

INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 15, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE C. WALLACE

INTERVIEWER: T. H. Baker

PLACE: Governor Wallace's office, Montgomery, Alabama

Tape 1 of 1

B: This is the interview with Governor George Wallace. Sir, do you recall you had any acquaintance with Mr. Johnson before the 1960s, when he was still a senator?

W: No, sir, I had no personal association with him other than in 1956 I was delegate to the Democratic National Convention and was the platform representative from Alabama, and I got on the elevator at, I believe, the Blackstone Hotel one time and he was in the elevator along with other folks. I shook his hand. But of course I'm sure he doesn't recall that because he shook hands with many people, and he was very prominent at that time. Evidently his suite was in that hotel, or the Texas delegation was there, one, but I did shake hands with him in the elevator.

B: Had you in those days classified Mr. Johnson according to political philosophy? Did you consider him a conservative, or just how?

W: In those days, based on his record in the Congress as a senator and as a House member, he had taken many of the positions that I took in this campaign for the presidency, and the positions that I took as a governor. But of course Mr. Johnson changed his position, and I certainly don't impugn the change in any manner. I always feel that people do what they conscientiously feel they should do. But his position of

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course changed a great number of degrees as a candidate for the presidency and vice presidency than what it was when he was a United States senator. Positions on legislation that infringed upon the rights of local institutions, the attack on the free enterprise system that I classify certain legislation that's called civil rights legislation, he bitterly opposed it as a senator. But later on he actively and very strongly supported it as a president.

B: Were you at the Democratic [National] Convention in 1960?

W: No, sir, I was not at the convention in 1960.

B: What was your reaction when Mr. Johnson was designated as the vice presidential nominee?

W: I don't recall my reaction, but of course I thought it's at least recognition of a southerner on the national ticket. But of course, Mr. Johnson, I think, classified himself as a westerner, which is perfectly all right. He had a right to do that. But that probably was my reaction. That has been a long time ago and I'm not quite sure what my reaction was.

B: Did he campaign in Alabama in the 1960 election?

W: Did he campaign in 1960 in Alabama?

B: Yes, sir.

W: I believe that President Johnson went through Alabama on a train. I believe that he did in 1960. I don't think President Kennedy came to Alabama, but I do believe that President Johnson came through the state on what they called a Lyndon B. Johnson Special. I could be mistaken, but I believe that's the case.

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B: Then, sir, during the years when Mr. Johnson was vice president, you were elected governor of Alabama in 1962. Did you have any contact with him in that period?

W: I didn't have any contact with Mr. Johnson, no, in 1962.

B: During 1963 when the Birmingham demonstrations were going on, do you know if Mr. Johnson was involved on the federal side of that?

W: I don't have any independent recollection of what part he might have played at this time. It happened so long ago. I'd have to check newspaper accounts. But of course the President came to Alabama at that time, and I was with the President at Muscle Shoals and flew with him in the helicopter from Muscle Shoals to Huntsville. And of course that matter was discussed.

B: That matter, meaning the Birmingham demonstrations?

W: That's right.

B: How did you get along with the federal officials who were here, people like Burke Marshall and John Doar? Did you find them easy to work with?

W: I don't think that I've ever met either one of those gentlemen. I don't have any recollection of meeting them. I never met with them; of course, they were here with the Justice Department. I have nothing personal against anyone. They were doing what I suppose they considered their job to be, but I thought the Justice Department was way out of line in trying to control every local institution in this state. And I bitterly resented and opposed it and still do, but I don't believe that I had any personal contact with those gentlemen at all that I can recall at this time.

B: Did you deal mostly with Attorney General [Robert] Kennedy?

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W: Mr. Kennedy came to Alabama at one time and came to my office. It was, of course, publicized. I believe we had an hour-and-twenty-minute conversation, and this conversation was recorded on a tape recorder sitting on the conference table in the governor's office. Mr. Kennedy was aware of it and approved of it. I did this in order that there'd be no misunderstanding about what I said to Mr. Kennedy and what Mr. Kennedy said to me. We both agreed that we would not release this tape unless we both mutually agreed to do so.

I can recall that Mr. Kennedy did not back off his position at all about the right of the government to come into this state and involve [itself] in those matters. And I never backed from the position that they had no right, in my judgment, legally or morally.

I believe at one time that we released this tape to a writer, in which we both mutually agreed to do so, and I received a letter from him later thanking me for complying with our agreement. And in his letter he stated that the agreement was still in effect insofar as anyone else listening to the tape or seeing the transcription of the conversation that we had.

B: For the benefit of future scholars, will that transcription be in your papers?

W: I'm sure it will be. I'm not sure where it is now. I'm sure it's packed away someplace in my papers. But since we had agreed not to release it unless by mutual agreement, I don't know what position that places us in now since the tragic death of Mr. Kennedy. But I can say again that I'm sure he wouldn't mind it being seen insofar as his position, because he took a very strong position, completely opposite to the

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position I took, on most matters. We might have agreed on some things, but on the basic questions involved we were poles apart.

B: What about the personal relationship with both the Kennedys? Obviously there was this ideological difference, but did you get along well with John and Robert Kennedy?

