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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

You have been asked for information to be used in connection with historic African-American buildings in Mississippi. The purpose of this program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

The interviewer has made a tape recording of your interview. If Jackson State opts to transcribe your interview, you will have the option of reviewing that transcription. Do you want this option? —.

The final retyped and edited transcript, together with the tape of the interview will be placed in the Oral History Collection at Jackson State University and the city of Jackson.

I, Robert H. Clark, have read the above, and in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, in return for a final typed copy of the transcript, I knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University and the city of Jackson, Mississippi, the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all of my rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University and the city of Jackson, Mississippi.

Robert H. Clark
Interviewee's Signature

Alfred Harrison
Interviewer's Signature

Date Agreement signed

1/15/04

Oral History number assigned

83.02(1-13-83); 83.03(1-24-83);
83.04(4-26-83); 83.05(4-29-83);
83.06(5-16-83); 83.07(5-17-83);
83.08(5-20-83); 83.09(5-23-83)

INTERVIEWEE: Robert Clark
INTERVIEWER: Alferdteen Harrison
DATE: May 23, 1983
O.H. 83.09

Harrison: Today is Monday, May 23, 1983, and I am in the office of Representative Robert G. Clark to finish our series of interviews. Today we'll be talking primarily about isolated incidences and experiences that he has had as a legislator in Mississippi. Many of these experiences involve other than Mississippi, but why don't we start with your experiences in 1968, having been appointed by John Bell Williams to serve on the commission dealing with Hurricane Camille.

Clark: We began to get calls to see if there were discrimination among blacks and if they were being taken care of. I flew to the Gulf Coast in a rented plane. When I got there I was very pleased to see blacks and whites working together at that time. This was really the first time I had seen this happen in Mississippi. White elected officials were working for the needs of all the people.

On our way back from the Coast we were not suppose to fly out because of the wind gulgs after hurricane Camille. We shouldn't have been flying particular in the afternoon. All of the towers were out on the Gulf Coast and we had to call Mobile to get clearance. Mobile didn't give us clearance. I went to the pay phone to call home to let the people know that I would not be coming back. They told me that we had clearance and I didn't know it until we were in the air. We almost didn't make it. Because of my interest in the aftermath, I was appointed to serve on the Blue Ribbon Committee. Governor John Bell Williams and Bishop were the chairmen of that committee. Our basic responsibility was to see after the refugees. To see that they were properly palced and received medical services coming in by agencies such as the Red-Cross. At that time most of the individuals were housed at Jackson State and Camp Shelby. By being on the committee I got a chance to really call to the attention of the State of Mississippi for the first time some of the things that we had been doing inatvertically and not bign aware of it. I had to call it to their attention, so far, as racial discrimination is concerned, but I was able to work on this committee.

I had to go out to Jackson State and work with the people there. I also had to help evacuate Camp Shelby and make sure the people there had proper places to live. It was an interesting thing. Blacks were living in an open space, all the families living together, with each family having their own section of the room.

- Clark: When I went down to Camp Shelby, I found out that this was one of the facilities that non-black evacuees have that blacks didn't have. I wanted to make sure that everyone was treated fairly and correctly, this was a chance that I got to serve the needs of the people of the State of Mississippi. Some of the positions that I took at that time were not profitable, but was appreciated by ten Mississippians for every one that didn't appreciate what I said. So, the evacuees were cooperative and they wanted to do a good job and I realized that I had a role on the committee to play and I played that role and got good cooperation from the Red-Cross and leaders of the state, Bishop Hummens as well as Governor John Bell Williams.
- Harrison: Why were the blacks put at Jackson State, was there no other facilities that they could have sent them to?
- Clark: I'm not sure why we brought them to Jackson State at that time. School was recently out at Jackson State and so much time has elapsed since then until I'm really not sure.
- Harrison: Do you know where the whites were placed at this time?
- Clark: I don't recall, as I can remember there were some whites at Jackson State.
- Harrison: So they intergrating them?
- Clark: To some extent, because I remember having called a news conference and I went to survey the situation, and when I got back with the report some reporter said, we didn't call this press conference to support Governor John Bell Williams.
- Harrison: Okay, were you going to say something else? So this experience helped you as a politician among blacks and whites in the State of Mississippi?
- Clark: Sure it did. It helped to the extent that I got a chance to see that whites could be responsive to the needs of blacks. Again that was due to fact of having lived in a segregated society, I solved that at that time. There were some things about the black community that the whites simply did not know and without my having to serve on the committee, blacks would have been denied some of the things they would have been getting. The whites didn't want to do it, because they had been part of the segregated society.
- Harrison: Could you give an example of one of these things or some of this that you are speaking about, that blacks were denied and you helped the white power structure to understand what their needs were?

