INTERVIEW I

DATE: April 29, 1972

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES P. COLEMAN

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Judge Coleman's office, United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Judicial District, Ackerman, Mississippi

Tape 1 of 1

F: Judge, when did you first know Lyndon Johnson?

C: I first met him in January of 1935. I started work in Washington on January 3, 1935 as secretary to Congressman A. L. Ford of the Fourth Mississippi District, whose home is here in Ackerman. I went to work for him six days before I was twenty-one years old. But I had been through the campaign of 1934 with him as one of his assistants, and I had just finished two years at the University of Mississippi. Soon after I got to Washington, one of the very first men I met was Lyndon Johnson.

F: How did that happen?

C: Well, he was a very active participant in the Little Congress, which was the organization of congressional secretaries. In fact, he had been the speaker of it. We met every Tuesday night. I, of course, was very much interested in it. I think I went to the very first meeting they had after I landed on Capitol Hill. Of course, Lyndon Johnson was there, along with Mrs. Johnson, as I recall it. We called him then "The Boss of Little Congress," because he was the leader of it. He was the acknowledged leader of the Little Congress.

F: Was it a pretty good organization while he was president?

C: Well, he had been speaker of it before I got to Capitol Hill but evidently, it must have been, because after his term as speaker for a long time his leadership generally always prevailed on any question that came up.

Incidentally, over in my other office here where I practiced law for years before I was appointed to the Court and where my son practices law now, I have a picture of the Little Congress on the wall, and you'll notice I have another picture of it here in this office.

F: Yes, 1937.

C: But he wasn't there then. I don't remember just exactly when, but pretty soon after I first met him, he was appointed NYA administrator in Texas and went back to Texas. Then he got elected to Congress and he was back on the Hill as a congressman before I left as a secretary.

F: I had wondered how you got from Ole Miss up to George Washington to get your law degree, and that explains that.

C: That's it.

F: What did you do? Go after hours then?

C: I went from five to seven. Of course, with a limited program, a limited course load.

F: That's the slow way to do it.

C: It took four years. I came home in 1937 and took the Mississippi bar and passed it and I didn't get my LL.B. degree until February of 1939.

But actually I left Washington on January 3, 1939. I did not wait to get my diploma. They mailed it to me. But I came right on back here and started off to practice law.

F: Did you see anything of freshman Congressman Johnson in those days?

C: Oh, yes. I did, but not to be associated with him on anything other than just meeting and speaking. After all, I was still a secretary and he was a very busy congressman.

F: Did the secretaries pay any attention to him as a young congressman, as one of their boys who made good?

C: Oh, obviously. We passed a resolution congratulating him on his election, things of that kind, you know.

F: Did he pay any attention to Little Congress after he got back up there?

C: I don't recall that he did by attending the meetings or anything like that. I would suppose, though, that was because he didn't want to be cast in the light of interfering with it after he had become a congressman when it was just an organization for the secretaries. [They are] now called the administrative assistants, but everybody was called a secretary in those days.

F: Now in those days in between your coming back home and when you sort of re-emerged as a national figure, did you ever have any relationship with him?

C: Not specifically, except I would hear from him . . .

F: Oh, he kept up?

C: . . . through many mutual friends. For example, two of my best friends, in addition to Mr. Johnson, were Wingate Lucas, who was a congressman from Fort Worth, and Lloyd Croslin, who is now dead, I'm sorry to say.

F: Croslin?

C: Lloyd Croslin, who was secretary to Congressman Mahon, and who later became district attorney out at Lubbock. Lubbock was his home town. When I was inaugurated governor of Mississippi in 1956, both Wingate Lucas and his wife and Lloyd Croslin and his wife came to the inauguration and stayed all night in the Governor's Mansion with me. They were just as close to me as anybody's brothers could be.

I'd hear from Lyndon Johnson through them. But on top of that, of course, I was always seeing his name in the paper and what he was doing. And he was off in the service a while. I watched with great interest his race for the Senate, I believe that was in about 1942, against "Pappy" O'Daniel.

F: Yes, 1941.

C: 1941? I was elected district attorney in 1939. I was elected district attorney the first year I came back here. I was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1940. I do not recall if Congressman Johnson was there. If he was, I didn't see him.

F: He was just one of the thousands.

C: But he and I became very closely associated again in the Democratic convention of 1952. They had a big contest going on in the Texas

delegation and one in Mississippi. I wasn't a delegate in 1952, but I was the attorney general of Mississippi, so I was chosen by the delegation to defend the contest, as a lawyer. I was the spokesman for the Mississippi delegation. At that time, I very frequently saw Senator Johnson and Governor Shivers and the other Texas leaders because we had common cause.

I'd say that our renewed, very close association dated from 1952 in that convention, which means that for about twelve years in there we were not seeing anything of each other much. Except that Senator Stennis was elected to the Senate in 1947 and I was one of his ardent and leading supporters. [I] went up with him to see him sworn into office and saw Congressman Johnson at that time. I remember seeing him and talking to him. Then, of course, when he moved over to the Senate in 1948, he and Senator Stennis became big friends at once.

I was not in Washington much in those days, except that I was recommended for the United States attorneyship in North Mississippi in 1949 by Senator Stennis and was up there in that connection. You know, Mississippi had walked out of the convention of 1948. I had not attended that convention because I knew from all appearances that they were going to walk out and I didn't want to participate in a walkout. So I remained away from it. But I was not appointed United States attorney due to the big patronage fight that was going on. I became Democratic National Convention Committeeman from Mississippi in 1952. Yes, I had forgotten about that a moment ago,

I was the national committeeman the same time I was representing the delegation in 1952.

Then, of course, on various trips to Washington, I would see Senator Johnson, the majority leader. In 1955, he had the very serious heart attack, and I was running for governor at that time. Senator Stennis went out to see him after he got able to have company at the hospital. One of the first things he wanted to know was how I was getting along with my race for governor. And when I was elected governor, I remember, right straight, getting a message from him, a letter in which he was directing my attention to the verse in Isaiah about, "Let us come reason together."

But I had seen a great deal of him in 1952 at the convention.

F: Go back to 1952 a minute. That was a very ticklish convention for Texas. It sort of put Shivers and Johnson, in one sense, having to go opposite ways, since one was represented as governor, the other as senator, which gives little different--pardon the word--vantage points in this situation. Did you have any opportunity that you remember to talk to either the Senator or to Governor Shivers about what going with Adlai Stevenson and Stevenson's views in the tidelands and so forth meant to this part of the world?

C: I don't recall that we had any discussions of that kind. We were making common cause between Texas and Mississippi, because we were similarly under challenge.

I remember Wright Morrow was the national committeeman, or at least . . .

F: He was.

C: . . . one of the leaders of the Texas delegation. I remember so well the speech he made before the Credentials Committee. The Texas case was heard first, because I guess it was a much larger delegation, for one thing. Of course, we all knew that what they did with Texas would have a great impact on what happened in Mississippi.

F: As sort of a model.

C: Obviously, if they threw Texas out, Mississippi wasn't going to stay in. I remember meeting in the hotel with Governor Shivers and with Senator Johnson both together at the same time, talking about the various aspects of it. Both sides in Texas brought up their biggest guns. I heard the argument from beginning to end, and I thought that I had never seen adversaries so evenly matched in ability and in enthusiasm. Both sides had apparently brought up the best they had, and it was a terrific argument.

F: I remember Maury Maverick was up there.

C: Yes. I remember him, too. Of course, he was there; I had known him just by sight and what have you in the Congress. His son now practices law out in San Antonio and frequently argues cases before the Fifth Circuit because he seems to be a spokesman for the American Civil Liberties Union and gets into a lot of litigation.