W: President John Kennedy was very gracious and very hospitable. I knew President Kennedy when he was a senator. In 1956 I saw him on the mezzanine floor of the hotel where the Alabama delegation was housed; I forget the name of the hotel at the moment. His sister, Mrs. Sargent Shriver--I'm not sure whether she was Mrs. Shriver then or not--by prearrangement met with him. And at his request I carried her and she was presented to the Alabama delegation to make an appeal for Senator Kennedy for votes for the vice-presidential nomination.

I had met the Senator earlier when he came to Alabama to speak to the Alabama League of Municipalities. When I was a legislator, I had been a floor leader for the League of Municipalities. And I was with him at the head table when he spoke in Birmingham, and I believe I carried him back to the airport that night, along with one other person. That was a short time before I ran for governor in 1958. But this was before 1956, because I then knew him in 1956.

You see, most of the southern delegations wound up in the, you might say, run-off contest at the convention voting for Senator Kennedy against Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee. I believe that Alabama gave a majority of its votes on the second ballot to Kennedy; a few for Kefauver. And I believe the Tennessee delegation voted for Kefauver, and maybe a few from Florida. But I believe, if my memory is correct,

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that almost unanimous support came to Senator Kennedy over Senator Kefauver from Virginia and North and South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, and maybe Kentucky--I'm not sure about that. And on the second ballot, I voted for Senator Kennedy. I think on the first ballot I might have voted for Senator [Albert] Gore.

B: Then, sir, did you ever discuss in the spring of 1963 with either the President or the Attorney General the civil rights proposal, the bill that--?

W: Let me get back. You asked how my personal relationship was to President Kennedy. Well, of course, President Kennedy was every bit a gentleman. And even though we disagreed on many matters, he was very hospitable and very gracious and a charming man. Senator Robert Kennedy was a little more intense in his attitude and presentation and discussions, but our conversations were polite and courteous. And I'll say that both the Kennedys, President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, were very courteous. There were no strained feelings when you talked with them. They differed with you, but I appreciated their courtesy. And of course I was courteous to them, and of course I always respected the positions they occupied. I have a high respect for the presidency and I have a high personal respect for anyone who occupies that high office in the country, so I had a high personal regard for President Kennedy and I had a high personal regard for Senator Robert Kennedy. I didn't have the highest regard for their viewpoint on matters involving especially our section of the country.

B: Were they willing to listen to your viewpoints, sir?

W: Yes.

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B: I asked a moment ago, did they discuss with you, say, the proposed civil rights bill of 1964?

W: No, sir. I believe that my conversation with Senator Robert Kennedy was probably in 1964, I just don't have the dates now. But no, sir, they never discussed with me the civil rights proposals. The short time I was with President Kennedy, I believe that was in 1963--

B: That would have been, sir.

W: He might have discussed the civil rights proposals, I'm not sure; we were on the helicopter and there were other folks, senators and House members. But he was concerned about Birmingham. But of course, as you know, Birmingham turned out to be nothing but a demonstration and some chanting. And later on you had riots and destruction of millions of dollars worth of property in other parts of the country, and the killing and maiming of many people, and of course that didn't happen in Birmingham, thank goodness!

B: Then later on that spring, in June, there was the matter of the admission of Negroes into the University of Alabama. Is there anything about this that ought to be put on this kind of record about the arrangements that were made with the Justice Department for the confrontation there?

W: There wasn't any arrangement made on our part with the Justice Department, and I think that they have even said that themselves in the past. Senator Kennedy, who was then attorney general, called our office at one time, wanting to talk with me. And an attorney who represented us in court, John Kohn of Montgomery, and Cecil Jackson, [?] my executive secretary or legal adviser at that time--he was legal adviser and then executive secretary, and then to my wife also--they talked with Senator

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Kennedy. And of course Senator Kennedy's conversation was a little intense, and of course they were intense in their conversation with him, and they had a brief argument over the telephone. They said, "You filed a lawsuit against the Governor," so I never discussed anything with Senator Kennedy, the then-attorney general, about the matter of Tuscaloosa. From us and Montgomery he knew nothing about our plans, other than that I was going to raise the issue, because I said that publicly, to raise a constitutional question to be further adjudicated in the courts. I said in advance over a nationwide "Meet the Press" that I would abide by the results; that we did not advocate defiance of the law, we advocated only that a case involving the governor be adjudicated at that level, with the governor as a party, to determine whether or not the governor, or the people of Alabama through their governor, could run the local institutions such as the University of Alabama, or could the Justice Department and the federal courts and the government in Washington. As you know, they refused to raise that issue with me, because, in my judgment, they violated the Constitution by mobilizing sixteen thousand troops when there wasn't a single act of violence, there wasn't any breakdown of domestic tranquility, there wasn't any insurrection, and there was no request for troops by the governor or legislature of the state. And I believe the federal law prohibits the enforcement of court decrees by the armed services in the first place. This is a requirement of federal marshals.

But of course I felt that our school system was the best school system. I still feel it was the best school system. I do feel that the breakdown of the public school system throughout the country, which you

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see every day, is a direct result of the theories imposed upon local boards of education by the courts and by the Justice Department over the objection of the University Board of Trustees. Of course, that institution is an integrated institution, and the people of our part of the country accepted freedom of choice that the courts said was all right, and now we find that when freedom of choice didn't bring about the desired results on the part of liberals and theoreticians, they now say freedom of choice is out! In other words, not enough people on one side of town chose to go to school on the other side, and not enough people on that side of town chose to go to school on the other side, and so they say, "Since you didn't choose correctly, we're going to choose for you."

