

An Interview with

ROSS BARNETT

February 11, 1981

Interviewed by

John Dittmer

John Jones

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

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JONES:

This is John Jones with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and I'm about to interview Governor Ross Barnett. With me today is John Dittmer, my colleague and friend, and it's Wednesday, February 11, 1981. We're in Governor Barnett's law office in the Barnett Building in Jackson. Governor, I just wanted to start off, since we are trying to get something down about Mississippi history, with some things I thought were interesting that Erle Johnston brought out in his recent book on your career. For instance, I never knew you were in World War I.

BARNETT:

Yes, sir. I was in the Student Army Training Corps at Mississippi College, Clinton.

JONES:

I see. You never were in the formal, the regular army?

BARNETT:

No, I would've been gone in about thirty days to France if the Armistice had not been signed.

JONES:

I also wanted to ask you when you first got interested in politics.

BARNETT:

When I was about ten years old.

JONES:

In Standing Pine?

BARNETT:

Oh, yes. I'd go to debates. We'd have a debate every Saturday night in Standing Pine in a great big old green schoolhouse. I had three uncles who lived right in a row. Two of them were doctors: Dr. Edward Barnett, and Dr. Arden Barnett, Judge James Arden Barnett's grandfather, and Oscar Barnett he was supervisor.

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My daddy, all four of them were brothers. I'd go to Standing Pine schoolhouse every Saturday night. There was another schoolhouse named Rosebud. We had debates there. This went on for many years. We'd debate on matters of whether a cow was more valuable than a horse, or is a girl more valuable in a home than a boy? Such as that, you know. We'd have it out.

JONES: Was there anybody in Mississippi politics who was a particular favorite of yours, who was more or less a mentor for you?

BARNETT: Well, I admire my own family really. I very much admired my brother Bert Barnett. Bert was Chancery Clerk eight years. I'd hear him speak at picnics and at civic club meetings. And he was state senator from Leake and Neshoba for four years. I was growing up then. I was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old. After Bert had served four years in the state senate the governor of Mississippi appointed him as business manager of Mississippi State Hospital at Whitfield. After he'd served two years as business manager he became a candidate for state auditor in 1943, and was elected in 1943. Out at Poindexter Park one night he was speaking and told the people that he was a candidate for state auditor, that he'd been Chancery Clerk twice, state senator and had taught school about twenty years in Leake and Scott Counties. "Now," he says, "I've been out at Whitfield the last two years." He says, "All of the inmates out there will tell you they are all for me." He says "They'll tell you they like me better than any business manager they've ever had, and the reason they give is that they say I'm more

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like they are than any business manager they have ever had." Oh, yes. That would bring on a big laugh. He'd say they all say, "I'm more like they are." Then I had a first cousin, Thomas Jefferson Barnett. If they start naming them Thomas Jefferson, you know they're democrats. Anyway, Tom was county attorney for twelve years. I had gotten out of the University of Mississippi school of law before he got out of that office. (Phone rings) Hello. Who is it? Now it it's some old bomb waiting to know about her granddaughter being run over I'll take the call. Well, I better take it. (Phone conversation)

JONES: You were telling us about your cousin, Thomas Jefferson Barnett.

BARNETT: Yes. He was a hand-shaking dude. I mean he'd walk in a store in Brandon or Forest or Free Trade or somewhere, and there would be some fellows sitting out on the bench in front of the store, and he'd say, "Here's my old friend. Here's my old neighbor. Good gracious, I'm just so glad to see you, you all are looking well." He'd walk off and they'd say, "Old Tom noticed us, didn't he? He knew us." He didn't know any of them. I was on the sidewalk here in Jackson about six months-ago, and there were three old ladies walking along, and one said, "Hey, I wanted to shake hands with you!" I shook hands with her. She said, "I shook hands with you on the steps of the courthouse in Gulfport in 1959. Now what's my name? I bet you can't call my name," like she was the only one I'd spoken to on the whole Gulf Coast. I said, "Oh, I'm glad to see you." I said, "You know, I'll bet I would know you if I met you in heaven."

