

INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 5, 1974
INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM M. COLMER
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ
PLACE: Mr. Colmer's home in Pascagoula, Mississippi

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F: Do you remember when you first met Lyndon Johnson?

C: I remember the first time that I remember meeting him. And I'm sure that I must have met him when he was with [Congressman] Dick Kleberg.

F: But he was just another one of a bunch of secretaries?

C: Of a thousand or more secretaries.

F: You went up in 1934?

C: Elected in 1932. Went up in 1933. Me and Roosevelt went up there together.

F: Right.

C: That's the way I like to word it.

F: Well, they needed you about that time.

C: That's when we started all this business.

F: Right.

C: No, the first time I remember meeting Lyndon, my boys were younger then, and we had gone up to Philadelphia for the Army-Navy game. It was one of those typical Army-Navy day games weather-wise, alternating between snow, sleet and rain. We were cold. And Mrs. Colmer never approved of my putting any alcohol in the radiator

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on such occasions. So I started up the ramp--I guess it must have been half-time--looking for a friend. I met Lyndon coming down the ramp alone.

F: Was he a congressman by then? Was he a new congressman?

C: He had just been sworn in. I guess one reason that I was impressed with him was that he had run, if you recall, upon an all-out Roosevelt support. The President had had him down to the White House and I doubt if there had been many, if any, freshman congressmen who had come into the Congress and received the attention that he did because that had been the issue.

F: And particularly interesting at that time because of the Supreme Court fight that had turned a lot of people against Roosevelt.

C: Right. Well, I said, and I quote literally, "Bud, you don't happen to have anything on your hip." He said, "I sure do." And he reached into his pocket, got it out. I got some alcohol in the radiator and went on and finished the game.

F: A little antifreeze?

C: A little antifreeze.

F: You knew who he was when you saw him, then.

C: Oh, yes. As I say, everybody knew Lyndon Johnson as a freshman congressman then, because--

F: Of the Roosevelt connection.

C: Right.

F: Did you see much of him during those congressional years of his?

C: Yes. I guess I did. But to be perfectly frank--and I know that's

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what you want me to be--after he had gotten in the hubbub and the busy life that all members of the Congress lead trying to look after themselves as well as the country, he was just another freshman member of Congress which was really no reflection upon him, because that's true.

F: Well, it's sort of like a small college or something. You've got a lot of people in there that . . .

C: Not only have you got a lot of people, but the Congress was run upon the seniority basis. And I don't care who or how well qualified a freshman member is, unless he makes a show of himself, for the want of a better word --

F: Pro or con. Right?

C: Yes, well, popping up on every issue and trying to let the people know he's there, you just don't know he's there. It's the senior members, the chairmen and so forth that handle the legislation. So he didn't make any particular impression on the House, well, I'd say, during his time there. That may be not exactly an accurate statement. But again I could say that about Jack Kennedy or --

F: That's just par for the course.

C: -- Nixon and everybody else.

Nixon, I remember when he was placed on the old Un-American Activities Committee. As a matter of fact, I told him since he's been president that as a member of the Rules Committee that set up that committee, Un-American Activities Committee, that I helped make him. That was the committee that Martin Dies was head of and Martin was a

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controversial figure. Nixon got on that Committee and pumpkin papers and all that stuff [Alger Hiss Case].

F: Really brought him out there to the fore.

C: Right.

F: Did you ever serve on a committee with Johnson?

C: No.

F: I know he never was on Rules, but . . .

C: No, sir. No, I never served on a committee with him. As a matter of fact, I don't recall now what committee he served on. Was it Agriculture?

F: Yes. And his most active job was on Naval Affairs under Carl Vinson.