Clark: I don't know how whites came about after the period of time, moving on into separate and close offices and facilities although it might have been a big barrate, but to make sure that blacks have whatever it is, whatever we had to offer that the whites had.

Harrison: Blacks are hesitant to ask or speak up in these instances?

Clark: Maybe, I'm pretty sure that they were because all of them were not hesitant to speak up, because I remember one group of young black men said, Representative Clark, we don't want to come here and be discriminated against or whatever they have to say, cause they were from Pasquastan. They said when the water got up and they heard people screaming and hollering and they waded into the houses to get women and children out they didn't look to see if they were black or white women and children, they just got them out. They put them around their necks and brought them to safety and that is the only thing they want now. So, they were not all long sharks and afraid to speak up.

Harrison: Did you have anything else you wanted to say on that?

Clark: No, that's about all.

Harrison: In 1968, were you assisting Charles Evers with his campaign, I don't know what he was running for at this time.

Clark: That was the time when Governor John Bell Williams gave up the seat to run for governor and Mayor Evers grant for congress at the time and Charlie Griffin was elected. Harry Brewer of the Delta Ministry National Council of Churches, Lawrence Seact, Chairman of the Stat's Freedom Democratic Party, and myself, was a member of the Freedom Democratic Party, were the three main coordinators and traveled before congressional districts to assist Mr. Evers in his race for Congress. At the time all four of us were very new in politics and one thing I remember most was traveling into areas in Jackson and Pike County and other places, some of the people would say well we don't know about voting for Mr. Evers, he want to take us off welfare. At that time Mr. Evers was going to create jobs, we don't want welfare, we only need it for the elderly and children. So, we came back out on Lake Street, evidently the house next to the old security Light Building, that's where we were meeting. I don't recall what office was there at that time, but we were having our stragedy meeting and brought the issues of Mr. Evers up. We found out that people said they were not going to vote for Evers becasue he wanted to tkae them off welfare. We discussed the issue with Mr. Evers as well as the rest of the committed people to the position of trying to eliminate a society that was committed upon welfare. We had to think about how we were going to absolutely say it. Mr. Evers came up with the term, determinenology welfare, and that was the first time I had ever heard it and it has been used ever since nationally.

Harrison: What did he really mean by that?

Clark: Workfare, meaning he's going to create a society and economy that would allow all able body individuals that wanted an opportunity to work so they could depend on having decent job for their livelihood rather than depending upon welfare. That is what all of us need today, if we want a better position, workfare.

Harrison: Okay, you were going to talk about his campaign, how did it progress?

Clark: We were at a tremendous campaign, history speaks for itself, although he didn't win. At that time he came closer to winning than any other black had.

Harrison: Were you his campaign manager?

Clark: We were his coordinators the three of us.

Harrison: Who was Lawrence Skiark?

Clark: He was the young man from the golf course who graduated from Tougaloo College. He is a lawyer now in Washington, D.C., he is what you call a civil rights activist. He was chairman of the Freedom Democratic Party. He succeeded Dr. Henry as chairman of the Freedom Democratic Party, at that time he was a full-time freedom fighter.

Harrison: How did he support himself?

Clark: Just like the rest of us, the best way he could. That's one of the things about the movement, we have not been able to transcend our political power into economic power even enough to make sure our own livelihood is being taken care of.

Harrison: What kind of politician was Charles Evers, during these days?

Clark: At that time in 1968, Mr. Evers was a completely raw politician just like the rest of us. I've met politicians of all descriptions and all levels, but I have never seen a man or individual mature politically as fast as Mr. Evers did. As I said, in 1968, he was just a completely green politician. But, in less than 2 years he was a finished politician. He was just a smooth politician as those individuals who had been in it for a life time. Frankly speaking, he matured too fast for many of his peers.

Harrison: What do you mean by that?

Clark: I mean many of his peers began to be his critics, because he did what he had to do politically in order to try to stay in a position of leadership and a position to fight for the cause and that he was fighting for in Mississippi.

Harrison: Do you know any of these things that would help to explain politically?

Clark: It's not anything that you can just specifically put your hands on, but it was just simply he began to separate politics from civil rights and began to take issues that were realistically and those in position that were pertainable. There's a time to just create commosion, then there's a time when you should just speak truthfully to issues although it might not create musch commosion.

Harrison: You were elected in 1968, and then you ran again in 1971, why did you pick a second term, is there any particular reason?