F: He sure does. I think he told me he got ten dollars a case out of that. (Laughter)

C: Well, he works as if he were getting ten million.

F: Did the two Texas contending groups keep it on a fairly good plane, or did they get pretty nasty?

C: I didn't think they got nasty at all. They certainly left off no emphasis that they could command. It was a strong fight between giants, the way it appeared to me at the time; that's what it looked like to me. Of course, the regular delegation prevailed and was seated, but only after the Battle of Shiloh.

F: Right. Did Senator Johnson talk with you at all about the problems of selling Adlai Stevenson in this part of the world?

C: No, he didn't that I remember. As I recall, of course I was not a member of the delegation, but I went to all the Mississippi meetings in 1952. Governor White was the governor of Mississippi. He was my great friend and was a great governor. He was an extremely well-off man, financially, and a lot of people thought that for that reason, he ought to be an ironclad conservative. But he was for staying in the convention, and actively supported the nominees after it was over. As I recall, Senator Sparkman was vice presidential nominee in 1952, and he came to Mississippi and spoke. And all of us like Senator Stennis and Governor White and myself as attorney general and others appeared there for the occasion. We did carry Mississippi very strongly for the Democratic ticket that year, as we did later in 1956.

F: Which we weren't able to do in Texas.

C: That's right. However, then, when Mississippi got to where it could not be carried, Texas pretty well returned to the fold.

F: Right. You were a delegate in 1956?

C: I was chairman of the Mississippi delegation of course in 1956 by virtue of being governor.

F: Yes. Now you have a little different situation. It's probably going to be Stevenson again. You've got some dark horse possibilities there in 1956 to replace Stevenson. One of them who was mentioned as a very dark horse was Senator Johnson. What was the feeling among the Mississippi delegation in 1956?

C: Well, Mississippi, you know, voted for Johnson for the nomination in 1956. As I recall, it may be that the two states which actually did so were Texas and Mississippi.

F: Did Johnson, in effect, work Mississippi? Or did you just do this strictly on your own initiative?

C: No. He had friends in Mississippi. Senator Eastland wanted to support him for the nomination at that time, because of their very, very fine working relationship in the Senate. Senator Stennis did. The congressional delegation did; they were all delegates, I believe every one of them. So it was quite evident that Stevenson was probably going to be nominated, but nevertheless we were going to cast our ballot for Senator Johnson on the first ballot. If it went to a second ballot, we of course then might have supported Stevenson as a matter of unanimity. But there never was any second ballot. So we voted for Senator Johnson.

F: There was no particular fight within the Mississippi delegation to support Johnson?

C: No. All of the delegates, like myself, fully intended to support Stevenson in the general election, if he were nominated. I remember, of course, I talked to President Johnson--I still want to call him President, he wasn't president then--about a matter, not about supporting him. I mean, I was over at his suite in--what was the name of that big hotel, used to be the Stephens in Chicago and they renamed it?

F: It's now the Conrad Hilton.

C: I think maybe it was the Conrad Hilton then. I remember his mother was there, if my memory doesn't play me any bad mistake. I know I had met his mother on more than one occasion and I believe this was one of them. I believe she came up to the convention. This was not too long after he had had the heart attack of course in 1955, about a year [afterwards]. But he was a very active participant in the convention. He was a delegate. He stayed away from the convention while his name was being considered for president, but he was there on the vice presidential fight.

I would like to tell you something that happened about that. Of course, Kefauver, you know, was a contender for the presidency and had--

F: --carried all the primaries practically.

C: Yes. I believe maybe he didn't quite defeat Stevenson in Florida. But he came very near ending his candidacy for him in Florida, for example. So, when Stevenson was nominated, then the great question overnight was who was going to have the vice presidential nomination.

We thought, of course, that Stevenson would name his man. He threw the convention open. I never did talk to him about it afterwards. I always thought that he was bound to have known that Kefauver was going to be the nominee because he had come there with about two-hundred-and-seventy-five votes for president, much less vice president. Anyway, Mississippi was opposed to Kefauver. He was from Tennessee, our next door neighbor. Ordinarily Tennessee and Mississippi make common cause, but Tennessee, you remember, had voted to throw Virginia and some of the other states out of the convention in 1952. Maybe the state hadn't, but some of its leaders had. We were very, very much opposed to Kefauver. We voted for Gore on the first ballot; Mississippi did and so did Texas.

Well, a lot of them, like Congressman Frank Smith, and others were wanting us to support Senator Kennedy for the vice presidential nomination. After the first roll call, it was obvious to me and to many others that if we were going to stop Kefauver, Kennedy was the only chance. I remmber beating my way over to the Texas delegation and talking to Senator Johnson about it. They had voted for Gore on the first ballot, and I was trying to get him to change and go to Kennedy on the second ballot. He said, "I'll have to have a caucus with the delegation before we can do that." I said, "Well, have the caucus." So he called the caucus, and they went out. I don't know what transpired in the caucus, but I always shall remember how, when they came back in--I can just see Senator Johnson now, and hear him: "Mr. President, Texas casts fifty-six votes for that great

American, Jack Kennedy." They had switched over to Kennedy, not knowing that they were going to be running mates four years hence, you see.

To me, that was the most thrilling political contest I ever saw between Kennedy and Kefauver there.

F: It was a beautiful horse race.

C: We came so near nominating Kennedy. But as I recall it, Missouri and some of them in Oklahoma maybe too changed their votes, and it got away. Which is probably the best for both Kennedy and Johnson. There is, after all, maybe a destiny which does shape our ends.

F: There's a time when you should not offer yourself.

C: Right. But I have never told President Johnson about this, because it just never did come up or I never thought to do so.

During the convention and after Stevenson had been nominated, I got notice in 1956--I was a member of the Platform Committee, too, in that convention--that Governor Stevenson wanted me to have breakfast with him the next morning. So I thought that what he was going to do was have a whole crowd of people there. But lo and behold, when I got there for breakfast, I was the only one present. I think maybe that I was selected because I was the unofficial chairman of the southern group. They had had a meeting in Atlanta in August of all the states south of the Potomac and I had been chosen as sort of the leader or chairman of the crowd, and we worked on that basis. We had been meeting regularly throughout the convention and cooperating with each other and maintaining the common front.

Well, what he wanted to talk about was who was he going to have for his vice presidential nominee. He actually had objections to raise, maybe just to get me to express my opinion, to all who had been mentioned. I told him that I thought that if Kefauver was the nominee, it'd just be almost impossible to carry Mississippi and I didn't know how many other states. But, as I recall it, very few southern states were voting for Kefauver. Even Tennessee didn't vote for him; his own home state didn't vote for him on the first ballot. They also voted for Senator Gore.

I remember of course talking about Senator Johnson. He said the only thing that worried him about Senator Johnson was that he had that heart attack about a year before and he didn't know whether he could stand up to the physical rigors of the campaign or not. I said the same thing to him about Johnson then that I later said to Senator Stennis in 1960. I wouldn't go to the convention in 1960 because I had just gone out of office, and my political competitors had just gotten hold of the state government. I knew it was going to be a futile thing for me to go and I wouldn't exercise the futility. But I told Senator Stennis, before he ever went out there in 1960 that if they could put the ticket together on the basis of Johnson and Kennedy, or Kennedy and Johnson, they would win. I never shall forget when Senator Stennis called me by telephone from Los Angeles to my home up here. I was watching the convention on television. He said, "The arrangement's just been made. Johnson's going

to be the vice presidential nominee." I said, "If that's true, the ticket will win."

But anyway, back there in 1956, Governor Stevenson knew about the deep-seated opposition to Kefauver in the South. He never did say anything about [the fact that] Kefauver had very nearly ruined his apple cart, anyway.

