

Interview With

JIMMY CARTER

Atlanta, Georgia

By Jack Bass and Walter De Vries

Transcribed by Sarah Geer

For the Southern Oral History Program

Jack Bass: In his book, Key said the key to understanding politics is race, basically. And I wanted to know how you feel about that now, both in southern politics and Georgia politics.

Jimmy Carter: I don't believe that's a factor any more, that it was in 1948. It's still a factor. You know, if you look at the results of the elections in recent years . . . and in 1970 there was a whole group of governors elected, none of whom, you know, were identified as racist or inclined toward any substantial degree of additional segregation than their opponents. In the election of major figures around the country at the local level, we've seen a substantial trend toward the election of candidates who are either black themselves or who openly profess to believe in the equal treatment of black and white citizens. Georgia . . . I'd say Atlanta is not any more liberal in its attitude than, say, Thomasville, Georgia. So we've got a black congressman, now, and as you know *[Atlanta elected a]* black vice-mayor to mayor's position. And our second largest city, Columbus, which is probably one of the most conservative in the state, they've got a black vice-mayor who was mayor a good portion of this year. We've got the largest number of black legislators in Georgia of any state, I think, in

the nation. And they are as far as I can tell completely assimilated into the legislative structure, at least to the extent that they want to be assimilated. I believe that any southern politician who openly raised the question of race would be almost automatically defeated. There are still those who appeal indirectly to the innate prejudices that exist within all of us. The fears of the moment, or economic competition of an emerging black labor force that might be competitive. These are always factors in anybody's lives, but they are not directly attributable to the racial problem. The furor of the bussing question is one that I think really crossed racial lines. The bussing issue was not a code word for racism. I think they both, black and white parents, to a major degree don't like to be required to bus their small children at least from their own neighborhood where they have a direct input into the school structure many miles away to an alien environment and to a school that's out of their sphere of influence. So I'd say that the connotation of race as a political factor has been substantially attenuated, although it's a factor along with economic issues and others, obviously, and always will be.

J.B.: Key also theorized that a preoccupation with race tends to submerge other issues and prevent development of a two-party structure. Is there a two-party structure in Georgia at this time, in your opinion?

Carter: Well, there has been. That's another point that I think would be pertinent and illustrative in the question that you asked before. The Republicans came into Georgia in 1964 . . . the Republican influence came into Georgia in 1964 with Goldwater. And Goldwater's popularity, and Beau Callaway's popularity as a congressman from the Third District, and others around the state, was heavily based on the racial question. And there was an aberration, in my opinion, that occurred because of that, that

resulted in a shift toward Republican party strength. In 1968, because of the debacle of the Chicago convention, there was an additional strengthening of the Republican party in Georgia. We lost several congressional seats; five of our top statewide elected officials defected to the Republican party. And I'd say it was related directly to what's been identified as Nixon's southern strategy, which had as its base an appeal to racial prejudices in the South. Since 1968 in a four year period, I've been elected governor, we have now every statewide officer in Georgia a Democrat. Nine out of ten of our congressmen are now Democrats. Eighty-six percent of our members of the state legislator are Democrats. And I think that although we still have a very easily identifiable Republican party mechanism in Georgia, the trend is toward the Democrats. I would predict that before your book goes to press, namely in 1974, that you'll see a trend begin in a similar fashion at least in Tennessee. The same thing has already happened in Florida, and I think that South Carolina might be moving away from the impact of Strom Thurmond's defection to the Republican party primarily on the basis of the racial question. I think we've been able to absorb the traumatic and very disturbing social change of insuring the legal equality of our black citizens. I don't think that any responsible person in the South would want to go back to a segregated society. We are still trying to adapt in some areas to the new competition of black workers, when unemployment is a threat. Luckily in Georgia we have less than three and a half percent unemployment, which is practically zero, so there's no major factor in the economic competition for jobs that results from the liberated black working force. But in general, I'd say that the trend--after a change toward the Republicans because of the race issue with Goldwater and as a result of the '68 conventions--has been toward a more enlightened attitude

among the voters of the state. And I think the statistics on elected officials indicate this. You might already know that in the thirteen southeastern states we have ten Democratic governors, we've got eighty percent of all the state officials, statewide officials and members of the legislature. We've got a little bit more than seventy percent of all the members of congress. And my prediction is that 1974 will show these percentages to be improved by the Democratic party.

Walter De Vries: You don't think the South's becoming two-party competitive, as it is in the rest of the country? You don't see this trend continuing?

Carter: Well, I think it already has become a two-party competitive location, but if you look at what's happened in Florida where you went to a Republican governor and back to a Democrat. I mean, you look at what happened in Georgia, which I've just described. When you look at the situation in Tennessee, which I expect to be improved. When you look at a nationwide trend from eighteen Democratic governors in 1970 to thirty-two now. All the trends have shown that you've got a strong Republican party mechanism, probably better organized than the Democratic party mechanism. But a very detectable reservoir of Democratic party allegiance among the people that have weathered this aberration toward the Republican party based on the race issue, and who have now come back to the Democratic party as their permanent home. There are obviously some exceptions. In Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, you have exceptions to the rule. But I would say that in Louisiana and Texas and Oklahoma and Arkansas, which had a Republican governor, and in Kentucky we had a Republican governor. In Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, you know, you've had movements toward the Republican party and a reverse back toward the Democratic party.

