from the standpoint of being an administrator and leader, I mean really provide direction for the state. He really sort of vacated the office most of the time. He was a sort of lazy guy who really didn't like the combativeness of politics and didn't like the strain of the office. And he would sort of show up infrequently and do something that sometimes was good and often was bad. The highlights of his administration, though, I would say, would be. . . . First, he did not follow the course of defiance

that had been set by his predecessor, Ross Barnett. And having been elected as sort of the logical successor to Barnett, since he had been lieutenant governor under Barnett and his campaign forte was the fact that he had stood up to the federal government at ole Miss, he was able to identify--

J.B.: Am I correct that much of his campaign literature showed a picture of him with his fist--

Minor: James King McShane, who was then chief of the United States marshalls, on one of the occasions of James Meredith being brought to the campus at ole Miss. . . . There's always a joke about that photograph, though. It's supposed to have been taken in sequence. And the next picture in the sequence is supposedly Johnson shaking hands with McShane. But it looks like he has his hand up in a gesture of defiance, see, so that made a beautiful campaign photograph for him, of course. And this swept him right into office. He defeated, as you recall, J. P. Coleman, who had defeated him in the '55 campaign. Coleman had a good. . . . I mean he was highly regarded by most Mississippians as having been an able governor and so on. So Johnson beat him and beat him rather handily, purely on this identity with the ole Miss defiance. But anyway, the main thing that Johnson surprised a great many people. . . . From his inaugural address on. I mean he adopted sort of a much more moderate course than anybody ever thought he would. Significantly, between the time he was elected and the time he was inaugurated, President Kennedy was assassinated. And I think this made quite an impact on Johnson. Whether this is really the reason or not. But his inaugural address in '64 was the tone of moderation which really none of us who observe politics ever expected him to adopt. And he talked about, you know, getting back into the mainstream of American

thinking. Well, of course, this was sort of radical talk at that time and we didn't know how he was going to implement it. Well, he did a few things. Of course he was presented in 1964 with the KoFo [?] movement and there was the slaying of the three civil rights workers in Cashoba county. And he did not really acquit himself admirably, I would say, in that episode. I mean he sort of. . . . He was rather defensive on the side of Mississippi, you know, and the nature of defensiveness that takes whenever confronted with anything involving the federal government. At the same time, whereas he didn't publicly do things, privately he did some things that I think were rather good. One, he agreed with the FBI that the evidence that they had gathered in that case before they made the arrest would not be turned over to the state prosecutor, which would be the district attorney in that district. Because he felt that that would just be erased and he did not have any confidence that the state. . . I think it would be the county, would proceed with the prosecution. He felt that the federal law [was the better one.?] So he would do things like that, I mean, after a series of things that were negative then he would come up with something like that. Then another highlight, of course, was after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He did not advocate defiance of it and he also later agreed that the state board of education should sign the compliance agreement, put the state in compliance with the Civil Rights Act. However, I mean, he would sprinkle these things with ~~really~~ some

statements inbetween that would sort of mitigate the positive nature of the things that he was doing. Another real, probably real act of courage that he did, I mean on an issue that's really a Mississippi issue, that was prohibition. He presented the first. . . I mean built the first legalized liquor and repealed prohibition that had ever been passed since the state became dry in 1908. And

he agonized over the bill right up to the very end and then decided to sign the bill. It was courageous in view of the fact that he had always run as a dry, you know, and one of his most influential backers--at least group of backers--are the Headerman family which owns the two Jackson newspapers. And they are very staunch prohibitionists and dries and they had strongly advocated that he veto the bill. He really withstood pressure from them to sign the bill. So I mean, he had, I would say, about three peaks in his career as governor, with a lot of valleys inbetween. One of the things was that he would, he would just disappear for a long time and sort of let things go. And things were going badly a lot of times and he would do nothing to help provide any sense of direction. And the legislature really ran a very independent course during that time. You'd give him, in the context of Mississippi, a fair grade, but not a high grade. He did not make good appointees, though, and this is one of the things. . . . I think his appointments probably lived after him to really hurt his image more than anything else. He named really unqualified people in a lot of places and their terms would not expire until some years later. And this sort of weakened his effectiveness. I mean the image that he left of his administration.