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She turned around and said, "I told you he'd know me." I didn't know her any more than the man in the moon. Tom Barnett was elected district attorney in five counties: Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott and Rankin. And then he got elected again. I always admired Leslie Barnett, brother of Tom Barnett. He was a candidate for supervisor in Leake County. His daddy had been supervisor for a good while. His opponent, though, was a college graduate. I'd go and hear him speak. I was twelve or thirteen years old. They'd speak at Walnut Grove, Madden, Standing Pine, Free Trade, other places. His opponent was a college graduate, and everywhere he'd speak he'd show his college diploma. "I want you to see my diploma. I'm a graduate of college. Les Barnett never went to any college," and he hadn't. Les would say, "Well, a college graduate doesn't know any more about building roads than a jaybird." Everybody would laugh. He'd say, "He shows his diploma everywhere he goes." He said, "Now, I didn't go to college, but I know how to build roads. I've built them all over this district. My opponent," he'd say, "shows his diploma everywhere he speaks." He said, "One day he's going to drop that diploma and a billy goat is going to chew it all to pieces, and then he won't have anything to talk about." Everybody laughed, you know. And he got elected.

JONES:

Yes, sir. But it wasn't Senator Bilbo or Governor White or anybody who really influenced you when you started getting into politics?

BARNETT: Well, they came on after I'd finished college. Not as much as local folks. I was born with an ambition, I guess. I played on the basketball team two years in public school, two years in high school - Leake County Agricultural High School - and then four years at Mississippi College. I was captain of my team at Lena, L-E-N-A. Leake County A.H.S. was located there then. My brother Bert Barnett was a schoolteacher there. I was captain of the team my sophomore year, manager my junior year, and was director of mens athletics my senior year. I got pretty ambitious, I guess. When I first entered Mississippi College I was one of the worst cigarette smokers that ever registered at Mississippi College. After I went out for basketball the first time, Coach Anderson said, "You smoke, don't you?" I said, "Yes, sir, I do." He said, "If you will quit smoking, I'll put you on the first team." I quit, and really I haven't smoked since.

DITTMER: Oh my.

BARNETT: I quit smoking, and I quit for good. Then I was named first orator on the Hermenian Literary Society. I'd pick a guitar every once in a while, and entertain them.

JONES: I've heard you pick a quitar.

BARNETT: I'd sing a few songs. There was an old colored man in Leake County named Morris Lewis, and I'd imitate him. He was real Southern black man. He'd get out in front of your house and dance. He could sing, you know. He would not dare come in

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your house. He would sit out on the steps and pick and sing songs like this, "When I die I want you to bury me deep, set a jug of molasses at my feet, put nine biscuits in each hand, and I'll sop my way to the Promised Land." He would sing a song like this, "When old Grady was on his feet, he didn't allow women to walk no streets, but now old Grady's dead and gone, and women walk the streets all night long." Ha! Such as that you know.

JONES: Who was the first person to try to convince you to run for governor? I know you ran the first time in '51.

BARNETT: That was my first race.

JONES: Who were the people behind you in that first race? People from Leake County?

BARNETT: Leake, Scott, Neshoba, Newton, Rankin, The first time around I carried fifteen counties. Aw, they were just schoolmates, you know.

JONES: Were you in politics up at Ole Miss?

BARNETT: Yes. I was elected manager of the Lyceum Course up there, to introduce speakers, you know. I got elected president of the Hermennian Literary Society. I was president of my junior law class. I taught a freshman Sunday School class at Oxford. (Phone rings) (Break) I enjoyed being at Ole Miss. I went to Vanderbilt and studied law for one year.

JONES: You went two summers, didn't you?

BARNETT: Two summers, that's right. And I studied, too. Of the fifteen subjects at Vanderbilt and Ole Miss, I actually made eleven

A's, four B's, and one C. I wrote life insurance three summers and part time at school for the New York Life Insurance Company. I sold a good deal of insurance. I had a pocketful of money the whole time. Now, at Vanderbilt I'd learn from a teacher tonight and write her a policy tomorrow. They didn't have much money, you know. One week I wrote nine applications.

DITTMER: That was in the 1920s then.

BARNETT: That was in 1923 and 4. After I finished at Mississippi College I taught school at Pontotoc High School for two years. I taught mathematics and coached baseball and basketball. When I ran for governor, Marshall T. Adams introduced me at Pontotoc. He lives in Tupelo now. He's ninety-two years old. I told them I didn't intend to teach school but one year. After the end of the first year, Marshall Adams, president of the board, got them to raise my salary \$3.50 a month, so I decided I'd stay another year.