So, he went down the line; he had some objection or some impracticality to be mentioned with reference to all of them, which may be the reason he threw the convention wide open. I don't know. I never did discuss it with him anymore. That was the end of it, you know. The most hectic thing on earth is a national political convention.

In any event, I came back to Mississippi and we campaigned for Stevenson and Kefauver. They had a southern meeting up in Knoxville, Tennessee, and I went to it. Kefauver--I never shall forget the fellow, you know with that long face and all--said, "Governor, if you people in Mississippi knew me better, you wouldn't hate me so bad." I said, "Now, we don't hate you in Mississippi. That's not the question at all. We just very vigorously disagree with some of your political philosophies and principles and ideas, and that's all it is." I said, "However, with all of that opposition, we're going to carry Mississippi for the ticket. You can worry about some other state." As a matter of fact, they didn't even carry Tennessee, you know, his own home state. But we did carry Mississippi. But that is due to the concerted effort of Senator Stennis and myself

and Senator Eastland. Of course, I was the governor then; whereas I had been the attorney general in 1952.

F: Did you ever get any line up on how Senator Johnson felt about Senator Kefauver?

C: He didn't say anything about that. I more or less made certain assumptions, due to the fact that Texas was supporting Gore on the first ballot instead of Kefauver. Kefauver was right there in the Senate with Senator Johnson. He knew Gore and Kennedy and Kefauver extremely well, as he knew every senator. I suppose he knew more about every senator than any other senator ever did before or since, according to all the evidence.

F: Yes. After the 1956 election was over, of course, you're governor. Johnson puts through that first civil rights act in three-quarters of a century. Did he talk to you any at all about that and the impact it was going to have down this way?

C: No. He didn't. I think that he discussed it almost daily, probably, with Senator Stennis and men like that. I went up and testified, as I recall, by request of the delegation, against the legislation. I don't know whether I saw Senator Johnson then or not. It was a rare thing for me to go to Washington and not see him, but I wasn't keeping a written diary and a lot of that's escaped my memory now.

F: Could you usually get to him pretty well when you showed up?

C: Oh, yes, yes. He was about the most accessible man I ever saw.

F: He always had some time in the day.

C: I guess that's the reason he worked so hard. He did what I did. When I was governor of Mississippi, I'd try to make it a point to see everybody who wanted to see me. It might be a great handicap, but I thought that was the least a man could do. I never went to Washington with any desire to see him but what I did see him.

F: He never seemed in any hurry.

C: For example, that 1958 picture over there on the wall. I really didn't intend to bother him, you know. I've always had great respect for the time of very busy people, and I always tried to stay out of their way, having been the victim of it so much myself. But he found out I was up there some way in 1958, which is some idea, I guess, of how he knew everything that was going on. And he sent word to Senator Stennis that we must come over there. So we went. While we were there, nobody else came in or went out. I believe he was sitting up in his office when we got there with his shoes off. [He] had on his socks, of course, and he was working away. He said, "Well, I guess I better put my shoes on." Then he suggested having this picture made and of course we did. [I've] kept it on my office wall ever since.

F: He's sort of, overall, with most people, looking down at them from that height. He never had that opportunity with you, did he? The two of you must be about the same height.

C: Yes. I'm 6'2"; I believe he's an inch or two taller than I am. But you can look over there in the picture, I look about as tall as he does.

F: Yes. You do.

C: I don't know just exactly what his height is.

F: I think he's 6'3".

C: I don't know why, but it appears from that picture that I'm about as tall as he is.

F: Right.

C: Well, I'll tell you my feeling about him in this business of seeing people and so forth, and I've often said it here in Ackerman, Mississippi. He was not a fellow that openly, overtly, set any great store by the position he happened to be occupying at the time.

Now, a lot of people, you can tell, you know, that they think, "Well, hey, I'm busy." "Hey, I am The Senator." "I am The President." "I am The Governor." I've told people here many times that if they saw him on the front street over here with his khakis on, they'd take him to be some of us farmers from down across the Yockanookany Creek or some other rural area of the country. I never have found him to be [that way].

F: I guarantee you, when you get that transcript back, we're not going to know how to spell Yockanookany.

C: Well, it's Y-O-C-K-A-N-O-O-K-A-N-Y. Choctow Indian. That's the name of the creek I was raised on, where my farm still is. Never has become anything like as famous as the Pedernales, which a lot of people don't know how to spell either.

But I've always looked upon President Johnson as being a very democratic kind of a man.

F: And when you saw him in those days, he never seemed to be rushing you out. As long as old Jim was there, he'd talk to him.

C: I was always trying to leave, for fear that I was trespassing. He'd say, "No. Wait a while." I felt as much at home in his office as I would have in the office of any personal friend, or some justice of the peace, or sheriff, or anybody from offices that maybe had a lot of time. I knew he didn't have. I'd try to go, and he'd say, "Hold on. I'm not through yet."

F: As governor of Mississippi, was there any use you could make of him as Senate majority leader?

C: No, not that I recall, except that it was nice to have that good friend, which he was. I never recall asking him to do anything about any of our problems in Mississippi. Maybe one of the reasons I didn't was because I knew Senator Eastland and Senator Stennis were talking to him on a daily basis.

F: You had two good advocates there for you.

C: It would have been superfluous for me to have said anything.

F: Right. Well, when you came down to 1960, did you consider going to the convention at all, or did you decide just to let the new crop have it?

C: I didn't consider it at all because my lieutenant governor had been a candidate for governor and had been defeated by Governor Ross Barnett, who mostly ran against me, as often happens. I wasn't a candidate and, of course, couldn't defend myself. [I] couldn't get out and discuss the issues. It would be another story for me to

go into that. But I knew that Governor Barnett was not going to . . . Well, he came home, as you know, and supported the third party effort. We contested with him and we lost the state by only eight-thousand votes at that. I mean, I spoke all over the state. President Johnson, being the candidate for vice president, came to Meridian, Mississippi; got on a train and rode the train from Meridian down through Laurel and Hattiesburg and Picayune, and made speeches. And so did I, at every one of those stops.

F: How did that go?

C: Oh, beautifully. Just fine. That was one of the reasons that we came within eight thousand votes of carrying the state.

He flew into Meridian. I remember he was flying in a Lockheed Electra, which he said was a mighty good plane. We had these whistle stops and a lot of little towns that we went through where the train wasn't scheduled to stop, there'd be great crowds of people out. He'd wave to them from the rear platform, and had a very happy day.

F: How long a trip did you make out of that?

C: Well, we ran from Meridian on the Alabama line down southwesterly through Picayune on the Louisiana line, just forty miles this side of New Orleans. I would say approximately a hundred and fifty miles anyway. We stopped in Laurel and Hattiesburg and the larger places, and he spoke from the rear end of the train and so did some of the rest of us, like Senator Stennis and others.

Later on, when I was a candidate for office, again, my

adversaries made a great to-do out of the fact that I was one of those who rode the train.

F: Yes. With that traitor. (Laughter)

C: Well, they didn't say that. The opposition to President Johnson in Mississippi, in my opinion, never did get to really be personal. It was somewhat like the Kefauver situation. They were in great disagreement with these civil rights objectives. Really, the opposition in Mississippi was never based on principle, as such, but chiefly because they thought it couldn't be made to work. It was the practical aspects of the thing.

I was about to overlook something. I remember he came down here, I've forgotten what year it was, but it was between 1952 and 1956 because it was while Governor White was the governor.

F: We can check that out.

C: Senator Johnson came down to Mississippi and made our Jefferson-Jackson Day address.

F: Was that in Jackson?