I did stand there, but as far as their knowing what I was going to do, I'm sure you can ask the Justice Department, Mr. [Nicholas] Katzenbach. They didn't know what we were going to do, and we didn't know what they were going to do. But we were determined to raise that question if possible, which they refused to allow us to do by a violation of the Constitution themselves.

B: As you know, sir, there has been a great deal of writing about that kind of thing. I've seen the story that you or someone on your staff requested that the federal marshals have drawn guns on the occasion.

W: I read things about that involving Mississippi, something of that sort. I think you're getting Alabama mixed up with Mississippi.

B: It may be, sir, but--

W: There was a lot written about what happened in Mississippi, but there was no request on our part for the Justice Department to do anything.

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But they requested us to cease and desist by an order from the President, as you will recall. But there was no request on our part. They did not know what we were going to do and we didn't know what they were going to do. And there was no prearrangement about any matter regarding the confrontation. I did not know myself what they were going to do and they did not know what I was going to do. And I think that the Justice Department has so confirmed in some times past; I believe that Senator Kennedy so confirmed that.

You know, there was a lot of writing about the confrontation in Mississippi, and something about drawn guns--somebody--but not about Alabama.

B: Then later in the year occurred the assassination of President Kennedy and Mr. Johnson became president. Did you at the time have any thought that Mr. Johnson's policies in this kind of matter might be different from those of President Kennedy?

W: Well, of course, I didn't have too much confidence that they would be different, because they had both run on the Democratic Party platform, and I always assume that a man that runs on the platform will certainly adhere to it. He had accepted it. I know that we were saddened in this state, as I would say the people of any state, about the tragic killing of the President, which plays up what we've been talking about, that not even a man who is president of the country can go in safety any longer in travel, nor can a candidate. And that's a sad day in our country that brought that about. In fact, at the time I just didn't think about that. I think people were stunned and shocked and angry about the

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killing of President Kennedy. I know that I was, and I know that my wife was, and I know the people of Alabama were.

B: Then, sir, you went to Washington for the funeral. Did you have a chance to see and talk to Mr. Johnson there?

W: As you recall, Mr. Johnson asked, I believe, the governors who were present to come by. And I think--there were a few exceptions--all the governors were there. We did go by the White House and Mr. Johnson did speak to us. Of course he was saddened by the occasion and all the governors were. He talked to us briefly, I don't recall exactly the statement that he made, but he did shake hands with all the governors and asked them--I believe he asked for all the governors to pray for him and think about him in these trying hours. But it was a brief meeting.

B: Did you have any opportunity to see and talk to Mr. Johnson on into the next spring of 1964?

W: The only times that I talked with the President were during the times that he invited all the governors to come for briefings on Vietnam. And I've forgotten the dates of those briefings but I believe at least--

B: They'll be on the public records.

W: They'll be on the public records. But I know that one governors' conference we all flew in his jet from the conference to the White House. And then at least one other occasion we were briefed about Vietnam, maybe three times--two or three times. At one time at a briefing of the governors I sat at the table. But this happened to be in 1966, because I sat at the table with the President, and I believe John Reed--Governor Reed of Maine--was there as president of the National Governors' Conference, and Governor [Richard] Hughes of New

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Jersey I believe was at the table, and then I believe the Governor of Rhode Island, because the President beckoned for me to sit at his table. I wouldn't have been presumptuous enough to have sat down without an invitation. I believe there were six to a table, had a buffet-style luncheon. And I believe he then beckoned for Orval Faubus to sit with him, and I believe Governor [John] Chafee of Rhode Island.

But it was right after [my wife] Lurleen had announced for governor. He had watched her announcement on television, and he had wanted to tell me that he thought she handled herself so well. Then he went into a conversation about Ma and Pa [James and Miriam] Ferguson in Texas. And he made the statement that Pa Ferguson had told the folks in Texas he was going to tote in the wood and draw the water at the Governor's Mansion. I had not read that before, but during the campaign I used to say, "If you elect my wife"--they wanted to know what my duties were going to be at the Governor's Mansion--"I'm going to tote in the wood and draw the water and wind up the clock and put the cats out at night." But the President did discuss that.

He was in a very good mood and very hospitable. It seems that it did him good to have the governors meet with him because the Vietnam War was very heavy on him, as it is on any president, and would be. And a man who is president is very much alone. He has to make the final decisions, and that's the reason I always said it's easy to give advice to the president about what to do, but then when you have to do it, it takes on a different complexion.

B: Were the briefings adequate and informative?

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W: The briefings were very informative. Adequate--I'm not sure as to how thorough the briefings were, because there's no way for me to know. But the President seemed to be very anxious to relay all that could be relayed to the governors, and I know that things were said that were classified and confidential. I remember him making a statement one time that, "Of course I hope I don't see some of these things we're going to tell you in the paper tomorrow. I'm sure I can trust the chief executives of the states, and if you can't trust them, I don't know who you can trust." I'm sure that every governor, like myself, never discussed anything that was discussed that was said was confidential and classified.