J.B.: How significant is the R&D Center? He was pretty much responsible for that, right?

Minor: Yes, he. . . . Well, the R&D is a valuable tool in the state but it has not reached the fulfillment of the goals and the bright prospects that he. . . that were foreseen under it's creator. And it's mission has never been really accepted or understood state administrations since then. It provides good service but it has not really given the sort of bootstrap improvement to the state's economy that. . . . You know, the concept that Johnson had originally.

[Interruption on tape.]

J.B.: -- Republican party. Where are they and where are they going?

Minor: The Republican party is the best organized party, the only organized party in the state. It's still essentially, I think, a kind of silk stocking party but it's trying to bring in new elements including a few blacks. I would say though that it has it's own elitist group that's running it. There's been evidence of dissension in the ranks that surfaced in the '72 campaign. They were pretty well put down though--

J.B.: Is there any rivalry between Clarke Reed and Carmichael because of that '72 race?

Minor: There doesn't seem to be even though, you know, Carmichael could not get the endorsement of Nixon. Reed was sort of riding two horses in that particular race. He was strong for Carmichael on one hand of course and then he was strong for Nixon on the other hand, see. I don't think that. . . . Apparently there is no real bitterness there, Carmichael is ambitious and this is the only route he has to travel. And I think he considers himself more popular than Reed, actually, which is probably true. Reed still pretty well controls the party machinery though.

J.B.: How organized are they, though.

They have only elected four

Minor: Yeah, but they've elected a lot of municipal offices and county offices. They did pretty well in last year's municipal offices. Surprisingly so. I mean after Watergate was already broken and going on, they were still able to win a number of Republican offices. There are some little towns in the state where the officials just turned over completely. They were Democrats and became Republicans. This happened in oh a half a dozen or so towns. And a lot of miscellaneous Republicans

were elected. I think the main strength that they have was they have this organized giving. They have a steady flow of money coming in. And consequently they are in a position to put money in campaigns where the Democrats don't have that source of money. Of course they have the benefit of having the popular type heroes. Agnew, Reagan, etc. That they can haul in here to put on fund raising dinners, see, and bring ~~in a lot of~~ ~~and bring~~ in a lot of popular support that way. The mass exodus of Mississippi Democrats to the Republican party, though, has never really taken place. The precise opportunity hasn't really come yet. I mean it looked like we were sort of on the verge of it several times, but it never did really take place. An indication of that would have been. . . . After the election of Nixon in '68 suddenly there were a few legislators who decided to identify with the Republican party and it looked like then there was going to be a movement of people to run as Republicans the next time around. Well, strangely enough, when the next election for legislature came up, very few legislative candidates identified with the Republican party. There were some surprises. In some really, what you would call redneck counties in the state elected Republicans to the legislature. But a real fine woman legislator who was a Republican got beat for re-election.

I would say having a state headquarters and a constant supply of money and *regular* staff people, you know, gives the Republican party in the state an opportunity to keep organized. The Democrats have no headquarters, no staff and no constant source of money. And of course the Democrats are split into the two factions--

J.B.: Do you see that, those factions coming together before '76?

Minor: Yeah, I think I said earlier that I think the bridge has been

built, I think, from what happened in '72, to make it possible for them to get together. I think they'll have to submerge a few of the personalities involved in order to get it done. And I think it's going to have to be done by somebody from out of the Democratic national committee. Straus or somebody like that is going to have to really bring them together and really knock some heads together in order to do it. Because you are still dealing with some pretty strong personalities. People who like the notoriety that they have and the position they have. You know, like in the national party. That they would probably lose if they merge.

[Interruption on tape.]

J.B.: Why do you think blacks have fared so poorly in legislative elections?