JONES: Scott County, Mississippi, is a strange place. That's where the Paul Johnson family is from...

BARNETT: That's right. Hillsboro.

JONES: And Senator Eastland has some connections over there too, doesn't he?

BARNETT: He was reared over there, at Harpersville and Forest, mostly Forest. I went to school with Jim Eastland. He and I were in school together at Ole Miss. He recommended me to a case about two months ago. A lady from San Antonio, Texas, shot

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and killed another lady in Adams County, Natchez, and she got convicted down there. There was a boy from McComb representing her. (Knock on the door) Come on in. And what happened was she got a life sentence. Will y'all excuse me?

DITTMER: Sure.

(Break)

JONES: Listen, I hope you won't let us take up too much of your time. I know you have to be in south Mississippi by 4:30.

BARNETT: Well, if I get down there at 5:00 it'll be all right.

JONES: John and I both wanted to ask you some questions about your administration as governor, if we could. Would that be all right with you?

BARNETT: Yes, sir.

JONES: 1959 was your third race.

BARNETT: That's right.

JONES: Many governors have had to run two or three times to get elected.

BARNETT: Most have had to run three times. That's true.

JONES: Why did it take three times for most of the post-war governors to get elected.

BARNETT: That's right. It usually takes three times.

JONES: Why? Did you have somebody behind you that third time that you didn't have behind you the first two?

BARNETT: You just have to fight to get the public's attention. The first time is usually just to get your name know to people in the state. You have to have the right people behind you, too.

They could support the other fellow two times before finally coming on in with you. (Phone call)

JONES: Governor, let us move on because it's getting time for you to go. The two biggest planks in your platform in 1959 were to maintain segregation in Mississippi and to promote industrial development in the state.

BARNETT: That was the main issue, really.

JONES: And did you not think that during your administration there would be an attempt to integrate Ole Miss?

BARNETT: I didn't know for sure. I just knew they were thinking about it. I made thirty-five industrial trips during my four years. I worked, and I worked hard. I tell you, I had some good backing. Joe Bullock was a wonderful director of the Agricultural and Industrial Board. He would come to the Governor's Mansion every morning about 7:30 and say, "Governor here's a prospect in Ohio. Let's call him right now, get him on the phone and invite him to a breakfast, and tell him about the forty-one brand new development laws reducing the income tax from six to three percent, economic development laws; and putting the right-to-work law in the Constitution." Such as that. It was attractive. Then he'd give me a number in Chicago, "Let's call him now." We'd call three or four people some mornings, you know. And about two out of three of them would come. They would look around, and finally put a branch office here, maybe. I was speaking at the University of Illinois - no, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. There were about 3000 in

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in that auditorium, I guess. Maybe 2500. There were about 100 over to my right with hair down below their shoulders and whiskers way down to their waist. They looked like a bunch of wild men! They were hollering all the time I was speaking, trying to drown me out. But I had a loud speaker they didn't have. "Oh," I said, "you ought to come to Mississippi and see the great 46,000 seating-capacity football stadium we've just completed. Ole Miss just defeated Arkansas," or something like that, you know. "You ought to come see the great Standard Oil Refinery, the largest initial oil refinery there is in the whole world! It is in Pascagoula. You ought to come and see the great Universal plant between Mendenhall and Magee, Mississippi, working nearly 3000 people." I'd just carry on like that and tell them eight or ten big plants we'd gotten. And they kept hollering. "And," I said, "we have an insane hospital that could take care of about 100 of these men right over here."

JONES: That was during your administration that you made that trip?

BARNETT: Oh, yes, yes. It was during the latter part of it.

JONES: I like that story.