C: In Jackson. The Democratic Party had a Jefferson-Jackson Dinner, and Senator Johnson came down and made the speech. He gave me the manuscript when it was over, autographed it and gave it to me to give to my son, my boy, who is now thirty-one years old and who is now the district attorney in this district, following in my footsteps. I hope I'm not bragging when I state it like that.

F: I think you have that right.

C: I have about twenty-five filing cabinets full of papers, back there in the other room and I want to get that manuscript and give it to this collection out at The University of Texas.

F: Yes. They'd love to have it.

C: But something's happened, I can't find it for the moment. We'll dig it up someday. It's just temporarily misplaced.

But he stayed at the Heidelberg Hotel. I don't know why he didn't go up to the Governor's Mansion. I'm sure Governor White invited him. That was one of his visits in Mississippi.

He had other friends in Mississippi like Marks Huff, who was in Washington when I was and who worked over at the Supreme Court. [He] is now the clerk in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi.

F: H-U-F-F?

C: H-U-F-F. Mr. Huff was chairman of the State Employment Security Commission while I was governor, by my appointment. He's one of my most highly esteemed friends. His home is at Forest on Highway 80 between Meridian and Jackson. He still has the davenport that Senator Johnson, maybe Congressman Johnson, going to and from Texas one time, stopped and visited with him an hour or so, and sat on the davenport. So Huff still has it. Huff's office is in Oxford, Mississippi. You might contact him and let him tell you about those experiences. But what I'm getting at is that Johnson had some pretty close contacts with Mississippi through men like Governor White, to say nothing of our senators. And he served in the House with all

these men, you know. In 1960, as I say, I rode the train with [him]. That's how I got [those cuff links]. He later sent me those sterling silver cuff links out there. I would say that I supported the ticket in 1960.

F: Did you have much trouble with that Catholic issue?

C: Not any. Not in Mississippi.

F: Did Johnson speak to it, or did he just speak like it was no issue?

C: I would have to go back and get into my scrapbook; I've got a scrapbook on that.

F: But he did talk well to the people on that whistle stop?

C: Oh, yes. In fact, as I recall it, there were no pickets, no heckling. Later on, you know, Mrs. Johnson came here in the 1964 campaign and received the same reception. We Mississippians get pretty violent about our beliefs, but most of the time, we're pretty good about preserving our good manners. Anybody who shows a discourtesy to a visiting leader of our country, regardless of how much you disagree with him, would really put you behind the eight ball in Mississippi. You remember, in 1968 President Nixon spoke on the Governor's Mansion grounds in Jackson, when he was a candidate. And Mississippi has--well, they voted for Goldwater in 1964, but I believe that's the only time they've ever supported the Republican ticket.

F: In the sixties, in 1964 particularly, were you involved at all in that attempt to keep Johnson off the ballot here in Mississippi?

C: Right at the moment, I don't have any recollection of that, except that I know I wasn't involved in it.

I want to tell you about this, too, which is one of the most delightful experiences of my life in connection with Senator Johnson. Mississippi has no absent voter law; if you vote, you have to go to the pollsto do it in person. The reason for it is to prevent fraud and the delay in absentee ballots and so forth, although, I think the legislature's now in session and they're about to enact another absent voter law. But in 1960, I wanted to go on a little vacation and really we had in mind going to California. We waited until the presidential election was over so we could vote and then leave. The election was on Tuesday and along about Thursday or so, we got in shape to get out of town. So my wife and I and Billy Moore and his wife--Billy Moore's a druggist here who grew up with me and is one of my closest friends and his wife is one of the most delightful ladies I've ever known. We used to live next door to each other for a long time; his father and my father were great friends in their lifetime. So we were going to take this trip together.

Well, I won't detail the trip, except to say that on Sunday after the election on Tuesday, we were in San Antonio and we went to the Alamo. We decided that we'd just drive up to the Ranch to look at it. I had no idea that the Vice President-Elect was there. I didn't see how he could have gotten home that quickly after such a big fight and long campaign and so forth. But we were just going to go look. When we got up there long about eleven o'clock in the

morning, maybe a little earlier, I saw the flag was up. Well, I had read about when he was home, he always had the flag up. So I told them, "We're in a big dilemma now. If he ever hears of my coming this close and not stopping to speak, my name will be mud. By the same token, I don't want to barge in on him when he's just out of the campaign. So we'll just compromise it this way." I said, "Y'all just sit in the car, and I'll go up and knock on the door and tell whoever comes to the door to give the Vice President-Elect my respects and my congratulations, and we'll get on away from here."

So I went to the door, and some young man came to the door. I told him that I was former Governor Coleman of Mississippi, my time had just expired the previous January, and that I was a good friend of Vice President-Elect Johnson's; that I saw by the flag that he was at home. I didn't want to pass without paying my respects and to please tell him that I had done so and that I would be on my way. He said, "I don't think that will quite work. I think you better let me tell Mr. Johnson you're here." "On second thought just come on in. He's going to make you come in anyway. We'll just go now." So we went in.

Well, it so happens he had all his family there that day, his brothers and sisters, including his sister from Fredericksburg that later died, I believe. Well, Sam Johnson wasn't there, I don't believe, and Mrs. Johnson had not got home. She was still in Washington, Mrs. Lady Bird Johnson. But anyway, we went in and he was sitting over in the corner reading the paper and we walked up on

the carpet. Of course, he didn't hear us coming. So I just stood there. I figured he'd look up eventually. And so, directly, he did look up and he said, "Jim, Governor, what are you doing here?" I said, "I had no notion at all that I was going to be here. We were just going to California, and when we came out here to look at the Ranch--we'd read so much about it and had never seen it--we had no idea you would be here." And I said, "I just want to tell you how glad I am you were elected, and I'm gone."

He said, "No, sir. Who have you got with you?" I said, "Well, now, I see you have a houseful of people here and I have my wife and I have my friends, the Moores." He said, "That won't make any difference!" He told the other young man, "Go out to the car and bring them in." Well, we stayed about fifteen or twenty minutes, and we said, "This had been a great visit, and we'll now be on our way." He said, "No, you're going to stay for lunch, you're going to stay for dinner," whichever he called it. He may have called it dinner, since it was Sunday.

We got out and rode over the Ranch. We went to the family cemetary and, of course, that's one of my hobbies, is family history and genealogy. I've written several books on the subject and so on. Of course, I knew how he had felt about his mother because he had mentioned that to me many times. I told those folks after we left that any man who'd take that much interest in his own people, and in their last resting place, and so forth, had to be a good man, if he were not otherwise considered one.

Anyway, we had lunch, the most delightful thing of all. And long about three or four o'clock we got away. I never had such a good time in my life. It was just like a country visit in Mississippi, as we used to visit from household to household, and from relative to relative, which has greatly gone out of style these days due to the pressures of time and so forth.

We came back to Austin and looked at the State Capitol, and then we went on to Del Rio and decided we didn't want to go to California. So we cut back up by Wichita Falls and over to Speaker Rayburn's home town.

F: Yes. Bonham.

C: Bonham. And we stopped by to see Speaker Rayburn's Library. Well, he was there, and he was another one of my beloved friends. If there ever was anybody that I admired from head to foot, it was Mr. Sam Rayburn. Of course, he was in Congress when I was one of the hirelings up there.

F: Seems like he was an old vet then.

C: He never knew me in those days. But of course, I knew him. Later on, when I got to be governor, he had come over to speak to our Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner one year and he stayed two days and a couple of nights with me. Of course, I'd been closely associated with him in Chicago in 1952 and 1956, you see, and then renewed our acquaintance and so on. Well, we spent the rest of the afternoon with Mr. Sam. He showed me a hat that Franklin D. Roosevelt gave him on one occasion. He said, "I later found out that Lyndon Johnson

bought it and paid for it." (Laughter) But long after sundown we got away from Mr. Sam and came on back to spend the night in Shreveport. That was in 1960.