C: Now that brings up a little recollection somebody might be interested in. One day after he returned from the wars--as will be recalled, of course, he was in the Navy--he came up to me on the floor and he said, "Bill do you know a Judge Tanner down at"--he named a place in my district, Columbia, to be exact. I said, "No, I can't place him." Well, he said that his son was in the same squadron that he, Lyndon, was in and that he was on the same mission when this young flyer was shot down. And he said, "I have the last picture that was made of him just before he went on that trip. I thought you might want to send it to his people." I told him I'd be happy to and he gave it to me. This man was standing before a thatched roof. Well, incidentally, and I hope this doesn't sound self-serving, I was so impressed with that--and I looked up his father afterwards--that I appointed the deceased officer's

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son to the Military Academy. He is now a lieutenant colonel;

I hear from him ever so often.

F: Has your district remained fairly constant in its boundaries, or has there been a lot of change through the years?

C: No, sir, the year I was elected, in 1932, we had eight representatives from Mississippi. But that was the year it changed, and as a historical [note], back there--this is not particularly interesting, [it's] interesting here, I guess--we had quite a court fight over that. The late Theodore G. Bilbo, from this district, who had wanted to run for Congress, was just going out as governor. He was at a pretty low ebb, politically. He didn't see fit to run against the incumbent. He wasn't afraid of me, I'm sure. (Laughter) He got up a slate and ran the state at large. Think that over. The United States Supreme Court settled that issue and has now reversed itself, incidentally. Then it went to seven [representatives] and then subsequently to six and now five. There were sixteen counties in my district at that time.

F: What'd you do? Run right up to the Alabama border, northward?

C: Alabama and Mississippi. Sixteen counties.

F: How far north did you go? As far as--?

C: Just south of Jackson. I live in Covington County--as far north--and that was over in Marion.

F: Now, did you get into Hattiesburg and Laurel?

C: Hattiesburg and Laurel.

F: Meridian?

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- C: No.
- F: Not that far.
- C: Just outside.
- F: Now how far west did you go?
- C: Went to the Louisiana line.
- F: All the way to the line?
- C: And, of course, the Alabama line.
- F: Right.
- C: Well now, the last redistricting cut it to twelve. So we now have twelve counties. Otherwise, the only effect the redistricting had on me was to reduce it from eight to five. Because--well, there isn't any use going into this any further.
- F: In one sense, though, you could always deal with your old constituency. You didn't have to go out and develop a new one.
- C: Right. But I always had obligations.
- F: Yes, sir. I'd imagine you would in this area. It's a pretty mixed-up group in a way. There's many different types of culture and interests and so on.
- C: Well, let's spit it out. I was the liberal, Roosevelt-following Democrat. But like some other people, I began to get weaned away from some of that liberality. And when I went out I was considerably conservative.
- F: Did you have any idea in those days that Johnson was going to amount to any more than another good congressman?

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- C: Not until after he got in the Senate.
- F: Well, was he considered, in Congress, a member of the southern bloc, or was he sort of a maverick?
- C: I wouldn't really put him in either category.
- F: Pretty independent, huh?
- C: Well, he followed the party line pretty well. But over in the Senate, of course, like gold, you know, it's scarcer.
- F: Right.
- C: A man has an opportunity to show his talents and ability more than he does in the House and particularly, it lets you become chairman of a committee.
- F: Right.
- C: So after Lyndon got over in the Senate, yes, I was impressed that he had the ambition and he had the drive. He was a hard driver. I remember the secretaries on the Hill used to call him a slave driver.
- F: He worked rather well, though, with people like Richard Russell and Senator Stennis and Eastland and so on, didn't he?
- C: As far as I know, yes. But again, I was over in the House.
- F: Right. Kind of kept the two groups apart to some extent. Did you ever hear Mr. Sam talk about him?
- C: Well, it was general knowledge that Sam was rather partial--that may be a strong word, very interested in him.
- F: Was there a feeling that he leaned kind of heavily on Mr. Sam's power and knowledge and so on?