BARNETT: And then about two months later I got an invitation from Western Michigan University. I made forty-seven speeches at universities and colleges in my four years. Speaking at Kalamazoo, that's Michigan Western University, they had a man that was going to answer me on segregation. He sat up there on the stage with me. I didn't mention segregation. Ha! He says, "I don't have anything to say." Everybody laughed. They had a professor there, he'd smack when he opened his mouth,

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popped like a Yazoo River turtle snapping at you, you know. Ha. "Hey, Governor, I want to ask you don't you believe that the reason that you're against segregation in the public school in Mississippi is the reason you're not getting any industry there?" I said "Sir, we've gotten more industry than any other administration by far in the history of the state." I said, "By the way, we just got the great big company from Michigan in Vicksburg, Mississippi; 400 employees." He said, "Do you believe in segregation in the cemeteries?" No, first he said, "Why do you believe in segregation in the public schools?" I said, "One reason is to prevent inter-marriages between the races." I said, "I believe you'd agree with me on that." He didn't say anything. The crowd laughed. Then I said, "Well, I hadn't thought about intergrating the cemeteries, but since you've asked the question: I don't presume that there could be any intermarriages in the cemeteries, so I guess it would be all right to integrate the cemeteries." And I told them this, which is a fact: I said, "My grandfather, and my father, and a slave by the name of Josh, all three witnessed the siege of Vicksburg. After the siege of Vicksburg, the Yankees picked up ol' Josh, and carried him with them. He slipped away from them in Mobile, Alabama, and walked back to Leake County where my granddaddy lived. My granddaddy actually gave him twenty-five or thirty acres of land, and told him he could live there as long as he wanted to. And old Josh says, "Now, Cap'm, I know you won't bury me in your cemetery, but I

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wish you'd put me right up next to the fence.' And he said, 'Well, we'll do that,' and they did." I said, "Now the cemetery's been enlarged and Josh is right in the middle of them." And that's the truth. Ha.

DITTMER: Yes. Well, you know we're going to have to ask you something about the Meredith case. One thing that has interested me has been that aspect of your relationship with the Kennedys.  
(Phone rings)

BARNETT: What is this about the Kennedys?

DITTMER: The Kennedys. I read somewhere in a book by Victor Navasky that you got the better of the Kennedys in all these negotiations. I was wondering if you could just recall for us some of your impressions of what went on between you and Bobby Kennedy, the Attorney General, over the admission of Meredith into the University.

BARNETT: Well, what they were begging me to do was to go to the Court of Appeals and withdraw our plea we had filed down there - I had six lawyers helping me - and I told them I was not going to do it. I was going to stick it out, because the law of Mississippi provided separate but equal facilities, and we were trying to get equal facilities. I had taken an oath to abide by the laws of the state, as well as any other state, and I intended to stick to it as long as I could. So, the Court of Appeals issued an order for him to get in, for me to get him in. I wouldn't do it. They brought him to Oxford on Sunday afternoon, I believe, and I met with them - he and

McShane and Doar and three or four others...

DITTMER: Is that where you made the famous comment, "Which one of you is Meredith?"

BARNETT: Yes. I looked them over right close and said, "Which one of you fellows is James Meredith?" About two weeks later they brought him into the state office building and I made the same statement. It went over so good in Oxford, and it went over better here in Jackson, I believe. I made a short talk to the group and told them that I believed in the Constitution of the United States particularly the Tenth Amendment, that the Constitution provided that the states had a right to control their own activities, and that the states actually made the government...

JONES: It says that any law not delegated to the federal government shall be determined by the states.

BARNETT: Yes, that's right. In other words, if the Constitution did not provide for that specific thing, then that belonged to the states under the Tenth Amendment. It was the authority of the states to control and direct their own activities, unless those things were actually prohibited in writing in the Constitution. The Constitution did not say one word about education. It said nothing about segregation or integration. I handled a case in Knoxville, Tennessee, in '57 that helped me a lot, I think. Robert Dobbs of Memphis was the general counsel for a Clinton, Tennessee group. They were up for contempt of court. They wouldn't abide by the federal rules of Robert Taylor, the federal judge in Knoxville. Robert Dobbs of Memphis called me

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and asked me to come and meet him in Knoxville. He had one lawyer from Birmingham and one from Louisiana. I went without any pay. We argued the case there for several days. We had witnesses go on the stand. I don't mean we were actually in the case thirty days, but we killed thirty days while we were there. One fellow got on the stand there, and the judge said, "Now, can you abide by the rules and regulations of the court?" He said, "Judge, I want to ask you a question: We've gotten along well around here for the last 100 years, now what do you want to go and change everything for?" I was satisfied. I was satisfied with the way things were. I don't know why they wanted to change up everything. The judge told him, "You're excused."

DITTMER: No, when it became apparent that Meredith was going to be put into the University, did you have any sort of agreement with the Kennedys on protection for him, as to where that would come from? There seemed to be some controversy about that, whether there was supposed to be...