I can recall when my wife went to a similar briefing during 1967, I went to Washington with her. I recall telling her when she got back something I didn't have to tell her, but of course she was a very smart girl. I said, "Well, you know this was classified and confidential. You can't even tell me about it." And she said, "Don't worry. I'm not!"

B: Do you find the President in person a persuasive man?

W: President Johnson's a very persuasive man, and I can see why he was so successful as a floor leader in the Senate, especially in a small crowd, like fifty or seventy-five, or a White House dinner. He makes everyone feel at home. He's a big, strong, tall man. I read in some article where some of the liberals objected to him pawing them, you know, like putting his arm around them. Well, I don't know what warped personality would object to the President touching you or putting his arm around your shoulders. I think most people are flattered at that. And the

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President was very warm. In fact, President Johnson and Mrs. Johnson made you feel very much at home at the White House. They were very hospitable and gracious. I think everybody who went to the White House to any function, as I went to the one the night with my wife, feels very much at home.

B: How did your wife get along with the President? Did he kind of single out the lady Governor for attention?

W: As I said, President Johnson was always--even during my administration when I went to the White House and when I talked to him three and one-half hours about the Selma march, he carried me out front and introduced me to the press conference himself. We didn't agree on many things on these matters. His position was in many instances opposite that of mine, but he was courteous and friendly and made you feel at ease in discussing the matter with him. In fact, he was very good at that. And he was a man that, you were a political opponent, but if you were not a political opponent of his, you'd feel very close and would be a very rabid supporter of his by the way he treats you if you could have gotten along as far as ideological positions were. He was very hospitable in that three-and-one-half-hour talk.

And when my wife went there in 1967, she naturally was a little nervous about being the only woman present. I told her, "You know most of the governors. You've been with them, you've been with their wives. And when you go to the White House, you're going to be treated as you've never been treated before, because President Johnson is going to be, in my judgment, especially solicitous and kind about your feelings, because you are a woman governor. You just don't have a thing to worry about.

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You're going to enjoy it, and you're going to be glad that you're here." But she still was naturally a little nervous, as I reckon most governors [are] the first time they maybe go to a conference with the President, because of the position he occupies.

But she came back that afternoon, when she came in she was smiling, and she said, "Well, you were right." I said, "Well, tell me about it." She said of course she sat up on the front row, and he paid attention to her and even called her name. Then when they broke up for lunch, when they had pictures taken out on the lawn, he had her to stand right next to him. And then I believe at lunchtime they were in the elevator in the White House, several governors and my wife and the President. I remember she said that he said, "Lurleen, do you want to go to the little girl's room? Do you want to go to the lounge?" She said, "Yes, Mr. President." So they stopped the elevator and he said, "You other governors get off. I'll see you later." And he carried her up to Lady Bird's bedroom and he waited for her. She appreciated that.

Then that night at the state dinner he told a joke about, something about, well maybe Lady Bird would run in 1972. He said he'd learned something from the Wallaces. That night, after it was over, there was a production from Broadway, I believe *Hello, Dolly!* Then in the speaking and talking and mingling, I remember one time the President leaned over to me because Mrs. Johnson and Lurleen were talking, and President Johnson leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Aren't those two pretty girls from Alabama?"

So the President was very gracious to my wife. And when she was sick, Mrs. Johnson wrote her handwritten letters; the President sent her

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flowers and telegrams and kept up with her condition. I can recall some of the talk about the flags after her death, as you recall. But all I can say is that the President was very solicitous about my wife, and I appreciated his interest in her. I believe former Governor Price Daniel of Texas represented him at her funeral. And so all I can say is, on the standpoint of personal relationship, I'm very appreciative of the President's attitude toward me personally and very appreciative of his wife's attitude.

Now, he speaks in the campaign for the presidency and says, "For goodness sake, don't vote for a man of hate." I'm sorry he said that because I'm not a man of hate. I took the same positions he used to take. So he used to be a man of hate, if those positions mean you hate, and I'm sure the President doesn't hate anybody. I certainly don't. I was always, you might say, a little taken aback by statements like that, but then I understand politics. I never impugned the personal motives of the President of the United States at all, even though I differed with him and did not support him.

B: In 1964 when you ran in the primaries before the presidential election, did you discuss with him your political activities of that year?

W: No. I don't think I saw the President in 1964 unless it was on a Vietnam briefing. I don't recall any comment ever being made. I just don't recall any comment. Maybe if I saw him in the White House during a Vietnam briefing after those races, he might have made some comment. He might have, but I don't recall it. But of course he came to Maryland, I believe, and spoke against my candidacy, and I also believe he came to Indiana. I know that a number of senators came to Indiana and a

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number came to Maryland. Senator Kennedy came and others. And the President spoke in Maryland against my candidacy. But I don't believe I ever discussed it with him.

Our conversations, say, in 1966 at the table--I just wasn't thinking about recording it--but the President naturally did most of the talking, which is what he was supposed to do, and very interesting. I don't recall whether any of those things were rehashed or reminisced about or not.

B: Incidentally, sir, was there ever a time in there where you thought about becoming a Republican?

W: No, sir, I didn't think about becoming a Republican. I'm an Alabama Democrat. And our party says that you pledge to support the nominee of the Alabama Democratic Party. And in 1968 the electors elected in the May primary were pledged to me. So the Alabama Democrats and Alabama supported my position, and the national party then had to qualify under a new ballot position in Alabama.