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- C: Yes, particularly, as I say, after he got over in the Senate.
- F: Was Sam Rayburn the man that he has been made out to be, or is this the sort of thing where the myth is built up around a person, as far as his ability to get things done and work in the possible, and so forth?
- C: Well, I don't think there's any question but what Sam Rayburn was a strong speaker [of the House] and leader. That, I think, is universally accorded him. It was also common knowledge that Lyndon was--I don't know whether allied is the word, but he didn't make many moves without consulting Sam.
- F: Back there in the fifties there was a Southern Manifesto issued--you know, following Brown v. the Board of Education--and Lyndon didn't sign it. Did that hurt his relationship with the South, or did they just figure that he had other fish to fry?
- C: I would say, with some of the more active members in the propagation of the Manifesto, it didn't help him. But apparently it didn't hurt him too much in the South.
- F: He never actually broke with his southern friends? He just strained it a little sometimes, I gather?
- C: I'd say that was true. Yes.
- F: Did you go to the Los Angeles Convention in 1960 when Kennedy was nominated?
- C: Yes.
- F: What was the Mississippi attitude toward the nomination at that time?
- C: Well, as far as Mississippi is concerned, Mississippi was looking for a more conservative candidate. As a matter of fact, in the

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caucus we agreed to support Ross Barnett as a favorite son.

F: This was just to sort of delay things in the hopes that you could get them in hand?

C: Right, and rather than put the delegation on record as having supported neither Kennedy nor Johnson. May I digress at this point? Personally, I was very fond of Jack Kennedy. By the time he came in, I was somewhat of a senior member. I sat down and talked with him when he first came in, I guess trying to impress him with my philosophy of government. But I was always interested in him. As a matter of fact, my partiality, I think, stemmed from the fact that I had a son who was in the service and who had somewhat a similar career. Both of them were lieutenants in the Navy. Both of them came out casualties--my son, not with a battle wound, but with a lung infection.

F: Was he in the Pacific?

C: Yes, in the Pacific.

F: I was out there, too, in the Navy.

C: Is that right?

F: On destroyer duty.

C: I had two sons out there. Well, at any rate, one was on a DE [destroyer-escort] and the other one was on a cruiser, the Houston.

F: That's the second Houston, not the one that was shot in the Java Sea? There were two cruisers Houston.

C: During the war.

F: Right at the very beginning of the war.

C: Right, right.

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- F: And then they came back with the second [one].
- C: No, he wasn't. Well, then in addition--if I may burden the record with that--this son and Jack Kennedy physically were the same kind of gentleman. They were both kind of auburn haired and about the same size, and so on. Now to get back on the track, Mississippi was, as you are aware, along with some of the other southern states and possibly even more so than most of them, pretty torn up about what was going on in the forced integration of the races, to spell it out.
- F: Now, in 1957 you put through Congress that Civil Rights Bill. I presume, in the House, that Rayburn was the complete shepherd of that and the House did not feel Lyndon Johnson's influence on that. Right.
- C: I would say so, yes. I would say so.
- F: Then when you come down to 1960, I suppose that you never really got a chance to make a choice between Kennedy and Johnson, did you, in that?
- C: No.
- F: Were you expecting Johnson to take second place?
- C: No, frankly, I wasn't. And, of course, my understanding of it was that Sam didn't want him to, either.
- F: Right. Sam ever talk to you about it?
- C: No, sir. He didn't.
- F: Where did you hear that?
- C: Oh, it was just some talk.

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- F: It made quite a buzz at the time.
- C: Yes.
- F: Did you come back and work for the ticket then?
- C: I came back and voted for the ticket. I never voted anything but the party line, although I was not too enamored of what was going on.
- F: You had to look the other way a little bit?
- C: Right.
- F: Did Johnson's position on the ticket make a real difference in Mississippi in 1960, do you think? I presume the Catholic issue was as strong here as it was in Texas.
- C: No, the Catholic issue here was not as great as it had been in the Al Smith thing. Frankly, I really don't have any firm recollection of anything about that, but I doubt that it made much difference.
- F: Did Johnson come in here to campaign?
- C: No, sir.
- F: Did you ever have him down in your district?
- C: No. I was really searching my memory about it. As a matter of fact, I don't think I ever had any president in my district, unless it was Nixon and that was [after] the Camille storm.
- F: Not on a straight political trip.
- C: As you may--I'm sure you do--know, back in the early days, nobody, no presidential candidate, bothered about Mississippi or the South generally. We were like a kept woman, you know, just taken for granted.