Sometime in 1962, this was at least a year before he became president, you remember, I was practicing law here in Ackerman. And I had a client who was in a big dispute with one of the agencies up there about an account that the government owed him, he said, and which was later paid. He wanted me to go up and talk to the department about it. He employed me to do so and I was down at the Department of Justice talking to this lawyer about the case and seeing if we could work it out without a lawsuit. The phone rang, and it was the Vice President. Now, how he knew I was in town, I don't know. I didn't ask him.

F: You believe now that everybody must be reporting to him, don't you?

C: I didn't ask him how he knew, you know. He was living then out at the Perle Mesta mansion [The Elms]. Anyway he said, "I'm sending a limousine for you. I want you to come out and have lunch with me." Well, of course, I was really considerably flabbergasted, but delighted. I told him, "Of course," and he told me just what corner to meet the car. So the man came. I noticed it was a White House limousine. I don't know exactly why that would be the case, but it had the White House emblem and everything on it. So I went out and had lunch and we talked till four o'clock in the afternoon. The fellow down at the Department of Justice in the case just had to wait. In fact, we resumed our discussions the next day. He had,

I believe, just made one of his trips to Asia at that time. We talked about it a good deal and about whether or not he'd be the vice presidential nominee in 1964.

F: Did he think he would?

C: At that time, I think he did, yes. Of course, he knew about my friendship with President Kennedy. President Kennedy had been down and spent the night with me in the Governor's Mansion in Jackson when I was governor and I'd been in his home in Washington. One time after the election, I talked from my office here to Vice President Johnson and President Kennedy; they were on extension phones in West Palm Beach. So he knew about that relationship and he was telling me how nice the President had been to him. There were others who were shooting at the Vice President, but he said that the President was certainly not one of those that was doing it.

F: You always felt that Jack Kennedy was completely loyal to him.

C: Yes, well, he was completely that way when I talked to him that time in 1962. I'm sorry I don't even remember what month of the year it was now. I could dig back in my records, I guess, and find out; probably look in that file and find the expense account of my trip to Washington, which would tell me when it was.

But after a while, he said, "Well, I better go back up to the Hill." The Secret Service man was there, of course, and the chauffeur. He and I rode on the back seat and the chauffeur and the Secret Service man on the front seat. He dropped me off at the

Mayflower Hotel, as I recall, and went on. But from all this, you can see that my relationship with him has not been so much official at all as it has been just "pure-de" personal. He has always been a hard-working man, a man who believed in obtaining his objectives if possible, and I've always been pretty much the same way. There's just one difference: he became president of the United States and I never did. (Laughter)

F: You did all right.

He was vice president, of course, during those rugged days up there at Oxford. Did he have any role at all in that or was that strictly handled by Bobby and Jack?

C: I had none, myself. I therefore would be a pretty poor witness on that. I was practicing law here.

F: I didn't know whether he ever called you, you know, and said, "Do you have any advice?"

C: He never did. He never did and neither did the Kennedys. I think that the Kennedys left off calling me. I doubt that the Vice President had anything at all to do with it. I don't know that he would. But I think the Kennedys refrained from calling me because, at least as far as the President was concerned, he knew I had no official power or capacity and he just didn't want to involve me in something that couldn't do anything but hurt me. It ultimately did hurt me anyway even though [I wasn't involved]. I think, more than anything else, it caused me to be defeated for governor in 1963 when I ran for a second term. I got into the runoff all right

enough, but was nevertheless defeated, and that was the only reason anybody ever gave for voting against me. There wasn't anything about my record or anything like that or my support of the Democratic ticket. Was just too good a friend, "had to show the Kennedys" was the argument, you know. Well, that election took place somewhere around the twenty-fifth of August, and the President was assassinated in November.

F: Did Johnson say anything previous to your running or after you had run and lost?

C: No, I don't believe he and I had any contact at all while that was going on. I rather guess that, with his great knowledge and intelligence and sources of information, he knew all about it.

F: Oh, I'm sure he did. He probably had a head count. (Laughter)

C: Well, he also figured, I'm sure, that if he so much as opened his mouth, that would just add to it. So he did not say anything about it, I don't think, either before or after. Of course, I talked to him many times afterwards, but I guess that a sense of politeness or what have you causes people not to say much about their losses, you know. We only talk about the victories.

F: You say, "Too bad," once, and then you've about said it all.

C: I don't recall that he ever said anything about it. Although, I might be mistaken on that, if I were to review my records and my correspondence.

F: After the assassination of President Kennedy, did you have any contact very quickly with the new President?

C: Well, it was another one of those things. I went to Washington for something in January of 1964, I believe. I don't recall now what I went for except that I know that my friend Billy Moore was with me, the same one that was in Texas, and also a friend of mine by the name of Horace Steele, who is now the bank comptroller for the state of Mississippi.

F: For an Ackerman justice, Billy Moore's kind of running in high cotton, isn't he?

C: He's a real fine boy.

I went to the White House. I can't remember how it was initiated or anything about it except that I know that I went. I saw the President in the Oval Room and we talked. He was very busy, as might be expected. Billy Moore went with me; Billy was there, and I remember we drank some coffee. Horace Steele for some reason didn't go, but the President wasn't satisfied. He said, "I want you to come back tomorrow." So we went back the next day and had another good visit. I don't think he mentioned the great problems of the presidency. He was just enjoying the visit from a friend that he knew was his friend, and had a good time. That was in 1964.

Now, in 1965, he appointed me to the Court of Appeals.

F: Before we move ahead to 1965, did he talk with you at all about his candidacy in 1964?

C: No, he never did mention it to me. He knew that, under all the circumstances, the same thing that defeated me for governor in 1963 was going to make Mississippi impossible in 1964. I'm sure he never

even came in the state for the campaign in 1964. In other words, Mississippi in 1964 had gotten like Texas was in 1952, although on different issues.

F: As far as you know, did Johnson make any real effort to try to hold the Democratic Party in line down here, or did he figure it was a lost cause and let it go? Or what had been the old . . . ?

C: I never did discuss that with him. Knowing him as I think I know him, I doubt that he ever considered anything much a lost cause, you know, not at least until it was explored to the uttermost. But he's at the same time very practical and very knowledgeable.

F: He's not going to stand still and get burned?

C: Well, he wasn't going to waste his time, I'd say, planting seed on stony ground, and he did what most of us do. We go where we can get the votes. In my own experience in the past, if I had places in Mississippi where I knew I was weak, I concentrated on those where I knew I was strong and built up my margin to offset the weaknesses that I figured I could not cure anyway. And I'm sure that's what he did.

F: Did you ever have any insight at all into his relationship with John Bell Williams?

C: Never did. I never did hear John Bell mention it. Now, you know, later on, in 1965, starting in December, 1964, when they were making a concentrated, organized effort to oust the Mississippi delegation from the House of Representatives and filed an actual contest against them, I, without prior notice, knowledge or what have you, was chosen

as counsel for the congressmen who were being thus contested, and was often in Washington in that connection. But I never did say anything to the White House about it.

F: As far as you know, the President stayed aloof?

C: I don't know of any connection he had with it whatever, no. He might have had some, but not to my knowledge. I guess I was by that like he was by Oxford. I just didn't call him, you know.

F: Right. What about William Colmer?

C: Congressman Colmer, of course, was the dean of the delegation during that contest, but I don't recall that anything was said about the President, pro or con, on that.

F: Do you think that he'd have enough relationship with Johnson for me to see him.

C: Oh, I feel like he would. Mr. Colmer is a very, very fine gentleman in my book. He's a formal, level-headed, cool-headed fellow [more] than a lot of people might be.