There has been some talk at times about 1964, that President Johnson wasn't on the ballot in Alabama, he was precluded from being on the ballot as they said President Truman was in 1948. Now, those are not the facts. The fact is we have a very easy requirement to get on the ballot in Alabama, probably too easy. We had a multiplicity of parties in 1968. Since we elect our electors, they run pledged. In 1964 ten ran pledged to President Johnson; ten ran unpledged but against President Johnson, and they were elected overwhelmingly. With the simple acquisition of a thousand signatures, President Johnson's supporters could have placed him on the ballot in Alabama. They didn't see

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fit to do this, because I think it was a foregone conclusion that he was not going to carry this state had he been on the ballot. But he could have very easily gotten on the ballot.

In 1948 President Truman could very easily have gotten on the ballot after the Democrats of Alabama voted for electors pledged to [Strom] Thurmond and Fielding Wright, Governor Wright of Mississippi. So he was not precluded from being on the ballot. If our law had required a half million signatures, some astronomical obstacle to overcome, it would have been not fair and right for the President not to have been on the ballot. But it was very simple to get on the ballot in 1964 and 1948.

B: Then, sir, in 1965--

W: But I never thought about turning Republican at all. In fact, I voted the Alabama Democratic ticket in 1964 for the electors pledged against President Johnson but unpledged as far as any candidate was concerned. But the state voted for [Barry] Goldwater.

B: Sir, in 1965, as you mentioned a moment ago, you had a long conference with Mr. Johnson about the Selma to Montgomery march.

W: That's correct.

B: What went on there, sir?

W: Well, of course he was very concerned about the march, and the need for the march. And naturally he was supporting the universal suffrage and easier qualifications for electors and the civil rights proposals. And of course I was interested in maintaining law and order, and of course he was, too. But we were poles apart about our attitude toward those who marched. I felt that some of those who were involved in the march

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were not interested in solving the legitimate grievances, but interested in just creating chaos. And many of those who were in the vanguard of that march proved that we were right, because today if they have one grievance and you accede to solving that one, then they come forth with another grievance. I think anyone has a right to present their grievances in a proper constitutional manner.

And of course the President did get upset, as you know, publicly, as I called for federal troops to occupy and guard the march and the government pay the expense, because this local federal judge here, who has been of paramount importance in destroying local institutions and helping to bring about the conditions that exist today, even though now he'll render a decision or two against some campus rioters, but he helped to bring it about by his permissiveness in those days. And the decree he wrote in the Selma marching case was one of absurdity, in which he said, "You have a right to have a march the size of the enormity of the wrong that has been perpetrated on you over the years." We had asked them to limit the march so that it could be policed, and that the limited march would signify what they were marching for. But he refused to limit the march. Thirty-five thousand, I think, marched, and in a city this size it would be about what two million would be in a city the size of Chicago and metropolitan areas. But later on federal judges did limit the size of marching in places like Chicago, which they refused to do for us.

I had no objection to people marching and peacefully demonstrating. But I was worried about the safety of the marchers between Selma and Montgomery. I didn't want anybody to get hurt. And the people of

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Lowndes County and Dallas County were so concerned themselves, lest those who wanted to foment trouble would be in those wooded areas and maybe shoot some folks--folks not even from our own part of the country. They felt that even the communist movement would be involved in something of that sort in order to try to bring about race friction and trouble.

So they made it appear we didn't want people to march. I had no objection if they wanted to march on the side of the road in the hot sun. It was all right. But I still worried about their safety. I told the President that we could handle the matter, but I had visualized at that time that it would take about five hundred national guardsmen and our police force. But then our own police departments of the state made a survey, and I'm not sure of the figures right now, but they said it would take a minimum of, say, thirty-five hundred guardsmen, of thirty-five hundred policemen, so many helicopters, so many automobiles, to guarantee absolute safety. That, for the number of days involved, was going to make the cost too high for Alabama's general fund, and so I said, "Well, I'll just call for federal troops."

And I did notify the White House a short time before I called for them. I wish I could have notified them longer in advance, but the time element was of essence, and the legislature was meeting, and so I called for federal troops. You see, if I had tried with the state of Alabama's limited forces and limited funds to police the march with a lesser amount than my own police department had said would be necessary for absolute protection, then if something had happened to some of those on the march I would have felt that I was to blame.

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B: Did you hear from Mr. Johnson himself after your request for federal troops?

W: I may have heard from him by telegram or from his liaison officer in the White House, whoever it happened to be at that time, but I believe the call from us went to either former Governor [C.] Farris [Bryant] or former Governor [Buford] Ellington, whichever one was there at that time, informing them that we were going to request federal troops before a session of the legislature which was in session at that moment, not too long before I addressed the legislature saying we were requesting them. But I think maybe the first time that I heard from the President was publicly when he seemed to be very upset at our call for federal troops. Of course, in my judgment, that helped to bring about peace and tranquility on that march because I'm sure that the Justice Department and the army was very active in their contact with the leaders, that they didn't want any problems. Because if there had been a riot, it would have been federal troops under the command of President Johnson that would have had to have stopped the riots instead of Alabamians and Alabama peace officers.

B: Ramsey Clark was in Montgomery as a sort of the chief federal coordinator. Did you meet him at that time?

W: Who was the chief coordinator?