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F: That, of course, was the one thing Al Smith did for the party, and later Eisenhower, you know that was the first time they recognized that they ought to pay some attention to them. Did you see anything of Johnson while he was vice president?

C: Very little, very little. Again, you have a thing about the division of the houses--the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The House of Lords didn't pay too much attention to the Commons. But again, for that matter, I don't think I ever met [Spiro] Agnew, although I was a senior member and chairman of a committee.

F: Where were you when Kennedy was assassinated? Were you here or were you up in Washington?

C: I was in Washington.

F: How did you get the news?

C: I think I'd been to the barbershop. I know I was over in the Capitol. The House was not in session, so I started back to the House Office Building, and I met a boy who was secretary for [Congressman O.C.] Clark Fisher. He had just come from the Capitol, and he was telling me about it. We were standing there talking. And I'm going to say something that possibly I shouldn't say. But Hale Boggs, who at that time was whip and my neighbor over there and one of my personal good friends, came rushing out heading for the Capitol. He was very emotional. I mean he was virtually running, and he said, addressing me, "Your people killed that man. Your Ross Barnetts."

F: Mm!

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C: And what he said hurt me particularly since I was personally very fond of Jack Kennedy.

F: Right. As it happened, five hundred miles from Mississippi.

C: Right. So I said, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" But he kept going. Possibly a month after that, he apologized to me for it. But that was quite an impression to me.

F: Very caught up in the emotion of the moment.

C: Right.

F: Did Johnson get in touch with you at any time after that to talk about plans, or did he call you down as a delegation?

C: Yes, I went down there one time, and that was after I became chairman of the Rules Committee. He had the Rules Committee down there. But no, he didn't.

F: What did he talk about on that occasion? Do you remember?

C: Oh, he was talking about legislation, what the status of legislation was, that time was really it.

F: A kind of briefing?

C: I said he had the Rules Committee. He had the chairmen of all the committees in the House down there, and I had just become chairman. He wanted to know what I had to say about the situation. I said, "Well, you know, I'm just a new chairman, Mr. President. I'm just going along as best I can."

However, again, the habit of most of the presidents in my observation, if not all of them, was not to invite people down to the White House from the Hill except the leadership. Now, Nixon did make

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some exceptions to that. He'd have little groups occasionally.

There's a little incident here I think you might be interested in, a personal thing again. They had an appreciation dinner for me down here sometime at the end of President Johnson's tenure. He sent a wire. When I got back to Washington I acknowledged these letters and wires and messages and what have you and I wrote him and thanked him. Sometime later I was down at the White House for something, and as usual I was late. (Laughter)

F: Johnson ought to appreciate that. He was always late.

C: That fits.

F: Right.

C: As I was walking, on the outside, down to the room in the business section of the White House where we were to meet, he appeared out of the side door, caught me by the arm, and walked on with me. He said, "Well, I appreciate that note I had from you." I was completely blank, and I said, "Oh, Mr. President, you didn't read that note." He said, "Of course I did! How do you think I knew about it if I didn't?" I said, "Well, thank you." He said, "But I would have made it stronger, but I didn't want to hurt you." (Laughter)

F: I guess he was one of the few men around there who was taller than you.

C: Right. Well, no, I'm only six.

F: Well, you seem quite tall. That's because you've kept your figure.

C: I'm surprised you say that. Well, Lyndon Johnson was rather a personable person. I can understand why he had so many personal . . .