And I'll say this for Congressman John Bell Williams: I think it would be fine if you'd contact him, if you have not already done so.

F: No, I have not.

C: Because since I started representing him in this thing . . . He and I used to be political adversaries, you see. I was considered a "liberal," and he was a great conservative and conscientiously so.

F: How did he happen to come to you?

C: At least, we thought we were on opposite sides of the fence. But when I started representing the crowd and having daily conferences with them and so forth, he found out I wasn't such a bad guy. And I certainly found out that he wasn't. We became quite inseparable friends, really, which goes to show a lot of times that these differences are born of lack of acquaintance with each other. Now, recently, I guess, Friday was a week ago, I went down to Jackson. They unveiled the official portrait of Governor Williams, as they do of all governors in the Hall of Governors in Jackson. He called up and invited me to make a speech for the occasion, and I went and made it with a great deal of pleasure.

F: Where is Williams living now? In Jackson?

C: He lives in Raymond, which is just a few miles from Jackson, which has been his home all of his life. You could get him by calling Raymond. And I would suggest, if you do, that you might tell him you interviewed me about my personal acquaintance with President Johnson, that this is a project for history and that you'd like to ask him to talk, if he would.

F: I suppose it might be better to wait on Colmer until he comes home to stay, don't you, or do you think that's chancy?

C: Yes, I think that'd be all right. I believe Congressman Colmer would talk to you anywhere though.

F: I can try and watch that.

C: But I know that during that contest, when, well, you know, for one thing, they defrocked John Bell as chairman and then there was a

great movement on foot right straight for everybody to run and join the Republican Party.

F: Right.

C: Of course, I was very much opposed to that. I told them that I hadn't got into it at all for any kind of objective like that. Well, as you know, none of them did, and Mr. Colmer was I think about the most stable man in the bunch on that subject. He wouldn't even consider it, and there wasn't all that much consideration given to it by the others, with one or two exceptions.

F: Okay, let's come back to your appointment.

C: Well, that has a history to it. Judge Ben F. Cameron died in about May, 1964, as I recall. Then the phone started ringing and people started saying, "We'd like to suggest you be appointed to the court." And I said, "Well, I just wouldn't consider that at all." And they kept on, and finally, it was rather a--

F: These are people here in the state that you had been associated with?

C: That's right. Finally, I put [out] a public statement that was maybe sort of a presumptuous thing to do. Hadn't anybody offered it to me, anyway. I made a statement just to settle the matter and stop the phone ringing and so forth that under no circumstances would I consider it. I was practicing law and doing extremely well at it.

F: Now, you had been a state circuit judge, hadn't you?

C: That's right. Right here in this district of seven counties. Well, I had served time on the Supreme Court of Mississippi, too, in 1950.

But anyway, then they got behind Noel Malone, up at West Point, who was a distant relative of mine. His father was born and reared in this country and on the Yockanookany Creek. Anyway, Noel had been a United States attorney, and a very fine lawyer, and as fine a man as I ever knew. Well, for some reason, that just hung fire along for a year or so, and one night Noel had a heart attack and died just right now. So the thing was open.

F: Were Stennis and Eastland working for Noel?

C: Yes, they were very much for him. Noel Malone was county attorney when John Stennis was district attorney. They were just like David and Jonathan. They were great friends. Of course, I've had the same relationship with Senator Stennis since about 1940. Anyway, Noel Malone was entirely qualified to have made a good United States circuit judge.

Well, it came open again and I said, "Maybe the Lord's trying to tell me something I need to know, if it comes around here the second time." So I decided that if the President wanted to appoint me, I would take it. And Senator Stennis so told the President. However, before that, the President on a number of occasions had said, "What's the matter with Jim that he doesn't want to take any kind of position in the federal government?" It bothered him apparently. He didn't like it. He wanted me to get hooked up in the federal government somehow.

F: Did he ever talk to you about it?

C: Except after the election in 1960, he and President Kennedy, together, talked to me about becoming secretary of the army. McNamara came down to Jackson to talk to me about it and I declined it on the basis that I wasn't qualified. That was out of my field. I told President Kennedy--he laughed and Vice President Johnson heard me when I said it--that it made me very happy for him to offer me the job; he could make somebody else very happy by giving it to him; that would make two who were happy. You know, I had the feeling all along that if there was anything I was capable of doing, it would be in the judiciary. President Kennedy called my attention to the fact that the secretary of the army under President Eisenhower had been the ex-governor of Michigan, Mr. Brucker. He said that if the ex-governor of Michigan can do it, the ex-governor of Mississippi can. But I just instinctively felt like it wasn't the thing to do.

F: It takes a pretty good man to turn that down, though.

C: Well, President Kennedy said, "You'll have all kinds of experts who can tell you the facts and so forth." I said, "Yes, but I always like to operate on my own independent judgment. I wouldn't know when they were telling me right and when they were not."

Then later, he said he'd appoint me ambassador to Australia. I said, "Well, I know you're going to give me up now, because I don't belong in the striped pants diplomacy at all. And my mother and father are both very old. It's eight-thousand miles to Australia and it would just absolutely break their hearts if I went that far from home at this time. I don't mind staying here on their

account at all." So later on, I think Mr. [Ed] Clark from Texas was appointed. He wasn't appointed right then. I think maybe he appointed Bill Battle [then]. Anyway, they were appointed.

Then there wasn't anything else said about giving me any federal appointments. They'd offered me two, and I had not taken them. Of course, really, the motivating factor behind it all was that I'd been off in Jackson for ten years as attorney general and governor, most of the time, and I'd got back here and my law practice was going good. I was at home, and I was just enjoying it.

F: It was a good life to go off and leave?

C: Yes. Well, I keenly regretted many times, to be frank about it, since I was appointed to the court that I hadn't stuck to that. Not that I am all that unhappy with the court, but it just has headaches that I wouldn't have otherwise had. We have fifteen judges now in the Fifth Circuit, and it's awful hard to come to any consensus with that many men. Yet, we've got to have them to try to handle the case load that we have.

F: But you can spend about three weeks out of four here in Ackerman.

C: I'm on the bench one week out of the month; then we're here writing opinions and all that business. I generally work six days a week and generally on Sunday afternoons, just to be frank about it. I always go to my office all day on Saturday. I've done it all my life. It doesn't bother me.

Anyway, I never did talk to the President about it. He never did talk to me about appointment to the court. He talked to John

Stennis, and Stennis would tell me what was being said and done.

I was greatly diverted at the time anyway because my sister, who was three years younger than I was and who was a real great person, came down with cancer February 1, 1964. She'd never been ill in her life. That's her picture right over here.

F: Yes. Very attractive.

C: She'd never been ill in her life and never been in a hospital in her life. And the doctors told us that she had only about three months to live. She died on June 6, 1965.

This had been hanging fire all during that time. I hadn't been paying too much attention. After her death, I went off down to Panama City, Florida--my wife and I, and Billy Moore and his wife, and Dale Davidson and Mrs. Davidson, and two other people who'd been through all my wars and fights and battles with me. And while I was down there, by George, the President appointed me, I believe, on June 22. I didn't find out till I got back home.

F: Yes, 1965. Oh, he didn't call you and say, "Jim, I am . . . Will you . . . ," and so forth?

C: Well, they called here, and I had a young man who was law-clerking in my office. I say here. I was in that little white building right over there. He knew about it, but I was on my way home by then, on the road, and he didn't know how to get in touch with me, you see. So I found it out when I got home.

F: Came home and found out you had a new job?

C: Yes. Then later on I never did go down to the White House during that time because I knew how busy he was and I didn't want to trespass on his time. We'd talk on the telephone.