W.D.V.: Someone suggested what happened is that the old-line establishment Democrats were thrown out of power because people were just fed up with them. Then they went to a Republican governor, then re-organized, in a sense, the party structure. Then went back to the Democrats. And that all the southern states are going to go through that sort of a thing.

Carter: Well, I think that has not only happened in the governors' elections, but it happened in a lot of mayors' elections in Georgia. All the cities in Georgia except one have gone through that process. That one exception is Augusta, Georgia. But this is not a matter of race or party allegiance. I think that's a separate factor, that's obviously related to it. And that is, to express it in very simplistic terms, that the inclination of the voters to have direct relationships with the candidate, rather than accepting the leadership of intermediaries who in the past have been very powerful, and who are sometimes referred to as the establishment. I think that frequently in the past, the endorsement in a particular county of a sheriff or a judge or a newspaper editor or a banker, depending on the circumstances, was almost adequate to insure that the voters would follow that leadership. When I ran for governor in 1970, my opponent--who was a very attractive, very wealthy, young, handsome candidate, who was a former governor, and who was extremely popular when he went out of office--he predicated his campaign on the old-fashioned concept that endorsements of public figures, members of the legislature and others than I mentioned, was an indication to the people that he was an acceptable candidate. I think, in retrospect, and I had the feeling at the time, that every time he got one of these public endorsements it

hurt him. Because there's a new freedom that exists among the . . . at least the southern people. I think it's nationwide. Which results in an inclination on their part to speak for themselves. And they resent major figures endorsing a candidate because they feel that this candidate will be obligated to the major figure in their community rather than themselves. I think the same factor was illustrated last year with Muskie, who started out a very popular figure. He predicated his campaign on the endorsement of prominent citizens. And every time he got a major endorsement, the people in the communities said, "Well, I don't want my governor to tell me how to vote." And they had an inclination to leave Muskie.

W.D.V.: Well, does this suggest to you that we're moving back to another one-party South?

Carter: No, I don't think so. I believe that both Democratic and Republican candidates who have been elected--say, Winfield Dunn in Tennessee and Holshouser in North Carolina and L. Wood<sup>Q</sup> Holton earlier in Virginia--were candidates who did not enjoy the support of the powerful special interest groups. Who may be benevolent in nature, but who have in the past been the leaders, with their positions of leadership adequate to influence voters. I think those of us who either had to forego their support because we couldn't get it, or who wisely chose not to depend on those powerful people but to go directly to the voter, in every instance I can remember, the one who went directly to the voter was elected. And that includes George Wallace. Wallace lost the support of the bankers, the power company, the utility company, and so forth, the newspaper editors. Although he had been a former incumbent, he had to go directly to the

people, because he lost that establishment support. Brewer had it, and I think that's a major factor in his loss.

W.D.V.: But if the Democratic party, for example, in North Carolina, could pull itself back together, and set someone up with a new face, wouldn't the same thing happen in that state that happened here and in Florida and in other states?

Carter: In my opinion it would. I don't know whether . . . the word "populism" is so abused and has so many connotations, I hesitate to use it. But to the extent that a candidate goes directly to the people themselves on an individual basis, and convinces them that ". . . when I'm elected governor, or mayor, you don't have to go through some big shot to get to me." Those approaches have been successful in almost every instance. There have been a couple of exceptions, which are notable, where that trend has been clouded by other issues. One recently in Virginia, where Henry Howell, obviously a populist figure, had lost the support of every congressman in the state, for instance, Democrats and Republicans. And where he was accused of being in favor of bussing, and he was accused of many other things. He couldn't fight those particular factors.

J.B.: Do you think *[the significance of that]* race is the fact that Howell came so close?

Carter: I do, yes. Because he didn't have the support of Democratic party officials. He had the open opposition of Democratic party officials. And the race, unfortunately, was clouded, as I said, by three very sensitive issues, that arose pretty much toward the end of the campaign. One, he was accused of wanting to appeal the right-to-work law, which he denied. He was accused of wanting to confiscate all people's firearms, which he denied. And he was accused of wanting to support mandatory bussing, even

across county and state lines, which he denied. But he never did deny those charges adequately to convince the people that they ought not to be concerned about them.

J.B.:

Carter: Yeah.

J.B.: We've seen the suggestion that Democratic candidates who take this populist point of view, and promise an open administration, no special interests, and so on, would have the chance in the next few years, to win back in those states like North Carolina what they've lost.