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- F: Did you get the feeling right away after he became president that things were going to move, that you were in for all that legislation, good, bad, and indifferent, but as much legislation as you ever saw in your life. Could you feel that the tempo was going to step up there?
- C: Well, I don't know that I ever really thought of it in that light, but it did [happen].
- F: And you, of course, sat right in the center of things.
- C: He was a hard driver, as I said before.
- F: You hear a lot about White House pressure, and the Rules Committee is a very sensitive committee for all legislation and for whatever Congress is going to get done. Did you actually feel pressure from the White House, or did you just simply feel that a strong personality was there at the helm? How do they exert pressure, or do they?
- C: Well, you see, by the time that President Johnson became president, the committee's complexion had changed. My friend Jack, President Kennedy, had changed that--he and my friend Sam Rayburn. They had "stacked" the Rules Committee and no longer was it controlled by southerners.
- F: Johnson didn't really have a hand in that, did he?
- C: So far as I know.
- F: Or if he did, he kept it behind the scenes?
- C: I'm rather of the opinion--I would think he would have, but I don't know. As far as I know, he didn't. But to get back more

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specifically to your question: Sam, with that committee of what we called liberals, didn't have to bother with me too much. They had the majority of the committee. I don't think the President ever called me or talked to me about it. Now, Sam would occasionally. Well, as a matter of fact, if it was tight up there in the committee, he would.

F: I always admired him most on the practical aspects of the thing: "Here's what we've got to do and here's how we've got to do it."

C: As a matter of fact, Sam Rayburn was a strong speaker; he was a strong man. He and I, in my early days when I was party-lining, were very good friends. I used to go out and eat breakfast with him at the Anchorage, play golf, and so on. Even in my younger days, you know, they'd drop in [?]. But after I was on the committee, I, I guess, became more conservative. We weren't as close as we had been.

F: You never did actually break, though? You always remained good friends who'd get together.

C: As far as I know, and I hope so. However, my invitations to the clinic didn't come as often as they formerly had. But as I say, he had a majority; and then our friends Richard Bolling and Homer Thornberry, I guess, more or less acted as emissaries then.

F: Did Thornberry seem to feel a special responsibility coming from Johnson's home district?

C: Yes, I would say, yes. I know he was--

F: Maybe he had to, once in a while, lean a little in a direction

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that wasn't natural for him?

C: Well, I don't--

F: I mean you can't help it.

C: No, no, but I got the impression that he was rather pleased with his relationship with the President. No, I couldn't understand some of my friend Homer's votes and so on other than on that basis.

F: Did Johnson consult you before he named Jim Coleman a federal judge?

C: No. That is a senatorial thing.

F: I didn't know whether [with] you, as a long-time congressman, he would do it as a courtesy.

C: No, sir.

F: Strictly for the senator.

C: No, again, none of the rest of them had.

F: Incidentally, on that, who would have been his sponsor? Would it have been Stennis or Eastland?

C: Sorry, I can't answer that. I really don't know.

F: Probably there wasn't any kind of patronage applied then?

C: No, no, as far as I know, they both approved him.

F: You know, Texas had a problem like that between Johnson and Ralph Yarborough for a long time--who was going to name whom. Finally they almost did a formula split on it, "You get this one; I get this one; you get the next one," and so on.

C: I think there's a gentleman's understanding now between Eastland and Stennis as to [this]. They alternate, but I don't think it's on any particular basis other than courtesy.

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- F: In 1964, Lady Bird came through here on that Dixie swing, didn't she?
- C: Right.
- F: Were you here at the time? Did you see the train, or get aboard it?
- C: No, no, I was just trying to think. No, I was in Florida when she came through.
- F: Did you hear any reactions to it? Did she seem to get by all right?
- C: Oh, I think she did. Incidentally, I'm glad you mentioned that because she, in my opinion, was one of the smartest and most gracious women that occupied the White House during my time or that I knew of. She was pretty keen and personable and courteous and capable.
- F: I always felt, in her way, she was just about as shrewd as he was, sometimes smoother.
- C: Well, you said it.
- F: Right. Did Johnson contact you at all with Mississippi's decision not to go along with the Democrats in 1964 in that campaign? He evidently just decided that he was going to live without it, I gather and not to make any big fight.
- C: Well, from what I know, he didn't make any big fight. He didn't contact me and it was, as you suggest, pretty well settled.
- F: Did he ever talk to you about Goldwater?
- C: No.
- F: Did you ever talk to Goldwater about him?
- C: No.
- F: When you get in that later fight in which the Domestic caucus

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stripped you of your seniority, did Johnson show a hand in that at all?