Clark: I had given four years of my life to the cause and this was a critical time in my life when I was elected. When the federal programs and blacks in Mississippi could make a descent salary and I felt that I had gone to far to turn around, but I do remember that my district was changed from the multi-post in Humphrey, Holmes and Yazoo to multi-district and two of us running and Holmes and Humphrey and at that time our estimation was that in Humphrey less than 1/3 of the black voters were registered to vote. I had to work full time in Humphrey, at least eighteen hours every day.

My first grade teacher was in Louise, Mississippi. I had classroom teachers, coaches and high school principals, therefore, I was well known and liked in the county, the county being somewhat of a small county. It was a tremendous battle. It led up to the election. There was some areas that were dangerous for us to in, because of the friction between blacks and the whites, but I remember well, this is the time that my wife was expecting my oldest son, Robby. Some of the incidents that we had to go through with I didn't know if I was going to be around until he came or not. We went through a series of intimidations, hastles, and other things on the night of election. It was a very close election. I would assume that we had a lot of foul play going on at the boxes. We saw our people turning out in large numbers, for example, the court house in Belzoni, we could see in those boxes where our opponent was getting nine voted and we'd get maybe eight or ten. We knew that wasn't the case, however that election was carreid to court and some of the others and many things there was thrown out. Of the places where lots of fear was created was up at Isola, MS. After the election I made sure that I wanted to break down some of the in Humprhrey County.

Clark: I worked with the white leaders in that area. I worked with Mr. Beerton, who was supervisor in that area, to break down the fear, because this was one of the ways that got blacks on the books in Humphrey County.

I realize that some looked at me as an outsider coming in to help people to register to vote. Those people had to live in that community, and until we broke down the fear those people were not going to participate in the political process. It had been a long and hard struggle but after eight years black people really became mature and were ready to participate fully in the political process.

I made a statement about being harassed. Some of my white friends say Belzoni is equipment. I remember we stayed up all night, we didn't go to sleep and all of the returns were in and I knew that I was going to carry Cruger. I was so far behind that Cruger didn't have enough votes to carry me over. In my mind I had succeed the election because Durant had to come in also. Durant box although it was majority white, it had enough to put me over the top and back at second.

Harrison: Now, from a newspaper article in the Jackson Daily News, during that year, you said that you had your intentions of opening minds of communications between all segment of society. Do you account your winning Durant with some of your efforts?

Clark: Sure, I realize that the elective official and Durant and all other areas of my district was elected to represent the same people that I was elected to represent. I didn't try to run the city of Durant, but I did try to let them know that I was willing and ready to cooperate with them to help make their system of government be effective and deliver services to the people. I had the city of Durant to accept me with a very good working relationship.

Harrison: Did you do any particular thing to establish this kind of relationship?

Clark: struggle, but, after about 8 years after that the black people really became mature came into their own and now they are ready to participate, fully in the political process. I made a statement about harassment. Some of my white friends say Belonzi is equipment. I remember well, we stayed up all night, we didn't go to sleep and all of the returns were in and I knew that I was going to carry Cruger, but Cruger was so far behind that Cruger didn't have enough votes to carry me over. Any in my own mind I had succeed the election, because Durant had to come in also, with the boxes and Durant totally and the majority was white and the last time I ran I did not carry Durant, but after Cruger came in and I understood that my opponent had started going downtown in Tchula, MS, receiving handshakes. But, when the Durant box came in, the Durant box although it was a majority white, it had enough to put me over the top, put me back at second.

Harrison: Now, from the newspaper article, Jackson Daily News, during that year, you said that you had your intentions of opening minds of communications between all segment of society. Do you account your winning Durant with some of your efforts?

Clark: Sure, I realize that the elective official and Durant the elective official and all other areas of my district was elected to represent the same people that I was elected to represent. I didn't try to like run the city of Durant but I did try to let them know, that I was willing and ready to cooperate with them to help them make their system of government be effective and deliver services to the people. I had and I always and the city government of Durant accept me at a very good working relationship.

Harrison: Did you do any particular thing to establish this kind of relationship?