Carter: Now, I said both Democratic and Republican candidates who turn to the populist view can win. But there's an inherent difference, in my opinion, between Democrats and Republicans. In my opinion, the basic nature of the difference between the two parties is that the Democratic party is always predicating its support on the people themselves. There have been times that an oligarchy could arise in a state, with major corporations, power companies, other utility companies, railroads, and so forth, banks, you know, speaking for the people in the absence of their inclination to speak for themselves. But, in general, Democratic candidates--there are obviously notable examples--tend to go directly to the people and understand what the people want. The Republican party, at the national level and otherwise, basically predicate their financial support and their organizational structure on the fact that a few very prominent people and very highly qualified people and very influential people, can be spokesmen for a vast number of citizens. And they get a lot of money from individual contributors with a small number of contributions on the average. Democrats, on the average, get a lot of small contributions. There's a basic difference in the two parties' philosophy, and I think this

is mirrored accurately in the polls and in the attitudes in Congress and historically. Well, this gives the Democrats a chance, in my opinion, to capitalize on what I like to call a new freedom. That is, that voter's new inclination to be vocal, that's been latent, really, you might say, for two hundred years. And now that inclination of people to speak for themselves has come forward. I think the first inclination that it was coming forward was in the civil rights movement, when Martin Luther King and others, who had formerly been dormant and quiet, said, "We have a right to vote, we have a right to go and get a job where we want to, we have a right to be treated as equals in public facilities." It was a shock to us, but we all sat back and saw that they were successful. Later, student groups demonstrated about environmental issues and civil rights, and we saw to a major degree they were successful. And then the average citizen said, you know, "Why should I let my sheriff speak for me anymore? I'll speak for myself." So there is a new inclination for voters to speak up, and I think

W.D.V.: And you don't think that ticket splitting at the national level . . . the presidency, your thesis about populism?

Carter: I think so. There again, I think McGovern had a handicap equivalent to what Henry Howell suffered this election. There were some issues that you know about as well as I that were very important to individual voters. Amnesty, welfare reform, adequate defense, and so forth. Where McGovern didn't quite understand, you know, the moderate to conservative inclination of the voters. I think his heart was in the right place, but he just wasn't trusted. And that can be an overriding issue. But in general I think the trend is toward the Democratic party. And I think to the extent

that we cast our lot with the individual voter rather than with powerful intermediaries, I think we'll succeed. I've probably talked more than you wanted me to, but I . . . /Interruption in recording/ . . . an established party to be his spokesman, would fall in the same category as one who depended on the bankers association to help him. You know, I think each individual candidate has got to go directly to the people. And we have had . . . I've seen this happen all over the country. I've had a unique opportunity this year, as I say, to meet with Democratic leaders in almost all the states. The only two states I missed were Oregon and New York. Just because of scheduling difficulties I had to let my staff meet those commitments. But I think that this is a trend all over. And even when the Republicans were elected, like Winfield Dunn . . . you know, he was fighting a kind of an establishment-oriented party organization there.

W.D.V.: So was Holshouser in North Carolina.

Carter: So was Holshouser, yes. And I think Bob Scott was to some degree an establishment figure. But, as you know, he won by just two or three thousand votes. I think it was about a week after the election before we knew he won. But that trend is a strong one. And I . . . if I ever run for office again in the future, I would be extremely reluctant to accept any public endorsements from organizations or from individually . . . .

W.D.V.: Well, that should be demonstrated next year, shouldn't it?

Carter: I think so. I think so. And we've seen through Watergate . . . I don't think Democrats ought to depend on Watergate as an issue to get elected. I think it would be a mistake. It lulls you into a false sense of security. And I think the people will resent it. I think the Watergate issue is something that the Republicans are embarrassed about, and they don't

want to have it rubbed in their faces and have to [talk about] it. I think anybody that raises it as an issue is making a serious mistake for themselves. But I think the essence of Watergate that can be utilized by Democratic and other candidates is . . . when I'm in office, I'm going to open up the governor's office, or the judge's office, or the sheriff's office, to the people, and describe pragmatically and frankly and accurately how they're going to do it. In Georgia, I have tried to do it. I promised through the campaign I'd have a Visitor's Day every Monday, anybody in the state that wanted to can come see me personally. Every Monday. I don't care who he is. I'll have a press conference every week. We've got a sunshine law in Georgia. We televise all of our . . . we televise every day of our General Assembly sessions at night at ten o'clock. Do everything we can to open up state government to direct access by the people, and remove the intermediates. Who, as I say, are benevolent people. I'm not ascribing any ulterior motives to them.

W.D.V.: So the access as well as the populism are the two keys, the way you see it?

Carter! I do. And just a feeling on the part of the average voter that "if that guy's elected, he'll understand my problems, he'll be open to me, he'll receive my suggestions, and he'll listen to me if I have anything to say."

J.B.: Do many people come on these Visitor's Days?

Carter: The least we've ever had is 93, and the most I've ever had is 250 or so. And I sit there and listen every single one of them.

W.D.V.: You know, we started an office in '63, and we had it once a week.

Carter: Once a week? I do it once a month.

W.D.V.: The first thing that happened, he started to refer everybody back to me. And finally, after about two months, he was having . . . .

/Interruption in recording/

Carter: . . . sometimes as little as a minute for somebody. But I listened to their problems, and if it related to prisons, I'd call a prison official over to "Help this man if you can, and let me know what you did to help him." And then I'd go .

J.B.: Do you feel it keeps you in better touch with reality?