C: Well, they didn't strip me of my seniority.

F: But you know what I'm talking about. I maybe didn't state it quite right. But when they had fight on you, you know?

C: Yes. Are you talking about when John Bell Williams was . . . ?

F: Yes, right.

C: Was that 1964?

F: No, that was a little later than that. Williams was the one in particular they worked over, you know.

C: Williams, yes.

F: And they made a hard run on you.

C: Right after Kennedy was . . . ?

F: Right.

C: Well, what really happened there was never a showdown on that unless--some things, you know, you just don't like to say. Something had to be done about the [Rules] Committee. That was the administration's attitude as I got it, not direct, but by messenger. Oh well, let's spell it out: to wit, Judge [Howard W.] Smith, chairman of the committee, he'd have to stack the committee or deprive me of my seniority. I was the low man on the totem pole, at that time. In other words, the committee is a one-sided committee. It shifts with administrations and at that time it was four and eight and I was the fourth man. Either I went off the committee, or they stacked it. So I just sent word back [inaudible]

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that I was expendable, but the committee wasn't. I was told that a survey had been made, and they didn't think the House would go along. So they went on the committee. They stacked it. They put three new members, two liberable Democrats and a Republican.

F: Did Johnson ever show any evidence of the kind of bind he put a number of you southern Congressmen in with these civil rights acts and other federal acts during 1964, 1965, 1967? Did he show any sort of evidence something like saying to you sometime, "Bill, I know you can't go with this, but this is what I've got to do. Sorry I've got to do this to you."

C: No, he never did that.

F: You must have had some real problems, though, in your district, explaining how the Democratic administration was doing these things.

C: No, he didn't do that. But, remember now, the thing we just talked about, stacking the committee, that was the Kennedy, not the Johnson, Administration.

F: You have no evidence of Johnson's direct intervention in this?

C: No. By the way, that was done by five votes.

F: Did you get a lot of visits from Johnson's staff? They didn't try to influence you? They pretty well knew where your position was?

C: Right.

F: On vote counting, they knew what your vote was, and they didn't try to change it?

C: No.

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F: I've noticed all during this--I've looked at some of the Johnson correspondence--he sent you, regularly birthday greetings and things like that and it's always "Dear Bill." He pretty well kept up his friendship with you?

C: Oh, yes. I don't think there was ever anything personal. It was just a difference in philosophy, ideology, politics, whatever you want to call it. No, no. My relations with the President, on a personal basis, were always good.

And then, too, particularly all the late presidents have been more energetic in keeping up with their constituents. For instance, I got a letter here yesterday, I think, from President Nixon, "Dear Bill: So good to see you in Jackson," and so forth. Well, my wife [inaudible] she enjoys it. Frankly, I've had too many. [inaudible] That's part of the set-up, part of the game. Of course, we all are glad to hear from the president.

F: White House stationery always looks good.

C: Right. However, I do want to say this: of all the presidents we've had up there, I suspect I've had closer relations with President Nixon than any of them. Now, that not only goes back to his service in the House, but the situations change. I was chairman of--regarded as a member of a committee, and naturally a president would pay more attention under those conditions than you would as a freshman. Now, on the other hand, he, as I say, has been most considerate.

But we're talking about Lyndon Johnson here. Do add this.

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When I was a chairman of the Rules Committee, I gave a seafood luncheon every year for my committee and always invited the leadership from both sides of the House to the luncheon, just a small luncheon.