Clark: Well, meeting with the elective officials and writing them letters and responding most of all when they call upon you to do something. Phone call or letter, responding. I remember after my election, in Humphrey County December 1, it simplified a certain white individual went over to put out some flyers for an opponent who was going to run against me. But he was discouraged from running, because the white elective officials told him we are going to support Robert Clark, because he is responsive and he works with us better than any Representative we've ever had or legislator, so we're going to stick with Robert Clark, so that guy dropped out of the race and decided not to run. However, I had some clusters not only in the black community, I had a few in the white community, for example Mr. Robert Harris, who is the supervisor in District 3, that's Louise, Midnight area. He was supervisor in '52 when I was over there teaching school, young man just left Jackson State, and he was still a supervisor. Our relationship went all the

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Clark:

back to those days, and at the time December 1, you had to have a relationship with the whites, not only in Humphrey County but Holmes County. I made sure I had a relationship with the plantation owners so that I could go freely on the place without people on the plantation being afraid, however, we didn't have access to all of the plantation but we didn't let that stop us from going on. You know, you have to have brave people, I remember at Thornton, MS., in 1967 when we had all organized a group on this particular plantation, and this particular plantation owner came in and started to issuing out mandates what he wanted done today to all of them. So, when he started telling one what he wanted, done, this individual said "Well Mr. X, I would do it when I get back, I got to go down to the place and vote and carry my family. He said Well, just give me my keys, just get off my place and give my keys. You gotta understand this was in November, the 1st of November, this was harvesting time, and when this individual looked around this white fellow there was the machine operator he had down and held their keys and they were reaching at their keys. He said "What's this mean. He said "Well, we don't you asking him for his keys and all of us are going to vote today and carry our family. And he said "Well, get on my truck and I'll carry. They said "Well, we don't want you to carry us because we got to carry our families, and we got to pick up some of our friends and some of the old folks and carry them. He said "Yall go and vote and get back here as quickly as you can. That was because they stuck together, got out to the polls and voted. That was organized and we had it planned and those individuals gotta be commended for that. Brave individuals. They had to go back to the same man and look him in the face when their kids need some shoes, when their wife needs to go to the doctor, because we didn't have anything to give them. nothing but hope. That's what I'm still trying to give them today.

Harrison: So, many of these people are still your supporters, aren't they?

Clark: Still my supporters, yes.

Harrison: o.k. In 1972, you were making plans for meeting a black politician in Chicago, and there were 14 delegates in Mississippi. Of this newspaper article, there were some discussion of separatism and it said that you didn't not agree with. What was your role in getting people ready to go to Chicago?

Clark: Evidently, this Gary, Indiana. This was when we had a national black political convention and this is not to be

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Clark:

construed with Rep. of new Africa, this is not to be construed with black separatism. As many of the news media. One of my friends who is now he was a writer for one of the Jackson Mississippi papers, I remember him carrying an article Robert Clark, the champ of segregation, now he wants to lead a black segregation delegation to a meeting in Chicago. What we were all about, Roy Wilkinson never went along with us. He talked to me about it. I met him in Chicago with the NAACP, but, what we were all about was trying to create an agenda for America. What we refer to as a black agenda, we just should have said an agenda for America, but this agenda was to direct this country so that black folks could share in the riches of society just like everybody else, so far as gesture economics, education, health, housing, and everythings else. That's all it was about, trying to make this country live up to it's creed, live up to it's preamble. I did go to Gary, Indiana, we did go to a covention, national black convention, in 1972, it was an historical occasion and a lot of good came from the covention and the next convention perhaps held and several years we met in Greenwood, Mississippi, But, I followed the movement for about 4 years and when the movement seized to carry out the purpose of the one of us who orginated the idea, then that was when I pulled away from it. Some of the politicians was trying to use it as a forum to farther political cause nationally, and when they began to use it for that that's when I began to pull away from it. I remember another situation that kind of began to push me away from it. We were meeting at Howard University in Washington D.C. and the convention wanted to take position supporting segregated schools. Well, I told them I'm from Mississippi and I can't take a position, because I've got supporters who've been bit by dogs, because I've got supporters who've been beat up and locked up in order to segregate schools. Now, if I go back to Mississippi and say that I'm against it, you know, I just can't do that. Then, they took the position that I had a plantation mytallity that I took the position that black folks could not be educated themselves, that we only could be educated by white folks. Our ideaologies began to differ and we had groups that really after a period of two years was trying to carry it into a black separatist organization. And that's when I left it. I didn't Little Rock, I just pulled out of it. Evidently when we first started out we selected a tri-part leadership, Congressman Diggs, Mayor Hatcher, Mayor of Gary, A-nui Prucker, formerly known as Leroy Jones, who was a playwright. And after a convention we pulled together. The delegation there about a couple thousands of people, then Jesse Jackson began to come in and play a role in the convention and it was at this time we could see it going in the direction of

Clark: trying to be an organization to give certain politician, you know, some power base in which to go and recognition the individual; rather than the cause which was started.

Harrison: Now, also in '72, you were under member, a 6 member with Sen. George McGovern and Sergeant Trevill on education issues. Do you recall that experience?