Carter: I certainly do. Ninety per cent of them are frivolous. They want to touch the governor, or they want to . . . they might . . . some state patrolman might have said something ugly to them and they want to just tell me about it. A lot of them want to come give me a petition, or some of them want to have a picture taken with me, or some are repeaters that come, and they just want . . . they have some psychological aberration.

W.D.V.: But one of the things it does, Jack, is reinforce the notion that the governor's office is open. What happened to us is we had a great increase in correspondence. . . . /Interruption in recording/

Carter: I even move the state capitol around the state. I think myself and all my employees and go to . . .

J.B.: You're still doing that?

Carter: . . . to Savannah, yeah, go to Moultrie, go up to Dalton. This is also helpful. But, now, I'd say in every day's session five or ten of them, out of maybe a hundred and fifty, will have some complaint that illustrates a failure in state government about which I would never have known otherwise. To give you an example that's unbelievable, one guy came to me with a withered hand. He said they wouldn't let him take the merit

board examination because he had a withered hand. And I said, "You're crazy. I've been working ever since I've been in office--which was about six months--on employment handicap programs." And he said, "Well, governor, that's true." I checked on it, and sure enough, the merit systems director put out a directive that nobody with a major physical affliction would be considered for state jobs. Unbelievable. The thing had been in effect about six years. But, you know, that's an extreme example of things that you learn with this sort of direct contact with people. I've, you know, said too much in a short time, but I . . . /Interruption in recording/.

W.D.V.: Can I go back to your visits around the country? You probably have travelled outside of the South more than any other southern governor. Do you find any different changes in perception in the way people see the South today, as you go around the country?

Carter: Yes. Compared to previous years, you mean? Well, I've lived all over the country, you know, in Connecticut and New York and Hawaii and California and so forth, in the Navy. Virginia. And in the past there has been a tendency on the part of the rest of the nation to look on the South as kind of a backward region, as you know, economically. And very ultra-conservative politically. And completely wedded to one basic political philosophy. Now, I believe an accurate assessment would be that the rest of the nation, particularly those who are interested in politics, look on the South as a bellweather portion of the nation. And consider the average southern voter to be very representative of what the nation feels about politics on major issues. This is an all-pervasive belief. And I'll give you an illustration that at least proves it in my own mind. Without any prior planning at all, both the national Democratic and Republican party within the last year have turned to the Southeast for leadership in an

almost unbelievable degree. We have eight major positions in the Democratic party, for instance, seven of which are filled by people who live in the Southeast. In the Southern Governor's Conference. The Republican party has ten major positions in their hierarchy, and out of those ten positions, nine of them are filled by people from the Southeast. An extraordinary circumstance. The Republicans have a couple of extra appointments. For instance, they have a National Women's Chairman, and we don't have that as far as I know. But I'm the coordinator of a campaign. Bob Strouse is chairman of the party. Mrs. McCulsky and Terry Sanford are the leaders of two major party mechanism studies. The chairman of the Senate Re-election Campaign Committee is Senator Bensen from down in Texas. The chairman of the Democratic Governor's Conference is the governor of Kentucky. And the only exception to the rule is the eighth person, who happens to be from Ohio, Congressman Wayne Hayes, who is chairman of the election committee for the members of the U.S. Congress. You have an exactly equivalent position circumstances in the Republican party. We also see, in the inclinations of major candidates, when they want to assess the feeling of the nation, quite often they make a tour through the South. It may be that I have a parochial perspective on that, in that other regions receive an equal number of major political visitors, but I think that Senator Kennedy coming down to Alabama, and President Nixon on his recent trip, are indicative . . . their actions are indicative of the inclinations of others, who are looking toward the 1976 elections, that the southern people are very accurate mirrors, in my opinion, of the average American voter. They are basically progressive, deeply patriotic, moderate to conservative in political orientation. I think that they have a basic allegiance to the Democratic party, but it can't

be taken for granted. They have a strong and an earliest inclination to exhibit the tendency that I described yesterday of direct interrelationships with the candidates themselves. I think they are fully aware of the need for the federal government to work in harmony with the state and local governments. I think they are fully conversant with the proper function of the federal government to meet the legitimate social needs in the field of manpower training, job opportunities enhancement, vocational and other higher education, health services, welfare services, these sorts of things. School lunchroom programs. Many of which have been initiated and perpetuated by strong southern congressional leaders who would otherwise be characterized as being very conservative. So, to summarize, there has been a tremendous shift in attitude of the American people toward the South, because now the South is looked on as not only a rich repository of a major political influence, but it's kind of a bellweather region that accurately represents what I think the majority of Americans on a nationwide basis believe.

J.B.: Do you think the South has lost any distinctiveness it had politically?

Carter: I think to some degree it has. Of course, one of the distinctions Georgia had was an unswerving allegiance to the Democratic party no matter who was the candidate. Up until 1960, Georgia had never voted for anyone other than a Democrat in the presidential elections, and we gave Kennedy then, in spite of the fact that he was a Catholic and Georgia's overwhelmingly Protestant, we gave Kennedy one of the highest majority of support of any state in the nation. I think that presumption of unswerving allegiance to a party, no matter what its attitudes toward our people, has been broken.