B: Ramsey Clark, who later became attorney general.

W: No, sir, I don't believe I ever had any contact with Ramsey Clark at all. During the march I believe there was a colonel, and I've forgotten his name, that was liaison officer between General [Creighton] Abrams, I believe, and the governor's office. Because the main item we were

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interested in was the maintenance of law and order, and certainly we wanted to cooperate with all the officials who were there to preserve law and order. We had called the federal troops and they came at our request from the President, and so we cooperated in the matter of our forces insofar as law and order was concerned. I don't believe I ever had any contact myself personally with Ramsey Clark.

B: In your meeting with President Johnson at that time, did you discuss Martin Luther King with him?

W: You know, in three and one-half hours of conversation with the President about that matter, I don't know that we discussed in detail any personality. I just don't recall.

B: Had you ever met Dr. King?

W: No, I didn't meet Dr. King.

B: Sir, did you ever discuss with the President any of the other matters that pertained between a governor and a president, any of the matters about general federal-state relations, or federal aid to cities, or anything like that?

W: I didn't have any specific conversation just with the President about these matters, like I'd call him up on the telephone, or he'd call me on the telephone about a matter of that sort, no. I think maybe that we had by recommendations written to the White House and to our members of the Congress about block grants and resolutions from the governors' conferences. But I don't believe that I ever talked with him directly about any of those matters, other than those matters could have been discussed in our three-and-a-half-hour conversation. Because we did discuss many things in that conversation. The President talked about

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many things. He wanted to talk about Vietnam, and he did. We talked about education. We talked about welfare. We talked about hospitals. We talked about medical care. We talked about a whole range of matters at that time. The conversation was three and a half hours. I met with him at twelve o'clock, and he had a press conference at three-thirty. He insisted that I go and say a few words at the press conference. I wanted to go out the side door because it was his press conference, but he insisted, and he was very gracious about it, and walked with me.

I recall that there was a great push and shove of newsmen surrounding us and trying to get through out to the front where the conference was to be held. The microphones were set up. And there were newsmen from all over the world. Of course, I remember that I tried to stay a respectful distance, sort of behind the President, you know. I mean, he was the President, but he would reach back and say, "Come on, George. Let's go. Move." In other words, I think he thought I was slowing down our progress. But he would say, "Come on, let's go." He'd reach back and get me and pull me up, you might say, even with him.

B: Did you ever discuss with him your political plans for 1968?

W: No, sir, I never discussed it.

B: Did you ever get any indication that maybe indirectly Mr. Johnson or some of the White House staff were trying to head off your political plans?

W: I couldn't even guess on that. All I know is what I read in the newspapers, and I just don't know. You'll have to ask them about that, because I don't know. I would say that many members of the Democratic Party felt that I was strong among organized labor membership in the

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East and Midwest, which was predominantly Democratic. And I'm sure they worried and were concerned about that because they could have been because it turned out that that's the big bulk of the vote I received in those areas.

B: Were you surprised when Mr. Johnson withdrew himself from the race?

W: I was surprised, but not too surprised. Naturally I wasn't expecting it the night he made it. I remember my wife was in the hospital and I was in the room right next to her room and watched it, and I believe she watched it. What date was that?

B: March 31, 1968.

W: My wife watched his speech and I did, too. We talked about it. And I remember I was at the hospital and saw his speech. But there were those who would say and write that President Johnson would run, he would accept a draft, but I always said, "No, he is sincere about this. He's not going to run for the presidency. He has been there several years. He has been sick and has had his heart problem." And that I believed he meant just what he said. In fact, I would say that the last time I saw the President when he briefed me on Vietnam as a candidate for the presidency, along with Dean Rusk, that he did look the best physically that I had seen him the few times that I had seen the President.

B: That was the question I was getting ready to ask. You did meet for these briefing sessions during the campaign?

W: That's correct. I met, I believe, once. Now, he called all three of the candidates on hookups at which we talked on conference calls about Vietnam, I believe two or three times.

B: One of those I assume was the announcement of the bombing halt.

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W: One of the calls came just prior to that, yes.

B: You did have one briefing session with Mr. Johnson himself?

W: Dean Rusk briefed me at length, along with other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Department of Defense officials. And then Dean Rusk and I rode from his office at the State Department to the White House. And of course the President didn't have to do too much briefing because Dean Rusk had briefed me, but he did discuss the matter with me and wanted to know if there were any questions I wanted to ask. He said, "If there's anything you want to know about these matters that I've told you I'd brief you and the other candidates on, you feel free to call me." And there was another gentleman there. "Or you call this gentleman here, and he will get me."

The President always told the governors, "If you want to call us and discuss any matter with me, you always feel free to do so. You can always get me." I think that I've talked with him one time on the telephone during the Selma matter, just prior or after, I've forgotten which. But I remember I said, "I'm sorry to have to bother you, Mr. President, as busy as you are." He said, "You don't mind calling me, as governor of Alabama, any time you want to. My office is available to you, and any other governor in this country."

And I might say that his attitude and Mrs. Johnson's attitude toward the Governor during her illness made her feel very good. She was very appreciative.

B: You had Secret Service protection during the campaign. Did you get along well with them?