Clark: Some what.

Harrison: The concern at that time was with finance in school systems like state legislators the cost of education, higher education, what I really want to know if you remember that experience, how you evaluate it's benefits to you?

Clark: Well, the experience that I had in working with that, I gotta a chance to what it causes me to give an indebt study into financing of education and higher education and I was very familiar with the structures that we had in Mississippi and long before the time I had vital property and so far as I was formerly for higher education to have a formula that is not discriminatory and will allow all institutions and to be able and to have the necessary to offer the board of quality education. Sometimes what we do is we have formulas that advise towards certain institutions. I'm still saying that we have to have secondary education. That is going to be fair and equity to all school district without regard to the wealth and nation-wide and even in the state of Mississippi we should not have that. I worked for McGovern.

Harrison: Now, I have the names of some of the task-force members, that might help you. Marion Wright Elderman, who directed the Center of Education of Reformatory the Chairman, Don Morrison, Pastor of NEA, Francis Kelson, I guess that is, former Director of U.S. Office of Education, and Terry Panther who is President of the University at this time. Does that help?

Clark: Well, it did help some, but, that was about the extinct of business, you know, I had to make my contribution as I saw it.

Harrison: As a Mississippian?

Clark: Yes, well, you know, I made my contribution from my experience in Mississippi as it was here.

Harrison: I wasn't able to determine what the task-force was to do. Six, southern members highscores advises these persons.

Clark: Well, that was what we were supposed to do was to advise them on education, the policy and financing of education, it was simply an advisory committee.

Harrison: Was it to maybe come up with the report that was going to

Harrison: help get us where now, hopefully?

Clark: Yes, well like if a governor had become president, like any figure, is running in a position you have to have an advisor of that committee because if you don't have the staff to go out and hire the research people, you have to have resource people, so we was just more or less serving as a group of resource people.

Harrison: Why ~~doe~~ you think you were asked to serve on this? You were the only black, weren't you?

Clark: Yes, I was. I don't know. I was the only black, but I don't know why I was asked to serve against because my interest in education and my educational background having been a good profession.

Harrison: I think you were a good choice, I just wanted to know why?

Clark: Figure out why

Harrison: O.K. Have you maintained any relationships with these people across the years?

Clark: Well, some with Terry, we've been in several meetings together Education Commission of States when I was representing the state of Mississippi on the Board of Directors, and the National Conference of State Legislators, I got a chance to be with those people quite a few times, but, as you know, since my wife took sick in 1978 since she passed I've cut off all my collection with my National Organization, but, up until that time we would see each other several times a year, maybe at some meeting. So, as of now, I'm trying to be a good State Legislator and try to devote much time as I can to my boys, which is not really a lot.

Harrison: O.K. now, you went to Harvard in 1977, why did you seek this appointment?

Clark: Well, again I didn't seek the appointment, the appointment sought me and I guess I was recommended by someone. I had gone to the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University twice. First of all I went there Funnell Jordan was the teacher there. And I was impressed with the place, evidently somebody was impressed with me. Then I went back again when Gil Carmicheal was a fellow there and I was offered the appointment, the fellow and I was going in 1978, but my wife was ill, and that was when she passed. We didn't go and in 1979, I just thought this would be a chance for me to get my mind back together and

Clark: Try to decide what I wanted to do in the future and to do some research and to give some practical experience about new politics of the south. I did find it to be an awarding experience, it was more the parting of knowledge than the giving of knowledge. Your job description when you go to an institution like that will be one something but you can be assured that the institution is going to rack your brains and it's going to get everything out of you that's in you by having you going to other related areas and departments, which is a full-time job. Down at Kennedy of Government which was a part of Harvard, one of the schools at Harvard University, and as I say, because of my experience as an educator, with Freedom Democratic Party, with the Mississippi Legislators and with NAACP, the Lawless Democratic Party And National Life Agenda Movement in 1972 and with the Commission of States, and National Harvard of State Legislators, and I had been involved in all of the, most of the major political races of black folk in this country, up as far as Chicago. And it was this thought of this other school that I had, a very rich reservoir of the black political movement of the south, and frankly speaking the new political movement in the south is to how it was expanded to include blacks and what role blacks were playing and I was invited by the school to come and teach and be a teaching professor and I accepted to go. Not only was I responsible for that, one particular section that I had I was expected to participate and workshop, in public forums and other schools on the campus of the university where I would import knowledge. I was thinking more or less it would be a learning experience for me, but, I found out why Harvard University is as it is, because I believe they would get more from it than anybody else would get.