J.B.: Would you *[say that]* the South politically, as part of its racial attitudes, is really not that much different than the rest of the

country. Maybe there's no point in our writing a book on the South as a region. You see very few books on the Northeast or the Middle West. Does the South has something distinctive that makes it worthwhile studying it?

Carter: Well, I think there are some distinctive things. I just mentioned a few of them. I think on the average the Southern people are more heavily inclined toward strong national defense. We're the first ones that come forward statistically to volunteer to fight. And we have the highest number of casualties and the most POWs and so forth. I think this is a matter of heritage, and a matter of having had strong southern leaders in positions of responsibility in the national Congress on the armed services. I think the South, the Southeastern region, is heavily oriented toward a fairly conservative religious ethic, which permeates workers' attitudes. We have. . . .

J.B.: What do you think is the political effect of that?

Carter: One very interesting political effect is that the South has a tendency to be hopeful about the future, and to have confidence in our governmental structure. And I'll come back to that in a minute.

J.B.: You think that derives from its religious conservatism?

Carter: I think so. Recently there have been some definitive polls run by Pat Caddell and others, which have shown that on a nationwide basis, for the first time in the history of polling, the people look on the future with less expectation than they do on the present and the past as far as realization of hopes is concerned. In the past we've always had . . . I don't know if you're familiar with it or not, but they have an eleven-position ladder, they call it, and you place yourself and your present circumstances in the middle at number five, and then you estimate where you think you'll be five years in the future, and where you were in

the past. And in the past we've always had an upward trend toward the future, which showed that the American people had hopes for circumstances to improve. And recently, the last year, all the polls have corroborated the fact that the American people in general have a more dismal outlook toward the future than they do an appreciation for what they have now or in the past. Except for the Southeast. The Southeast still has a strong upward inclination toward the future, which I think is influenced to some degree, at least, by a deep feeling that God is going to take care of us. They have a faith in a religious ethic. They also, politically speaking, have a faith in the basic institutions of our country. And we look on the vicissitudes and the failures and the embarrassments, see, like might be associated with Watergate, as a temporary aberration and not as a permanent circumstance. I think we have a feeling that we can overcome it. And I think this is of political significance. I haven't analyzed it deeply, as you can tell.

J.B.: Do you think that comes in part, also, because the southern experienced the Civil War defeat?

Carter: I think so. I talked to Pat Caddell at length about this last week, and you may have talked to him yourself. But I believe that this experience of resurgence has been a part of the southern life on two different occasions. Obviously, the most of important of which was the war between the states. And I think the second one has been an escape, in more recent years, from the constraints on our lives brought about by a preoccupation with the race issue. We've gone through a very great ordeal, a traumatic experience, in recent years, in changing our basic social relationships with black citizens. And I think we feel, again,

that we've been successful in overcoming that handicap.

J.B.: Is that the basis of what you were referring to yesterday when you spoke of southerners having a sense of freedom?

Carter: Yes. No, when I was talking about a new freedom I meant the freedom of the southern voter to express himself directly and not let some intermediary speak for him. I think in the past, you know, powerful special interest groups. . . . Well, I hate to call their names, but you know who I'm talking about. Some of them are very benevolent in nature. I'd say the major corporations, banks, and so forth have got an almost unbelievable lock on the election of local and state officials, extending to the U.S. Senate race. And I think that in the last four or five years, we've seen that become, not an asset, that powerful influence, but a detriment to a candidate. I think the people have reacted adversely to it. That's really what I was talking about when I used the phrase "new freedom" yesterday. Because we do really enjoy a new freedom from the debilitating circumstance of racism.

W.D.V.: If the South is a bellweather for the rest of the country, what do you see in terms of national politics over the next ten or fifteen years?

Carter: Well, that's a complicated question, and the answer to it would be very complicated. I think there is a faith in the basic institutions of our government. I think there's going to be a resurgence of patriotism. A higher standard of ethics demanded on the part of public servants. A quiet individual reaction against the ones involved in the Watergate scandals. A new searching for a return to . . . well, I'd say the integrity of Washington, and the wisdom of Franklin, and the belief in the common man of Jefferson, and so forth. I believe that

we'll have some of the principles that were indicated in the 1972 election continued. A desire for a more harmonious relationship with foreign countries, a commitment to a strong defense, an insistence that government be open, that the shrouds of secrecy be stripped away. I think that McGovern had some inherent defects that clouded the issue last year. But I think if you look at the conglomerate results of many governors' elections, which are the most easily analyzed, that what I've just described has already been exhibited. What would happen in the future I don't know, other than what I've just described. But I think the South has shown a very enlightened attitude. We've learned to live in harmony with one another. We are reaching out to foreign governments and people for new degrees of friendship, and cultural and trade involvement. We are progressive in our economic development, but we have an almost unswerving allegiance to the protection of the quality of the environment. I think we've assimilated the revolutions that have taken place in our nation in recent years, in searching for peace, and protecting the environment, and alleviating poverty, and overcoming racial discrimination. These have been shocks to our system, and I think now we're going to build on them and not let them be undone. But maybe capitalize on them within the framework of our national government structure. This is a round-about answer. I don't really know how to say it more succinctly.