Minor: Well, I think they made a mistake. First they did not concentrate on electing legislators in '71. I think that was a mistake. And they did not put up really good candidates in a lot of places. They had poor candidates and they didn't support them nearly as well as, I mean, concentration was on the Evers campaign. You can see, for example, how the vote dropped off in a lot of counties with blacks running for the legislature. The vote for Evers would be much higher than the vote for the ~~black~~ running for the legislature. In some places they possibly could have elected blacks if the vote had been strong, as strong or stronger. Now, Robert Clark, who is the only black legislator, proved to be a pretty good politician. He produced the vote in his county for himself greater than the vote that was cast for Charles Evers. You see, so this showed that he is not a bad politician. The other thing is that in the more urban counties we did not have single member districts in the 1971 election. This is really the best opportunity blacks would have, I think, for electing legislators

~~[unclear]~~ and, certainly will have single member districts in one and possibly four counties before the next election.

W.D.V.: Somebody asserted to us that Carmichael would have been elected had the president endorsed him and not ~~the Eastland-backed candidate~~

~~[unclear]~~

Minor: Well, I think it probably would have given him a little bit better chance, but I don't know. It would have been pretty hard to unseat Eastland. I mean it would have been pretty difficult. You would have had to have. . . you would almost have had to had the president coming right down here and campaigning for him over Eastland. And I don't know how that would have been, how the reaction would have been on that.

J.B.: Your premise was that there was so much anti-Eastland *sentiment* --

Minor: There is a great deal of anti-Eastland ^{vote} I mean Carmichael got the benefit of the young vote, the new vote, and the benefit of the black vote, too. I mean a good bit of the black vote. The black vote, which normally would not be Republican, but most of the blacks just can't see themselves voting for Eastland. Although don't discount the fact that Eastland did get some black votes. He had some organization in some of the black communities. It would probably have been much closer, but I just really doubt whether Mississippi would have thrown out Big Jim. I mean they like the idea too much that they have somebody who is high in national circles, you know. I just really doubt that you could have unseated him. Going back a little bit, like in '64. Stennis was up for re-election then. It would have been possible to have defeated Stennis in '64 if he had had a strong Republican opponent. He did not have one. See, when Goldwater struck the state in

'64, the reason was that at the time the state was still in the throes of the segregation insanity, see, in '64. And Stennis was the kind of guy who had never really identified with segregation in Mississippi, at least at that time. And it was really sometime later that Stennis really gained his stature with the average Mississippian which he now enjoys. Eastland has always had this identify with, you know, on race, and he'd be pretty hard to dislodge. He has so many local politicians ~~and~~ supporting him. He'd have been hard to beat. It could have possibly been a real choice--

J.B.: Are there any indications that Eastland got some of his local politicians, pretty loyal to more or less his machine working for Waller?

Minor: Yes. You mean in the campaign in '71?

J.B.: Yeah.

Minor: Oh the main thing that Eastland did, I think, was to untap the sources of real good campaign financing. One of the hard things in Mississippi is raising money in political campaigns. There are just a few good sources for raising money and Eastland controls most of them. And he turned those loose for Waller.

J.B.: There is a campaign financing law here? Disclosure law?

Minor: There's one now. There wasn't one then. But it's a rather. . . . It's not a strong law, though.

J.B.: Where does the money come from, or where is it believed to come from?

Minor: It comes from big business and from big agriculture. Banks. Individual bankers who are wealthy control a lot of campaign money. The oil industry, the oil interests are pretty stout, too. But the money comes out of really individuals. I mean there's no corporate

cover in Mississippi. We have no ITT or any big sources of revenue or campaign money. Usually it comes more from wealthy individuals, a lot of whom have made their money in agriculture or in industry.

J.B.: Did Eastland also go get the supervisors.

Minor: County supervisors. Right. He has them pretty well locked up. So much so that in that campaign in '72 the supervisors at the state convention, they endorsed Eastland. They'd never endorsed a senatorial candidate before.

J.B.: ~~working for Waller?~~

[End of tape. End of interview.]