Harrison: Use you up, huh? You had a study call New Politics in the south. You say the State Education Finances and the Secondary and the Elementary. Could you

Clark: Well New Elements of the South that was the title of the course that I taught, but the research that I did was in the other area, there.

Harrison: What education finance, from the secondary and elementary level. Did you have anything printed as a result of this, or did you write ever study?

Clark: Well, I wrote my study up, the New Politics of the South but with all due respect as you know in the past, Harvard has not

Clark: been noted for it's school of education and I did do research but my research that I did there was not anything for research that I had did on my own or been a part of the Mississippi Legislator I didn't find anything new that I had not allready found, not anything to be proven that I had not allready proven, some years ago. So, you know, like say, the main thing was the experience of meeting other people and you know, meeting groups and then part of the knowledge. However we got a better chance to lead a series and you know outstanding, people who were outstanding different fields, such economics and the leading economics. Top people, former people in government and one of the individuals that I want, see we had some of ours too, we had them bright and we had to decide who was coming according to who we could get. One of the people that I wanted to come with the group that I was a part of did not particularly want this person to come, I wanted Henry Kissinger to come and meet with us on one of the Monday night seminars that we had.

Harrison: What were they objection to Him?

Clark: Well, at that time, you know, Henry was involved with Watergate, with the conflict overseas, and they just didn't feel that he should come, but I felt that he is a part of history of this country, just face facts and we ain't going to blot him out.

Harrison: Was Gil Carmicheal there the same time you were?

Clark: No, he wasn't. Gil was there some years before I was. All or one person from Mississippi was there. There was several other students that I met in certain areas from Mississippi, but as I can remember there was one individual that was a part of the Justice Department, there was another individual from Great Britain, who had been a part of the Cabinet of Margaret Thatcher, another individual from Wisconsin, who was the youngest mayor, was the mayor of Madison, Wisconsin, then there was another individual who was a playwright, but all individuals had unique backgrounds, come from different sections of the state.

Harrison: Anyway, let's skip from that to '76, when you supported Gil Carmicheal for Governor.

Clark: That was in 1975. Yes, I did support Gil for Governor in 1975. Was a very unique situation. You might note that throughout my career, I've been fighting for trying to make this society in America, in Mississippi responsive to the needs of all of

Clark: it's a citizens. I can remember the days when we had campaign with a racial tone, but we had move away from that somewhat into an area where race had been completely blotted out and where individuals where being elected to office on a state wide basis without making any promises what so ever to the black community without saying that you were going to have a society that was fair and just to everybody. The Democratic nominees at the time was refusing to meet with NACCP, they was refusing with the Law of Democratics, I remember meeting Aaron Henry in the halls of the captol, but at that time we had some so call power brokers in the black community and the white politicians and go behind closed doors and they make a bill for the black vote. I had made a vow in 1971 that the next person that was going to become governor of Mississippi was going to have to campaign out in the opening of everybody and the Democratic nominees at the time was refusing to do it and I had some friends who came and talked to me about Gil Carmicheal Well I knew Gil and I had been knowing Gill for about 8 years, and after I talked to Gil, Gil explained his position to me and I knew that a governor was more or less was just like a queen, what I mean by that is the legislator is all powerful, and about the biggest thing that he can do is public relations. Beyond, the point, and Gil promised me that he would have a government and would advocate a government in the state for Mississippi that would be fair and justice to all people regardless to race, creed, or color, that he would oppose discrimination in the state of government, that he would fight for jobs, and that he would appoint black people at all levels in the state government. I told him that if you would make that a part of your campaign platform than I would support and he went public and he did that. When he did that and I supported him. Yes, he was a Republican and I was a Democrat, but, whenever we started to talking about justice and fairness that's what I'm all about and that transcends part of living so far as I'm concerned if necessary and it was necessary at that time. Democratic eas'nt doing it and he did it and I supported him and so far as I'm concerned when true history of politics in Mississippi is written this has got to be recorded as a historical step in untying the hands of white politics in Mississippi. Up until that time white politicians were afraid to publicly campaign for the black vote because if they did the white folks would run from then and go to a candidate and go to not conservative, but more racist, but I supported Gil Carmicheal, came out and supported him then other white politicians were able to say to the white community I got to go for the black vote, if I don't go for the black vote, Robert Clark is going for to support Gil Carmicheal and the black vote is going to go to Republicans and for the first time white politicians state wide was able to campaign openly and freely for the black vote. Now this had

Clark: been in some areas, like Holmes County, my home. In 1967 white people start campaign for black votes and blacks had done started campaigning for white votes, but this had not been done on a large scale, so what I was doing, I was spreading the political in Holmes County state-wide. If it was good for us in Holmes County, it was good for the state and that's what I did.