W.D.V.: On that point, it's very well argued that in the last eight years there's been more social progress on more social problems in the South than in any other democracy. We were reminiscing yesterday with John Luce that it was just eight years ago he got his skull fractured in Selma. What is it about the South that allowed that kind of social change, those traumas, to take place and really be accommodated

in the course of just eight years? Because in the north--for example, I come from Michigan--that's just not possible.

Carter: I know. Well, I happen to be deeply religious, and I think that for decades, since the subject of discrimination was raised so that we had to face it--I'd say a couple of decades--that there has been a soul-searching among many leaders, about how can we accommodate our religious beliefs with a patent and obvious lack of compassion and concern and communication and understanding and unselfishness towards the minority groups. And I think that although we had to go through an ordeal of accommodating a major change, which you've just described, we've done it with a sense of relief, and not reluctance. You know, it was something that had to be forced on us from outside so that we could accept it, without admitting that we had always been wrong. We said, "Well, the federal courts made us do it." But I think that in many instances, maybe even a majority of the instances, we accepted it with secret gratitude, that it was brought on us. And now there is a pride, you can tell there's a pride on my part, in what has been accomplished. And I don't think anybody would want to revert back to a formal attitude of, you know, separation of black and whites, of lesser degree of citizenship, and so forth. So I think that here again, a deep religious ethic, although it was used in some degrees to perpetuate racial discrimination, once we had to confront the fact that we were right or wrong in the eyes of God, we said we're wrong, and if we can find a way to make this change without losing face, we'll do it. And the Supreme Court and other court orders were the things that permitted us to do it without losing face. And in many instances we did it with a great sense of relief.

W.D.V.: But had that not been in the context of the Christian religion you think it would have been very difficult to accomplish, don't you?

Carter: I don't say, obviously, that was the only factor. But I think it was a major factor. Also, there's one more social factor that's involved. And that is that we have always, just because of the nature of our lives, lived in close proximity to our black citizens. You know, in , my next door neighbor is black. And we've always worked in the same fields and have worked in the same factories. We've been alongside of one another. And there was this artificial delineation in public facilities and school buildings, and so forth. And we understand one another. When I grew up in Archery, Georgia, there were twenty-five black families and two white families. Mine and one more. When I played on the baseball team as a grammar school and high school child, there were eight black players and two white players. We had ten then. We had a catcher and a back-up catcher. We didn't have a backstop, so we had two catchers. But this is the kind of heritage that we had. And as you know, there are a remarkably large number of southern people whose backgrounds are oriented towards rural areas. We've had a mass movement into the urban areas, but we still have this basic sense of friendship and understanding with individual members of the black race.

W.D.V.: You think maybe the rural aspect is a factor in it too?

Carter: I don't know. I just know that there's a personal inter-relationship. You know, we said, "The blacks that I know are very good people." We even said this a long time ago. But the black citizens as

a large, generic group, you know, are trying to undo, you know, the white society. But then as it was forced on us, we began to equate our present circumstances with individual blacks, and we said, well, they're not as bad as they were. So we had the deep religious feelings--this is kind of a Bible Belt that we live in still--where the church is an integral part of our lives, even the ones that don't go to church. And secondly, an intimate personal relationship and knowledge with black citizens because we had always lived, you know, close to them and worked with them. And even when there was this unbreachable barrier between the two races socially and officially.

J.B.: On the presidential level, there's always been something called "presidential Republicans" in South Carolina, even when Key wrote his book. In the last two presidential elections, Texas in one of them went to the Democratic party, narrowly, and it's the only southern state that did. Do you see the South moving back into the Democratic party in presidential elections? If so, what would you require to bring that about?

Carter: Yes, I do. The only thing that we'd have to do, I think, would be to provide a candidate that would exemplify the feelings of the southern voter, and also would show an overt inclination to acquire the southern vote. In the last . . . well, in 1964, Johnson deliberately wrote off the South in order to cast himself as a nationwide candidate. He didn't come to Georgia, he didn't campaign in our state, and so forth. And I think this was a very wise strategic move. He was from Texas, and he had to show the rest of the country that he wasn't just a southern politician. Humphrey, in 1968, again deliberately wrote off the South,

emulating what Johnson had done, and because of his natural tendencies in that direction. He thought he could beat Nixon in doing so. It was a mistake. But in both instances, there was a deep wound inflicted on the southern people, who were kind of like a scorned bridesmaid who had been loyal to her fiance for twenty years or a hundred years, and then at the time of the wedding, you know, the bridegroom ran off with other females. That's not a very good metaphor to use. But, in effect, we felt like we had been scorned by Johnson and Humphrey. They didn't want our vote, and, in effect, we said to hell with them. Well, I don't think that's going to be the case next time. I think that anybody who hopes to be the president in 1977 has got to come to the South with a major effort. To say, "I want to be your friend." There's another overlooked factor, and that is, when you go to Michigan or Indiana or many other northern states, just the fact that a candidate overlooks deliberately the southern people puts him in a position of being suspect. Because, I'd say the third largest ethnic group, for instance, in Michigan, is the southern white. I would say maybe the Poles first, and maybe the blacks second, and the southern white would be third. And there's a strong tie and allegiance, you know, to the South by many people who live in the midwest and in the swing states. And I think just the fact that a candidate woos the South helps him indirectly, at least, among the moderate to conservative worker in states like Wisconsin.