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W: Yes, sir, I got along well--one of the finest group of young men I ever met. I tell you they're great. They were all business. I liked every one of them personally, and I'm sure they liked me personally. I don't know anything about their political leanings, I never asked them. It would have been improper to do so. But they did their job, and I think that one reason I got safely back from the campaign was because of the Secret Service and our own local Alabama police who are assigned to me. And I'm sure that Mr. [Hubert] Humphrey and Mr. [Spiro] Agnew would say the same thing.

In fact, there's a picture of those boys, with the exception of one or two of them, there on the wall where I gave a luncheon for them after the campaign. And the President was kind and gracious and very thoughtful to provide this service to me and to the other candidates. And I'll tell you what, I don't think we could have done without it. I was very appreciative of President Johnson doing that.

B: On an historical record like this which you can close up if you wish, would you mind if I ask you what you really had in mind in your candidacy in 1968?

W: You have in mind to win. But you also realize that it's a difficult accomplishment for a new party movement the first time. So even though we wanted to win, but we knew that was an outside chance to win, our purpose also was to orient the other two parties toward the middle and to let them know what the issues were in this country. And I do feel that my ballot position campaign in California impressed both national parties to see tremendous crowds cheer and applaud the statements of a governor of Alabama--a former governor of Alabama--at that time.

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And I believe that the acceptance speech of Mr. Nixon in Miami was influenced by my speech in Miami two weeks prior to that when the headline in the paper said, "Largest Crowd Since Ike's Visit Hears Wallace." When the tremendous crowds we had in Columbus, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Seattle, Washington, applauded positions I took, in my judgment [that] made both of those parties take those positions that ordinarily in my judgment they would not have taken. Mr. Nixon had to campaign in the South by taking a pro position instead of receiving votes on an anti basis in the South, just against maybe the administration of Mr. Johnson and being against Mr. Humphrey. So I think our movement was highly successful in that it did make them realize what the issues were.

I can recall Senator Kennedy running in the primary campaign in Indiana made statements such as, "We must turn the public school system back to the people of the states." An editorial in one of the local papers here that has always opposed me was entitled "Robert Wallace in Indiana." In other words, "Robert Kennedy's saying the things Wallace has been saying." So I think it was highly successful, and that was the purpose, and it served its purpose. And if the time comes there's no need for this movement, then it will have been successful.

B: Did you ever have any idea, if you amassed enough electoral votes to prevent anyone getting a majority, of doing some bargaining in the electoral college?

W: Well, of course it's probably better that the election didn't get tied up in the electoral college this time--I won't say that about next time if a next time ever gets here. I don't know what will be necessary in

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1972. But the challenge is still to make the national parties recognize the position that the people of my state take, and in my judgment a majority of the people take in this country. As one professor in City College of New York in analyzing the campaign said, "Many voters' hearts were with Wallace, but they voted for Humphrey and Nixon." And he especially said that about working people. He also said that "The votes that Wallace received was only the tip of an iceberg," which I believe is the case. So I'm not sure what will be necessary in 1972, and I'm not sure as to what we would have done in the electoral college had that situation arisen. But I can assure you that had it arisen, that it would have had a profound effect and impact upon whoever was president.

B: Do you mean that you would have asked for certain things or certain ideas?

W: When you say bargaining, the word bargaining may not be the right word. But people have asked me, "Well, would you have wanted to be in the cabinet?" Well, of course it would have been very degrading and very undignified for a candidate to say, "Give me a position." I wanted no position in the government, would not have accepted any position in the government whether it have been on the Supreme Court or otherwise. But maybe we would have asked, for instance Mr. Nixon--he made statements that sounded like statements I made. Maybe, I say, we would have asked him to reiterate his campaign pledges. Maybe we would have asked whoever one of the candidates, "Will you recognize these positions and adopt them and say it to the American people?" It would have been all aboveboard and all public.

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B: Do you think you might have asked for a say-so in the appointment of people?

W: I don't know whether I would have asked for a say-so in the appointment of people. I would have asked one of the candidates to give us his word, and I would have accepted the word of a man who was going to become president, that he would appoint people who were oriented toward the position of moderation and conservatism in a certain context. I know that conservatism and liberalism are labels that I don't necessarily like because sometimes people say, "You're liberal: You're a big-road program man; you're a big-school program [man]." Well, I don't exactly know what you mean by liberalism and conservatism. But I don't like labels. But I don't know that I would have wanted a voice in the selection. I don't know that that in itself would have been dignified, and I think that might have been degrading the presidency. Just the commitment from a man who is going to be president that we're going to appoint people of moderation and who are constitutionalists to the Supreme Court, for instance, would have been accepted, because I would have expected that man to have kept his word.

B: My time is about up here. Would you care to in kind of a summation evaluate Mr. Johnson as a president, his strengths and his weaknesses?

W: Of course, I think that history has to record in times to come whether or not a man is a successful president. I know that Mr. Johnson tried to be a successful president, and I'm sure that he was conscientious in the positions he took that in many instances were opposite those he used to take. But I change my mind about many matters and that doesn't mean that you're not sincere. I would say that he did the best he could. I

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didn't approve of many things that he did and don't approve of them now on a government standpoint, and wouldn't approve of him doing them if he were there today. But as to whether he was an overall successful president will have to be determined by history.