I invited President Nixon to the first one and he accepted. He came to all of them, every year. Then when I retired and they had a retirement dinner for me down there, he sent his daughter Julie down to represent him. Now, pardon me, we'll get back on--

F: A most attractive young lady.

C: Isn't she?

F: Did you think Johnson was going to run again in 1968?

C: Yes. I was one of them that was very much surprised when he made that announcement.

F: Did you ever talk to him about his decision?

C: No.

F: Did he ever talk to you about the war? Vietnam?

C: No, sir. No. Again, I was not on the committee then.

F: Mississippi, I don't have to tell you, particularly this part of Mississippi, has boomed considerably in the sixties--fifties, too, for that matter. Did Johnson have any role in that, or was that strictly good representation in Congress by the Mississippi delegation. Could you go to the Johnson Administration, explain what you needed, and get a hearing?

C: Well, in the first place I don't think either of your analyses is correct. I often get credit for a lot of this, much, much, much more than I deserve. There's the coastline, ports and there's

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some industry, woodworking, that has prospered. And I don't recall ever talking to President Johnson about any of these things, or for that matter, President Nixon.

F: It's happened because it's due to happen.

C: Right--the natural resources.

F: Yes, I was on the National Parks Advisory Board when we were dealing with these offshore islands out here. I sat in on that decision.

C: I guess I had something to do with that.

F: Tell me about that.

C: Are you interested?

F: I'm very interested.

C: There's an old fort that you may or may not know of--Fort Massachusetts, out of Gulfport.

F: Not exactly a good southern name but go ahead. (Laughter)

C: Right. Back in the Roosevelt Administration Pat Harrison and I'd gotten a bill through to give most of that island to the American Legion for a nominal purchase price, but it was to be used as a park. If it wasn't, then it would revert to the government. Well, they really never developed it. And the sea was encroaching upon the fort and some of the people, mostly down around Gulfport largely, were interested in preserving the old fort. And it should be preserved. So they took the matter up with their senators and with their representatives.

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The Park Commission turned them down--federal. But they were not satisfied. So I got George Hartzog, who was then director, to come down here and [I] took him out to the island and showed him, he and his staff. They decided that it was not of sufficient significance to make a national park. But George said he was going to give it some further thought and he came up with this idea of making a national seashore out of it.

F: Yes.

C: So I handed him this legislation and got [Congressman Robert] Bob Sikes to go to Santa Rosa Island in Florida, and [Congressman] Ed Hebert. They decided that Chandeleur Island wouldn't fit into it--too low, subject to floods and so on. So it left the one thing in Florida and these three islands out here. We got it through. That's about the story. By the way, that's a sand dune on the island. That was made by a National Geographic photographer.

F: This I suppose is Beach Avenue, Beach Boulevard here.

C: Well, sir, that is a picture that hung over Pat Harrison's mantle in his office in Washington and that's in Gulfport, made in the nineteen-teens, new concrete highway had just been laid there.

F: Great picture.

C: It is. So when Pat died Mrs. Harrison gave it to me since I had lived right near there when I was living in Gulfport and since I was so very fond of Pat. I prize it rather highly.

F: Yes. I can see why. Did you see Johnson after he quit as President?

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- C: No, sir. I don't recall ever seeing him since then.
- F: You've never been out to Texas to see him?
- C: No, sir.
- F: Did he have anything to say at the time that you retired?
- C: No, I doubt if he knew it. I didn't amount to that much. My retirement wasn't any earthshaking thing like his.
- F: It was earthshaking to you. (Laughter)
- C: Of course. Right.
- F: Did you feel that he played a large role in that 1968 convention in Chicago, or that he stayed home and really stayed home? You know, a lot of his critics at the time said he was pulling all the strings from down there at the Ranch and that he didn't feel that he could go up there to push through a Vietnam plank and push through Humphrey but that he was doing it all by remote control. Did you get that impression? Or did you think it was a pretty open convention?
- C: No. I didn't get that impression one way or the other. I didn't go.
- F: You didn't?
- C: I just don't have any impression.
- F: Did he ever talk to you about the rival Mississippi delegation? Remember? You had them in 1964 and again in 1968--a rump group to the convention, that thing that they represented.
- C: No. No, sir.
- F: What do you think about Johnson's effect on the state of Mississippi, as a president? Do you think that he made some fundamental changes that are going to stand up? Do you think he got captured by the liberals?