F: Did you go up there to be sworn in or were you sworn in here?

C: I was sworn in in Washington, yes. I was sworn in in Senator Stennis's office by Mr. Justice Clark. That's the picture right over there. What happened, you know, they made a great fight on me because, I think, the fact that I represented these congressmen was really what teed it off. That hadn't been resolved even then. They had been allowed to take their seats and so forth, but the final determination had not been brought to pass and wasn't until September. But the same group that I was embroiled with in the congressional contest were the ones who brought the contest against me, so to speak, for confirmation.

And, amongst other things, I got sick in the middle of it. I'd had kidney stones once before. My father had them all of his life; well, until he was sixty years old, at least. And on the very morning that I was to appear before the Judiciary Committee, along with Judge Thornberry, who'd been appointed at the same time I was, just as I was getting ready to leave the hotel, one of these things just struck me, and it just knocked me out. I had to stay in the hospital for ten days. The President called me up, and he said, "Jim, I got one of them myself. Don't want you to say anything about it. You don't want publicity for those things. You know, I've been operated on once for it up at Mayo's." I was at the

George Washington University Hospital; had splendid doctors and excellent treatment.

F: His came during his 1948 campaign.

C: Well, I'd forgotten just when he had it. Later on, he had surgery and they announced then that they had removed a kidney stone which he had told me about that he had.

Actually, I have not seen the President in person since I made those two visits to him in 1964, when I happened to be in Washington.

F: As far as you know, did he put any pressure on anyone to get you confirmed? I judge this was, in a sense, not so much personal against you as it was just kind of punitive against Mississippi, wasn't it?

C: That's what it had to be, in that Senator [Sam] Ervin would ask every one of those witnesses, "Do you know Judge Coleman in person?" "Oh, no." "Do you know he's been a state judge? Do you have anything to say about any misconduct or serious errors he committed as state judge?" "Oh, no." It was mostly because I was from Mississippi, plus the fact that, having been governor of Mississippi, I had taken some positions in Mississippi, as governor, holding the lid on here and what have you, that would have been directly the opposite, for example, of what President Johnson would have done under the same circumstances.

Of course, I think that's the test of friendship and respect and confidence. He appointed me knowing that I had not always agreed by a long shot with some of his own policies. But by the

same token, I had been his friend, although I had not agreed with them. I mean, our relationship rose above such considerations as that. I never did try to talk to the President when he was president, or when he was vice president, or even when he was a senator, to deter him from any policy he was pursuing, even though I might have seriously disagreed with it. In the first place, I figured he had as much knowledge on the subject as I had and possibly more; in the second place, he had a role to play which is far different to mine. I consider him, well, I don't consider--I know him to be absolutely sound as an individual, as a person, and as a loyal American. So therefore you just make room for differences of opinion.

But I do not know anything the President did in the way of picking up the phone and talking to anybody or anything like that, but there's no question but what he gave me the strongest backing for confirmation, and there's no question in my mind that had he not done so, I would not have been confirmed. Now, I base that on such things as the fact that the Attorney General of the United States himself, Mr. Katzenbach, came up and testified in favor of my confirmation. I don't think he'd have done that without the approval of the President.

F: Did you finally get to testify?

C: Oh, yes, sir. Those hearings ran about three days, and they kept me on the stand all of one day.

F: Were they run pretty even tempered or were they somewhat . . . ?

C: There was nothing discourteous about it or anything. It was very, very probing and so forth from some men like Senator Javits and others. Senator Kennedy from Massachusetts asked me quite a lot of questions; so did the senator from Michigan, Senator Hart.

F: This would be Bobby Kennedy.

C: No, this was Teddy Kennedy. Of course, Teddy Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy both voted for my confirmation on the floor. Hart voted against me, and so did Javits and Morse and Cooper of Kentucky, and so on. You never forget them, but actually, there was a 75 to 7 vote when it came down. Senator Dirksen supported me and spoke in my behalf on the floor; I believe there were only three Republican votes cast against me, or four; maybe three Republican votes and four Democrats, or something like that.

F: I notice you have an autographed picture from Emanuel Celler. Where did you get mixed up with him?

C: Now, that's another story which really goes back to President Johnson again.

But I've always felt that if Senator Dirksen had been alive and had given either Haynsworth or Carswell the support that I got, that they would have been confirmed for the Supreme Court. Those men really went to bat up there on that occasion. I appreciated it, of course. When we started off, Senator Javits asked me if I didn't know that I was on trial for my professional life. I told him that I didn't think so; that I had been practicing law in Mississippi for many years; still had a license and was making a

living for myself and my family. I figured I could continue to do so whether I was confirmed or rejected but that, of course, I didn't want to be rejected. I will say that I'd far prefer, at any time, to run before a million Mississippians as before a hundred senators. Those old Mississippians would probably just vote their objective beliefs, even if they're wrong. And the senators have to watch a lot of things, not just what they think, but other factors as well.

Now, getting back to Mr. Celler. This is another contact I had with the President, but not directly. Of course, we had no federal court facilities in Ackerman. It was not a federal court town. I made it very clear that if I were to be appointed to the court, I would not leave Ackerman, and if that was going to be required, I would not accept the place.

F: I guess New Orleans is your closest city.

C: It is. It is. It's actually the seat of the court; it's the capital of the court. But we sit in all these other states, you know, in certain places.

F: That'd sure change your lifestyle.

C: Oh, you bet. But anyway, the only remedy for that, once I got . . . Well, for about three years or so, I just stayed in my own office that had belonged to me all the time. Then my son got back from Korea where he had been in the Army and was going to start practicing law, and I wanted to let him have my library and facilities. So I moved into another building and paid my own rent. The government couldn't pay rent, because this wasn't a federal court town.

I got a bill introduced in the Senate by Senator Eastland to make it a federal court town, so the government could provide me with facilities, as they do all the other judges. It passed the Senate and got over to the House, and you didn't hear anything more from it.

So I got on the plane and went to see Mr. Celler. He and I are very warm personal friends. We sat right side by side on the Platform Committee in Chicago in 1956, and had seen each other on numerous occasions since. So I went up. As I expected, somebody had put the bill in a pigeonhole up there, and Celler didn't know about it at the time until I called it to his attention. [Then he] brought it out and passed it.

Well, having worked on Capitol Hill, I knew the procedure. I knew it would go to the Department of Justice for their recommendations, and I was afraid they might say, "Well, a little old town like Ackerman, Mississippi, what do they want with federal courthouse facilities? We will recommend that the President veto it." So I called up Barefoot Sanders, who was then the President's counsel and stated to him what had happened and told him I wished he'd put a red flag on it. And if there was any likelihood that the President might veto it, I'd like for him to give me a chance to come up and argue the case with him. "Oh," he said, "I don't think the President would do anything like that, but if he were about to, I'll sure call you."

So one morning we were sitting in New Orleans--I was on the bench--and my secretary, Miss Commander, sent a note up to the bench: "The White House calling." I said, "Uh-oh, they've got a recommendation to veto that bill." So I told the other judges I wanted a recess just as soon as the lawyer got through, whoever was arguing, and we took a recess. I went down and returned the call to the White House. Barefoot Sanders says, "Judge, the President wanted me to call you and tell you that he had just signed that bill for the Coleman National Monument in Ackerman, Mississippi." (Laughter) That was a great relief and very much like the President.

F: Right. (Laughter)

C: So then I wrote Mr. Celler and I told him that since he had played such a vital role in building the building, I thought his picture ought to be in it. And he sent me that autographed picture; that's why it's here. Which carries out my philosophy, that I've had all my life, that a great deal of this whipped-up acrimony between the North and South is not only useless and needless and hurtful, but a lot of it would disappear if people would maintain contacts with each other. Of course, I'm sure that I've had that philosophy because I started off, when I was twenty-one years old, working on Capitol Hill. I knew people from every state in the Union, and was later speaker of the Little Congress myself. I mentioned a little while ago that President Johnson was. And I found out that no corner in this great country has a monopoly on good folks. It sure doesn't.