W.D.V.: It might even be stronger than that if the South is bell-weather, and if people look to the South for solutions to problems like the racial problem, would even suggest that perhaps major candidates might even be coming from the South, more in the future than they have in the past.

Carter: I believe that would be a trend.

J.B.: Let me ask you something related to that. '68 was the first year since 1944 that there was not even a southern or border state person on the national Democratic ticket for president or vice-president. Do you think that the Democratic party will revert to that trend, and will it be necessary to have, in effect, a southerner or border state person on the ticket?

Carter: Yes, I think so.

J.B.: You think that was a factor in that defection?

Carter: I believe so. I do. I think that McGovern felt that he didn't have a chance in the world, you know, to carry a southern state. He made some . . . I guess he gave some thought to that in the selection of his first vice-presidential candidate, but I think it was primarily a matter of assuaging labor and the Catholic vote. But I don't think there was any feeling, you know, "I got to tie the southern voters to me." But I think that's a mistake that's been made for the last time. The South is a cohesive group, too. I guess you realize this, but we. . . . I know in the Georgia legislature, well, say in my election, I carried the south of Georgia. Some of those counties, ten to one. And now in legislative matters, if an issue is clearly defined, ninety per cent of the members of the general assembly of a certain region of say south Georgia will vote harmoniously, without having to compare notes with one another. The Atlanta region, which has twenty-three members of the legislature, they'll ordinarily divide twelve to eleven. So they in effect have one net vote, either in the governor's race or in a general assembly battle, whereas the southern part of the state, that is more rurally inclined, tend to vote the same way. And they have a much heavier preponderance

of influence in a statewide race, and also in the legislature. Well, I think to some degree, this principle applies to the South. There's a cohesiveness down here that exists among the people that's fairly strong. And it's been shaken recently. . . .

W.D.V.: You mean in relationship to people in the north, or candidates from the north, or. . . .?

Carter: Just among ourselves. And I think that relationship has been re-cemented. We were shaken, obviously, by going through the ordeal of the racial question. And I think it was mirrored in the nationwide elections. But I think now that we've weathered that adequately. There's the closest possible relationship among the governors of the South, and this applies. . . .

W.D.V.: I was going to ask about that. Is there more cohesiveness among southern governors than the national governors?

Carter: I believe so.

W.D.V.: I notice that when I attend those conferences too.

Carter: But I frequently visit, either on the telephone or in person, you know, with David Hall and with Reuben Askew and with Edwards, with Bill <sup>Waller</sup>~~Wallin~~, with John West. And with Dale Bumpers and others. Just as a matter, not only of friendship, but I feel we have a common purpose and a common region to develop. The organization recently of our Southern Growth Policy Board is a major indication of that effect. I've just been elected chairman of it, and in the next twelve months we'll be working just to say what are the goals of the South, in every aspect of life. And what can we do to bind our states closer together. How can we look to the future with a common purpose. How can we share experiences across

state lines. I think this is a cohesiveness that I doubt is replicated in other parts of the nation, although I wouldn't say that definitively, not having investigated it thoroughly. But, you know, I think this again makes the South a much more important region politically.

W.D.V.: Well, if the South is different as a region within the country, how is Georgia different within the South?

Carter: I don't know. I think Georgia, again, is probably the most typical state in the South. Miami is a rapidly changing population. They have a thousand new people coming in every year . . . every day, as a matter of fact. And Georgia, I think, has a very fine combination of being relatively stable in population, very strong economic growth--between fifteen and twenty per cent a year, which is very strong. It's now recognized as a center for the Southeast, as far as international trade, and culture, and education is concerned. Atlanta is the largest city in the Southeast, and probably the strongest as far as development is concerned. We've got the second busiest airport in the world here. We've got a heavy, brand new concentration of foreign consulates. We have twenty-five honorary consulates now in Atlanta, seven full time professional consulates with the opening of the Japanese the first of January. So I'd say Georgia is not only because of its location but because Atlanta's kind of a crossroad, and we have a very stable population but a very rapid economic growth would be significant. But I wouldn't describe it as any more influential politically than, say, Florida or others.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but if you strengthen the ties between the southern states, don't you tend to build it as a power bloc?

Carter: Yes. I think so.

W.D.V.: Not only within the Congress, but the National Governor's Conference and so on.

Carter: Yes, that's true.

W.D.V.: Because I know in the Midwestern Governor's Conference, they don't have the kind of elan and spirit and all that sort of thing that you have in the Southern Governor's Conference.

Carter: Anybody who's ever been to a governor's conference would say--and you all have--I think the Southern Governor's Conference as far as the substance of the program, the closeness of the people involved, far transcends the national Governor's Conference. Now, I don't go to the other regional conferences. I've only been to one, just as a visitor, but it was practically a non-existent entity compared to what we have in the Southeast.