I do know that he agonized much about the Vietnam War. And I do know that it weighed heavy on his heart and mind, because I've been with him in briefing sessions. And I know that he lost sleep and he worried about the missions that were sent out. He'd stay up at night to get a report on how many got back safely, because he was a human being, and I never impugned his motives about the matter at all.

I also say, again, that it's easy to tell him what he ought to have done about it on the outside, but when you have to make the decisions, then you have to take into consideration many matters. Land war in Asia: Because we have taken a position for so long of maybe weakness that maybe they've come to the conclusion that we are weak. And on the other hand I know he wanted to end the war honorably, and it was just a thorn in his side. It's a thorn in President Nixon's side.

But I'll say this. I don't agree with many of the things that he proposed and brought into law. I pray that what he did turns out in the final analysis to be right because of the country, but I don't think that's going to be the case. But he did what he thought was right. And I'll say that from a personal standpoint he was very gracious and kind. Of course I was privileged to have had the opportunity to be with him personally and socially as a governor and as a governor's husband. And I appreciate his kindness and graciousness to my wife and to me.

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B: You know, Governor, one thing occurs to me. At least members of Mr. Johnson's staff, if not he himself, have sometimes complained about the kind of thing that you've criticized, too--that Mr. Johnson was a victim of slanting in the news media and snobbishness from the Eastern Establishment. It occurs to me that you and he have maybe some things in common.

W: Well, I think he was. Although as a southerner I didn't agree with the positions he took, I think the fact that he was a southerner, that he was the object of ridicule by the eastern press establishment and the news media--they called him "Old Cornpone." Well, President Johnson may have had a southern Texas drawl, there's nothing wrong with that, but President Johnson was an intelligent man and a brilliant man. And anyone who gets to be the president of the United States certainly is not lacking in intelligence and ability, because you just don't get to be president regardless of what we think about your philosophy and attitude unless you have much on the ball. And they were completely in error in trying to make him appear as uncouth and crude. He was refined. He was a sort of extrovert and outgoing and did much of the talking, but that's his right as the president. You expect that. But he made you feel at home and made you feel good. And I would say that if the mass of American people, whether they lived in the East or in the Midwest, could have been with him personally as I was as a governor, they would have liked him personally. They may not have agreed, and have been bitter against him politically, but I think that he would have made them like [him personally]. And I think that an average New Yorker, an average New Jersey citizen, Michigan citizen, or Alabamian or

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Mississippian, would have felt at home in the confines of the White House if he'd been invited there by the President.

Now, I'm sure some of these eastern smart writers and the news media who sometimes think they really know everything and they have solutions to all the problems, they wouldn't have been at home with him because he was gracious and kind and hospitable. Maybe they think you ought to be aloof and cold as granite, but he wasn't.

B: Did you ever find yourself defending the President as a man among your supporters?

W: Once on a radio show where they called in and asked you questions, one person called in and said, "Don't you think President Johnson is a traitor to the United States because of the positions he has taken?" And I said, "Well, now I'm not for President Johnson politically and never have been, but to say that he is a traitor is absolutely untrue. A traitor is one who knowingly consorts with the enemy, knowingly does something that harms our country, knowingly does something that would be in the interest of the communists. But to say that President Johnson had knowingly done something in the disinterest of this country is something that I don't think very few people in this country should believe. And I don't agree with your position on that at all. No, sir, he's not a traitor. He's an anticommunist. He's not a procommunist at all, he's anticommunist." Yes, I found myself defending him even on a radio program.

Now, I'm sure that those in public office sometimes in taking positions may take some position that helps a movement, but he didn't do it knowingly. I think that some professors and college administrators

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who have allowed dissenters their way on college campuses have awakened and found that they were aiding and abetting revolutionaries. I don't say that all of them knowingly did it, although some knowingly did it because they're revolutionaries themselves. Some professors on college campuses are, some administrators are. But those who are not revolutionaries didn't knowingly do that. They thought they were doing the broad program of dissent. And maybe the President took some actions that aided and abetted the revolutionaries in our country. I think this federal judge here, who I don't like and who I oppose and who I think has helped bring about what exists in this country, but I don't think he did it knowingly. I wouldn't say that he knowingly aided and abetted the breakdown of law and order in this country.

B: What is that judge's name, sir?

W: Frank M. Johnson.

B: Sir, I've taken a lot of your time. Is there anything you'd like to add to this kind of record?

W: No, other than I want it made clear that I have not impugned the President at all, that I have a high personal regard for him and Mrs. Johnson and his family. And although I differ with most of his positions politically, especially those domestically that he took, I have a high personal regard for him and appreciate his courtesies throughout the years that I had the pleasure of being with him.

B: Thank you very much, Governor.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I.

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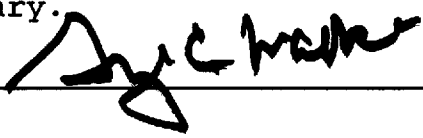
Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

GEORGE C. WALLACE

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, George C. Wallace of Montgomery, Alabama, 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 the personal interview conducted on May 15, 1969 in Montgomery, Alabama, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

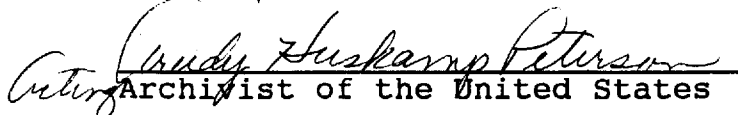
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