F: Have you had any contact with Johnson since he left Washington?

C: Oh, I have written to him a good deal, and he has written to me and I have been laying off just to go see him. I just thought I'd call him sometime and, when he didn't have anything in the way or that would be bothersome, that two or three of us, like Billy Moore, and Horace Steele, and myself, folks who'd been his true friends would just go out and see him. Horace Steele was a presidential elector in 1964, purely just so he could show his friendship for President Johnson; he knew he wasn't going to carry Mississippi, but he was one of the electors. But, of course, now, he's had this heart attack, and we'll have to defer that for a while. I see, though, in the paper, he's back at the Ranch which is encouraging.

F: Right. I noticed that Dr. Hurst said that he left Washington before ordinarily he would have let him go, but it seemed more diplomatic to agree with him. Yes, I heard that on "Meet the Press."

C: I really think his medical reasons were that, after all, your mind and the state of your mind has about as much to do with your recovery as anything else. He knew the President would just be so much more happy down there in Texas, like I am when I'm here in Mississippi, and he just let him go. Like my mother, who's still living, eighty years old; she has congestive heart failure, and she has a hard time. Every once in a while we have to take her to the hospital and then she'll get to raising sand to come home and the doctors say, "Well, on the balance, the smart thing to do is to let her go home." (Laughter)

F: Right. I suppose, as circuit judge, that that just removes you from all ostensible politics anyhow now.

C: That's right. We're not supposed to be politicians or politicking.

F: You've had some rugged decisions to make.

C: That's been fairly grievous at times, such as last summer when my son was running for district attorney. I did go to one speaking and heard him speak. That's the only political rally or what have you that I've attended since I was appointed to the court.

F: One last question--you may want to add something--but did you feel that Johnson was in any real way responsible for what kind of happened to the Democratic Party here in Mississippi during the sixties, or do you think it was just one of those things that come along on time and would have happened?

C: I don't think it could have been laid at his door in any specific particular at all. I think it's just something that was bound to happen, when you get right down to it, about as much as the Civil War was bound to happen. It would have been wonderful if it could have been averted, but it just had to happen.

F: Was your appointment well received here in Mississippi?

C: I think so. I think it still is, really. Although I have withdrawn from all political activity, I'm still pretty active in a lot of things. I was a chairman of the building committee for the construction of our new Department of Archives and History in Jackson.

F: They tell me that's a beauty.

C: It's really nice, and we've been needing it a long time.

F: Where is it, north of the--?

C: It's right on the south side of the old Capitol, which was built in 1839, and which I had restored when I was governor.

F: I've worked in the old Archives.

C: Was it the War Memorial Building? Yes. Well, was that before the Capitol was restored, or after?

F: That was in 1946.

C: Oh, yes. That was while McCain [?] was director. We restored the old Capitol during the last two years that I was governor. It was just about to go. But Henry Clay had spoken there, and all of Mississippi's history at least up until 1900 was right there. It would just have been an indescribable tragedy if we'd let it fall into the ground. We spent a million and six hundred dollars and put it back like it was; in fact, probably better than it was when it was originally constructed. And it's a showplace. I hope you get a chance to visit it.

F: I will.

Did Johnson ever have any relationship at all with Ross Barnett?

C: Not to my knowledge. I don't know of any.

F: I haven't found anything.

C: No, I don't know of any. I expect about the only chance he'd ever had to have would have been at Los Angeles during the 1960 convention, while he and Kennedy were still in competition for the presidential nomination. But I don't know that there hasn't been. I

wasn't there. You see, Barnett never was elected to any office in Mississippi except governor.

F: I know.

C: He ran three times and was finally elected on the third go-round. Then of course he came back in 1967 and ran again, but didn't get but 75,000 votes out of the 680,000, which shows you how the mind of the people of the state had changed since Oxford. His lieutenant governor was elected governor after Oxford. But the same governor ran for lieutenant governor at the same time Ross did and didn't get in the runoff. So there'd been some great changes for the better in Mississippi. Because they finally got the facts; they finally got the information. It takes a long time for that to happen a lot of times. When I was defeated for governor in 1963 in the runoff, some man came up to see me the next day, and although he was a man, he was crying; he was so bitterly disappointed. He was saying something about the people in Mississippi and I said, "You just don't do that, because they elected me the first time I ever asked them, and I'm not about to concede now that I was just elected by a bunch of people that didn't know what they were doing." I said, "They've just been stampeded this time." In fact, I figured all the time that they would be, knowing all the circumstances. But I decided it was better to make the fight than it was to have the situation foreclosed without so much as a contest.

F: Yes, right. You hate to give it to them by default.

C: Sure. But I don't know what that would have led to, you know.

F: You never know how much a losing campaign educates.

C: Yes. Well, I have no doubt, not the least, from what people say to me today that I could easily be elected governor of Mississippi. Last year they came here and wrote and called, and a lot of it was some people who have never supported me in their lives. A lot of it, they say they want to make amends for what they did. I say, "You don't have to make amends. Any man that runs for office ought to know that he's liable to get beat. I always knew it." There were a lot of times I thought that I was going to be defeated, and I won. So I don't have any complaints. As a matter of fact, getting beat that time pretty well gave me my political independence.

F: Do you think Mississippi has mellowed toward Johnson?

C: Toward President Johnson?

F: Yes. Not Paul Johnson. (Laughter) No, I was talking about Lyndon Johnson.

C: Yes. President Johnson.

F: (Laughter) We've got too many Johnsons around here.

C: Well, Paul Johnson, you know, although he defeated me in a campaign based on Oxford, made a good governor.

F: Yes, he did.

C: He was very temperate and very quiet, and he did not stoke the fire. My hat's off to him for that.

But we'll get back to the President now. As I said earlier in our discussion, I doubt there ever was all that much personal

antipathy toward him as a man or as an individual. I saw Ambassador Clark over at this judiciary conference in Savannah that I attended last week, which I'm required by the law to attend and which many of the outstanding lawyers attend. He was there in that status. And he was telling me how much Mrs. Johnson enjoyed her visit to Natchez to a pilgrimage and how nice everybody was to her. I said, "Well, that doesn't surprise me at all." In the first place, Mississippians certainly ought to be expected to behave that way. In the second place, they all recognize Mrs. Johnson is a great lady, and woe betide the Mississippian that's not going to show proper respect toward a great lady. I said that all of the factors would point toward that kind of reception. "Well," he said, "it hasn't always been that way everywhere." And I said, "Not in anybody's life has it always been that way everywhere."

But it would please me for example, if President Johnson could come over here and stay all night with me here in the country in Mississippi. I know what the people would do. They'd give him a reception that would . . . not just to LBJ, but to a man who had been president of the United States. Folks around here still respect the presidency and the governor's office. They may disagree ten thousand per cent with the governor, but they will respect the office that he occupies. We haven't gotten to that point where we think that you're supposed to sit down in front of the . . .

F: Tear down the institution.

C: Tear down the State Capitol and close up the classrooms, and all that kind of business.

F: Well, thank you, Judge.

C: Yes, sir.

[End of Tape 1 of I and Interview I]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of James P. Coleman

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, James P. Coleman of Ackerman, Mississippi do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of personal interview conducted on April 29, 1972 at Ackerman, Mississippi and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Jas. P. Coleman
Donor

July 3, 1978
Date

acting James E. O'Neill
Archivist of the United States

August 1, 1978
Date