J.B.: What was the political impact in Georgia of the end of the county unit system?

Carter: Well, I think that as far as a control or influence in the state legislature, it hasn't been as profound as had been expected. But I think that was a major factor in breaking down this spokesman role in individual counties, in the political process. You know, it used to be that the tiny counties would have two votes, and Atlanta would have six, and Macon would have four. Well, this meant that thirty small counties with less population than Atlanta, as you well know, would have sixty votes and Atlanta would have six votes. And it made it possible for large amounts of both money and other kinds of influence to be exerted to win the votes in the small counties. It also meant that the fewer people that you could have voting in a county, the

better off a statewide candidate would be. If he could trade with some powerful figure in a county, and that powerful figure could pay haulers or actually pay for votes, or influence them through bank loans or through other mechanisms, and then try to exclude the other people from voting at all, you could deliver that county's unit vote. So that's one of the main things in Georgia, at least, that helped to build and perpetuate this powerful special interest control over the governmental mechanism. And that was broken down. And it meant that every individual vote in the small counties was equal to all others. And the isolation of individual voter became of much less importance. So I think the end of the county unit system contributed substantially to what I characterize in some of my speeches as the new freedom. The inclination of individual voters to speak for themselves, and inclination of candidates to get out and campaign. Eight years ago, if I had been running for governor, I would have gone to the county seat and gone into a back room with an appropriate official--say a judge or a sheriff or some other official in business or banking--and I would have had a secret conversation with him. And if the conversation had been satisfactory, I would have left that county and gone on and never worried about the votes. He would deliver the votes by excluding some others and by buying others, in a legal or illegal manner. Now, when I go to a county, I avoid people like that. I don't go in courthouses, you know, except on business. I go to the shopping centers, and to the factory shift lines, and I deal with the voters individually. So, now not only is there a motivation on the part of voters to speak for themselves, but there's an equal motivation on the part of candidates to go directly to the voters. Because no more in our state, with a couple of small exceptions,

can any powerful figure in a community deliver that county's votes to a candidate.

J.B.: Well, what do you suggest is the proper role of political parties at the state level?

Carter: Well, it varies from one state to another.

J.B.: In Georgia.

Carter: In Georgia, we have always kind of looked on the Democratic party itself as a necessary evil. We have built individual campaign organizations, predicated exclusively on allegiance to a single candidate, rather than an allegiance to a party mechanism. And I think this is probably going to be the case in the future. I believe that the Democratic party can provide a very useful service, which it hasn't in the past. And this is what I'm trying to do on a nationwide basis. The training of candidates, the uniformity of direct mail lists, the sharing of opinion poll results, the delineation of issues in a clear way so that the candidates themselves can understand them. The attraction to the state of major figures who can enhance the attitudes of the people toward the Democratic party. A strong role in the mechanism of the national Democratic party itself. But with all that said, plus other more minor things like the raising of some funds, and so forth, the essence of the Georgia attitude toward the Democratic party would be, as far as running an election or telling me how to vote, stay out of it. We still prefer to deal directly with a candidate, and I think that the organizations for the winning of elections will still be predicated on allegiance to a particular candidate.

J.B.: On any of these questions that you want to just not attribute them, cut this thing off, just tell us. I did want to ask you this question. What is the actual role of organized labor in Georgia?

How weak or how strong--if they are strong, most southern states say weak--are they, and why?

Carter: They're fairly weak but increasing in strength and influence. I would say that organized labor in the past has been heavily suspect in Georgia, and has been heavily controlled from the national labor organization headquarters. That's not the case, anymore.

J.B.: Who would be the single most influential labor person in Georgia?

Carter: Herb Mabry. Herb Mabry is the new president of the AFL-CIO. And he works very closely with me. He works very closely with the Democratic party officials. He ran for membership on the Democratic National Committee, and was elected, himself. He enjoys a very fine reputation among the members of the general assembly. And now when candidates in some of the areas of the state are running for office, they come to the labor organizations for the first time for financial and organizational help. And I think that because organized labor is not a major divisive factor in the state, there's very little stigma attached to being associated with the labor organizations, you know, during some portions of a campaign. For instance, in the elections in the metropolitan area of Atlanta here, for Congress and for mayor and vice-mayor, organized labor played a major role, both in financing and organization of telephone pools . . . the Communication Workers of America worked.

J.B.: Who were they supporting?

Carter: They supported in every instance the most recent winners. <sup>Manley</sup> Manley Jackson, <sup>Wyche</sup> Wyche Fowler, and Andrew Young. In my county--I come from one of the more rural counties. is the county

seat; I live in Plains. We have about a thousand members of the Garment Workers union in Sumter County, that work in the Manhattan Shirt Company. That's the biggest single employer in the county, and every one of them is registered to vote. I would say that indirectly those ladies influence at least two others of their own family, which is a theoretical total of three thousand votes. And in an average election in my county, about six thousand people vote. So anybody who alienated the women who are members of the. . . .

/End of Interview/