Harrison: At some point you made a statement, must have been about '75 or '76, that you were going to try for the U.S. Congress. Was that a serious statement or are you still considering that? Let's go back to the situation at that time, when you first made the statement.

Clark: I was considering go for Congressman services since our election year, and what I might meant by when the time was right and when I got a suitable district and I did attempt to put, back in the early '70's, I did introduce legislation that would create a district, that would have a district about approximately 61 or 62, but I was not able to get that district and therefore. I did not run for Congress. Then after that working to help the people poor people in the state, I found out that I had developed very good communication between my office and the federal government with the make-up of the district. Sonny and I became friends, I was not interested in running against Sonny. What I meant when the time came right, when Sonny steps down and I get a district that was more heavily black and when I could educate and train more whites in Mississippi to come around and vote forget about color lines and vote for the best individual, then I would be available would sit down and consider running for Congress and that's exactly what I meant. Some individuals that didn't know, when I ran for Congress, that this was perhaps something that I have been considering for 12 years or longer, So we, did run for Congress, last year, as you know, and we lost a very close race and at this time we are going for the House of Representative in Holmes and Humphrey County, Holmes and Yazoo County and just hoping that we can be successful.

Harrison: Is it Holmes and Yazoo, not Holmes and Humphrey?

Clark: Holmes and Yazoo, not Humphrey any more. We started out in Holmes and Yazoo, then we went to Holmes and Humphrey, then it came back to Holmes, now we at Holmes and Yazoo. So basically they always say they're good people.

Harrison: O.K. Do you have anything to say about County Politics? You mentioned earlier that you passed politics in Holmes County to state-wide level when you were supporting Gil Carmicheal.

Clark: Well, in Holmes County, black folks start participating freely in politics at early stage. Well early than most people in Mississippi. Maybe with the exception of Clairborne County, and Jefferson County, Madison County was pretty active at one time. Well, what I meant by that, politics was not a one way street in Holmes County, it was a two way street. What I mean by that black folks were asking white folks to vote for me and doing it public and thats the way it should be done. It should'nt be done by paying somebody off, buying the black folks, but, it should be done by going to the people and presenting your agenda to the people, and letting the people make a choice for the best person, and not letting some power-broker say this is the man we are going to vote for and that man may or may not be the best man for the black community.

Harrison: O.K. I have one last question, it has to do with your assessment of your life or anything you want to say about your political career at this point. Now before you answer that I don't know if you are familiar with the black or Negro legislator prior to you being elected in 1968, but, maybe you thought about this G.W. Bell, Caywes in Bolivar County and C.W. Butler in Sharkey County were the last blacks to serve before you were elected in 1968. So, do you make any connections there, I'm asking like sort of a summary of you being the first black legislator in the 19th century, I mean 20th century?

Clark: Well, the only comparison or summary that I'd like to make is that I am aware of those individuals and do know who they are and they did what they had to do in that time in order to serve aptonsituously and when I came to the legislator it was a learning process, naturally we had to stay after I got here and I had to prove that I was black, and that was the stage of deliver of service and in order to deliver services, I got to be able to work with groups of individuals, I don't mean violate a principle. Principles is that which I live by. Often times, I know I have been misunderstood because I'm trying to make black politics in Mississippi become a reality. There's a difference between civil rights and politics in Mississippi and if we still continue to pray on civil rights and don't move on to the next stage, we are doing a grossly justice to those who went on before us. I often say if we do that we are just like the individuals that prayed upon the mothers and fathers to raise them, send them to high school, send them college, then they're gone on and get there college degree and they still in back home relying on mother and father. They're not taking care themselves. So, civil rights issues and civil rights movements want to give us a chance and to teach us how to think for ourselves and how to participate in this American democracy.

Clark: and how use our abilities to fight to bring black folks, into the mainstreams and that we should be all about and that's what I'm all about.

Harrison: O.K. just for the record, since we are at the end of the tape, could you sort of speak to what your personal aspirations are? And political aspirations are for the future?