BARNETT: Well, President Kennedy told the truth when he said I opposed it all the way through. It was President Kennedy who said that. Bobby Kennedy said that I agreed with him for Meredith to come into Ole Miss. I didn't make any such agreement. I did tell him this: He said he was going to bring him in Monday night, I said, "You better not bring him in Monday night. The students will be back there, and they'll kill him." I says, "If you're going to bring him in, you'd better bring him in Sunday night

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instead of Monday night - if you're going to bring him in at all." He says, "We'll bring him in if it takes the whole army of the United States." Well, anyway, I couldn't whip the army of the United States. They federalized the Mississippi National Guard. I didn't have anything to fight with!

JONES: Were you on campus that night?

BARNETT: I was on campus on one occasion. I wasn't there the night two or three were killed. Two were killed, I believe. I wasn't there that night. I had a committee up there: George Yarbrough, Buddie Newman, and two or three others, and Lieutenant Governor Paul Johnson.

JONES: Senator McLaurin.

BARNETT: Senator John McLaurin. I had him up there. Well, I'll tell you what, I bet a lot of people in the East and North wish now they'd listened to us down in the South. They've had more trouble; Cleveland, Ohio, Boston, and a lot of other places. They're still having it. There was a Negro woman in here not long ago from Brandon. She lives in Jackson, I believe. Anyway she teaches school over there at Brandon. She said, "I wish something could be done about this busing of school kids. They pick up my eleven-year-old boy every morning a little after daylight and carry him thirty miles, past three schools." She said, "I don't see any sense in it." I said, "Well, I don't either. I don't see a bit of good, sound sense in it." She said they bring him back nearly at dark every night. And when he gets to school his class is about half over with. They're

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not learning anything much.

DITTMER: What about Ole Miss now, there are hundreds of black students at Ole Miss now. Do you think it was worthwhile to make the stand that you did in light of what has happened? How do you feel about integration at Ole Miss today?

BARNETT: Well, that's the law and I have to abide by it, until that law is rescinded. I don't think much can be done about it right now, unless Congress, I mean the United States House of Representatives, would get on their hind legs and speak out against it every day. We need some Huey Longs and Bilbos up there in Washington. They'd speak every day on it, you know, and get it in all the magazines and newspapers all over the United States and everywhere, and people would finally get wise and would create sentiment against school busing and integration. I don't think it will ever work.

JONES: Do you think it will ever be rescinded?

BARNETT: I think it will, someday.

DITTMER: Looking back at your administration as a whole, besides the racial aspects of it, what sort of things stand out in your mind that you would like to be remembered for in terms of your achievements?

BARNETT: What you're looking at there on that wall, industrial development. Talking about speaking at the University of Michigan reminds me of the time I was testifying before the United States Commerce Committee. I was on the witness stand two hours and forty minutes. Senator Hart of Michigan jumped up... (Interruption)

JONES: We just wanted to ask you a couple more questions if we could Governor.

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BARNETT: All right.

JONES: John asked you what were the most outstanding things you were able to accomplish during your administration, do you rate the unpledge electors issue up there with your outstanding accomplishments?

BARNETT: It was an issue, but we carried the state two and a half to one. You see, we didn't want Kennedy or Nixon, so we relied on the unpledged elector plan which would give the United States Congress the right to elect the president.

JONES: The House.

BARNETT: House of Representatives. We figured Harry Byrd could win it in the House. We got quite a number of votes from Louisiana, Alabama, and other places. I was proud of that. But we didn't get quite enough votes to throw the election in the House of Representatives. We were trying to keep either one from getting a majority of the votes, which would have thrown it in the House of Representatives.

JONES: Do you think John Kennedy's administration was a uniquely unsuccessful one?

BARNETT: No, I wouldn't say it was unsuccessful. He and I didn't see all things alike, you know, but I think he was the best one of the Kennedys. I really do. Ted is getting a divorce, isn't he?

DITTMER: Yes.

BARNETT: Well.

DITTMER: John Kennedy was very popular in Mississippi in '56, wasn't he?

BARNETT: Yes, sir.

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DITTMER: It was when he was running for vice president. Didn't he have a lot of support here?