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C: You didn't ask for this, but I'm going to say it anyway.

President Johnson was not the most popular president in Mississippi in my time. You're talking now about the social changes and so on. I think that they will remain--that goes for the whole social order and what is loosely termed the "welfare state" and racial mixing and so on. Now as, again, a self-styled kind of conservative, I think we have gone too far and too fast--too far in the so-called welfare and too fast in the integration business.

I think the War Between the States was the most unfortunate thing that ever happened to the country. And that goes both [ways]. Well, it's just a self-evident fact and it was most unfortunate. I think the slaves--which we understood was then the issue, but which later was not to be the issue--eventually had to be freed, educated, and take their place in society.

As I said in some of the debates on the floor, I thought it was too fast. I remember that one of my best analyses [was that] you couldn't take a race of people who for thousands of years were on the Dark Continent down there without the benefit of education and civilization or religion or Christianity and so on and overnight by an edict of a court or passage of a statute put them on a parity with the white brother who had enjoyed all of these advantages. That really wasn't fair to the Negro. (Tape disconnected)

F: Go ahead. We're talking about [Thomas Babington] Macaulay.

C: Well, Macaulay wrote his friend that he'd read the Constitution our Constitution and he didn't think it would work. He said it was all sail and no rudder. "The day will come when you have your

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Birmingham and Manchesters just as we do, and then your public officials, your congressmen, won't be able to withstand the appeals and demands of the laboring class"--he's talking about the laboring class. "It just won't work." Now, Macaulay obviously never had in mind that the slaves would be freed and they'd be free to vote.

F: From a purely political standpoint, the additional Negro voting in Mississippi never threatened you in your district. I mean, you always stayed in control here, and when the black vote came in, you started getting your share of it, too.

C: Yes. I got my share. Yes, I guess I did, because I don't think anybody ever made an issue of my stand. Again, and I quote from the able man who is now talking, my favorite subject, I said in those statements on the floor that if I had to be characterized as a Negro-hater or a Negro-lover, put me in the category of a Negro-lover. And I think that's true today.

F: Of course, I have felt very strongly that one plus in all of this had been that for the first time the nation realized that this was not an exclusively southern attitude, but that other sections had never faced up to it.

C: I think that's true.

F: I think that the South in some ways is way ahead of the rest of the country because it has had to grapple with it. There are other sections where the feelings are much more venomous between races than they are here.

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C: There isn't any question about that. The average southerner will take the part of a black man in an argument with a white man because the black man was right. I said the average. I know, I served for a dozen years before I went to Congress as a prosecuting attorney. One of the things that I disliked more than anything else is to have a Negro to come before the jury charged with a crime unrepresented by counsel--the government didn't furnish counsel--because I knew the sympathy of the jury was with that defendant, that black defendant.

F: You really had to prove a case.

C: Right.

F: Well, do you think of anything else you want to talk about?

C: No.

F: I mean, I'd like to just sit and talk all afternoon because I'm enjoying this.

C: I'll tell you what you do, if you don't have anything else to do. What time do you have?

F: It's about three o'clock.

C: Oh, well, we've got plenty of time. In thirty minutes we can watch the Byron Nelson Classic. Are you a golfer?

F: Yes.

C: I am, too, and I greatly admire old Byron Nelson. Looks like they're getting ready to show it now.

F: You playing any golf anymore?

C: I did until I had back surgery.

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F: Can't swing it now?

C: I'm going to try. My probation period is up in a couple of weeks and I'm going to.

F: You look good.

C: Well, thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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