Clark: Well, so far as I know at this time, I'm running for the House of Representatives, to be elected and hopefully I am re-elected as long as I'm here. I hope to be a legislator that is going to be known for being progressive and open-minded in making a contribution to the present and the future state of Mississippi and in and beyond that, if the conditions are suitable, hopefully I would run for Congress and be re-elected. And if the conditions are not suitable, then there's a possibility I'm going to have to think about settling down to a job that first of all would afford me and my boys that we can enjoy like anybody else and No. 2 a job that's going to allow me to stay in one place, so that I can give my boys the type of homelife that they need. Now whatever that is, I don't know, presumerably maybe in some areas of education. I'm pretty sure there are jobs that I can get into areas of education. I'm pretty sure there are jobs that I can get into areas of education, sitting down and not doing anything and earning a big salary. I've got to earn a salary, but, never in this world would I accept a job no matter how much it was paying, unless it had a challenge, or unless I was actually making a contribution.

Harrison: For the record, I'd like to say on the tape, that I appreciate all of the time that you'd given to us to complete this series of interviews and as we go through these and process them perhaps there would be other questions that would come up, you know, that we would like to have additional information and I hope that you will be available to grant us another interview in case we should need another.

Clark: Sure, I will be available. I'll be here untill 3rd of June. Hopefully, I won't have an opponent, but if I do, that's just the price I have to pay and I can see now where a lot of individuals is coming out qualifying against my friends coming out in the last place, so I don't know if I'll have anyone to come out or not, but, you can get in touch with me.

Harrison: Now, I have to ask this on the tape as well. Do you mind us using this for Jackson State University for educational purposes?

Clark: If it would help the University, and it's for educational purposes, please use it.

Clark, Robert

Harrison: O.K. going back to an incident to something I read in the papers a xerox copy of what really happened on election day in 1967, written by Thomas C. Hathy, so you were going to tell me something about who these people were, Peter Haterfield. Do you remember?

Clark: Yes, I remember him. I remember the young lawyer, white fellow he was found to help us. He and Ollie Cooper, were on the outside, the adults were out there was Mr. Eddie Hooper who had deceased, Mr. Burl Tate, he has deceased, Ollie Hooper that's Mr. Curtis Hooper, he has deceased and me, Robert Clark. The rest was a group or younger. My uncle Henry Clark, was on the inside as a poll worker and the law stated that some individuals could go in that is a Mississippi law and when we were on the outside waiting until they finished they counted the votes, we felt that if the whites could go in and observe and abide by the law then someone representing blacks, Robert Clark, should go in but not a large crowd. So Mr. Curtis began head of the family and owner of a business and this other young man was a lawyer and this other young man who had a college degree knew how to act. So the only thing they did was step on the inside of the door to observe the counting of the ballots and it was at this time when my friend told them that they had to get out and when the lawyer began to read the law that's when she was supposed to be shoved out of the voting place. I was on the outside and I had to go by what they say. When he was shoved to the outside that's when he knocked a jury down and when he knocked him down that's when I heard some guns click. So I threw myself between Mr. Hathy and the gun and told them don't shoot and that's when they told me are you going to let them beat the lawyer up and then that's when I stepped aside and then several went up and tackled Mr. Hatcher to get him off of the lawyer. It was something that would not happen in Ebenezer now a beautiful scene you go by now and see blacks and whites drinking coffee on election day.

Harrison: I want to ask you about this Peter Hapthen. What kind of a person was he? Was he white or black?

Clark: Well, that has been a long time. He was white. The only thing I can remember was that he was just a young white lawyer. Maybe from Yale.

Clark: Yale or either _____, so far as I know.

Harrison: Now you say H and some of you were dressed similarly. They described you as having on you know something similar to a dress kokia.

Clark: Well, he said that, but, they were not, they were just former students of mine and they put out that black folks some niggers were going to shed blood that night in Ebenezer and we called the law enforcers and they could'nt give us any help and we called the FBI and they could'nt give us any and they were former students of mine and I got on the phone and called simply to come down to make sure that nobodies blood was shed. They were there for the protection of Ebenezer, not there to destroy it. They were not dressed similar, they just had on their regular clothing whatever they wear.

Harrison: Yes, they look like same clothes, but, sometimes thats just the way teenagers dress, but, during this----

Clark: One of the young men there, Lewis Montgomery, he was a former basketball player of mine. Course he got killed in Detriot several years ago. Edgar Love was there. Edgar Love still lives in Holmes County.

Harrison: The article that you and your friends had written in this version what happened to it?

Clark: They never printed it in the local paper.

Harrison: So, was Mrs. Smith's paper the only one available?

Clark: No, the Harron was available, but, I'm not for sure, because we tried the Harron, but, during that time we would'nt expected the Harold to carry it. The only thing that I wanted was the truth and I didn't was'nt the wrong information to get out and I had no reason to get to lying and would not lie, just tell it like it is.

Harrison: Did you have anything else you wanted to say on that, there are a lot of things I don't have insight on?

Clark: Nope.