BARNETT: A lot of support. He was nice to me, really. The people in the chicken broiler business were getting in bad shape in the South. I called a meeting of several governors of the South, including one from Delaware. They raised a lot of chickens up there, you know, broiler chickens. Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama and several others were here. We passed a resolution asking President Kennedy to get the price up so that we could sell more broilers to foreign countries, to get him to write letter and so forth. I was the one that read the resolution, and he was mighty nice to me, really. He had two men along with him when he came into the office where we were, and I read the resolution to him on how badly we needed his help; after he walked out the two men sat in there for a minute and I said, "You all don't forget to remind him to write the letters," and they said, "He won't do that; we write all his letters." I said, "I believe the president's job is easier than a governor's job." Ha. Well, they got a laugh out of that. I went to his funeral - not his funeral. I went to the White House while he was there after he'd been shot to death. That was unfortunate, really. And it was unfortunate that Bobby got killed. He was shot to death by some nut. And George Wallace. That was a tragedy, really, when he got shot. I'll tell you, old George Wallace was a pretty keen man. Jimmy Carter and I spoke from the same platform for George Wallace for president.

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JONES: In '68?

BARNETT: '72, and '68. I'm trying to think of the place in Alabama the last speech was made: Red Vina, Alabama. There was a big crowd there. Jimmy Carter spoke first and I spoke second. I told him, "Now you didn't tell them who you were going to vote for." He said, "I never do." I had already told them who I was going to vote for, and I believe I got a better reception than he did.

DITTMER: Was Carter governor then?

BARNETT: He was governor of Georgia, and I was ex-governor of Mississippi. But George Wallace was on a program in New York in either '71 or '72, on a panel discussion on economic conditions. The chairman of the panel - there were seven or eight on the same program - sounded like this: (Nasal tone) "Governor Wallace, we're glad to have you in New York today. I guess you think you're the smartest man in New York today, don't you?" Wallace said, "Why no, I don't think that." (Nasal Tone) "Well, you know you're the smartest man in Alabama today, don't you?" "No, I don't know that, but I know one thing: I'm the smartest man on this television show." Ha. Only person that ever did him in was his second wife, and she got \$3,000,000 out of him, so I understand. Was there another question you had in mind?

JONES: Yes, sir, one more thing. Mississippi today is probably the most thoroughly integrated state in the Union, certainly there are more black elected officials in Mississippi today, the schools have been peacefully and pretty thoroughly integrated, and perhaps we can say that the quality of life has been improved

more substantially here in Mississippi than in any other state. I just wanted to get you to comment on that. Mississippi has changed a great deal since your administration, do you think it's for the good? What do you think about the nature of the change?

BARNETT: Well, I think there are a lot more black people here today than there were thirty five years ago. That's one reason. There're more black voters here. They have come here from the North and the East and the West. Don't the records show that there are more of them here than there were twenty-five or thirty years ago? You asked me if I think it's best for the state?

JONES: Yes.

BARNETT: To have more Negroes here today than we had twenty-five years ago?

JONES: To have more of those blacks elected to office, to have them going to school with white children, and to have it all done so that now there is an atmosphere of relative peace. Do you think that's good or bad, or what do you think about the prospects for the future?

BARNETT: Well, it's hard to say, but I don't think it's good, for the welfare of the state. I think busing is one of the craziest things we've ever done. I really do. People are going to fight and carry on as long as there're two races. I think Congress or the Senate ought to pass a law making a university for blacks and one for the whites in each state. I honestly

believe that would be in the best interest. I believe there would be less friction between the two races.

DITTMER: What about the area of public accommodations? Do you think motels, hotels, restaurants, what about integration on that level?

BARNETT: I don't think that's so bad. It's just these kids going to school together, falling in love with one another. I was speaking at Kalamazoo, Michigan, a professor stood up and challenged me to name one black and white to get married in the South. I said, "Yes, a couple at the University of Georgia got married not long ago." I gave their names and when they got married. It had made some families mighty, mighty sad. (Telephone call)

JONES: Governor, one more question and then we'll get out of your hair. I want you to comment on how you would make any changes in your administration if you had it to do again. Would you emphasize the same areas?

BARNETT: What would I do that I didn't do?

JONES: Yes.

BARNETT: I wouldn't do a thing in the world I didn't do. I did the best I could and what I thought was right all the way down the line. You take integration - I was forced into that. No question about that. They were bringing the army in here, you know, had 30,000 at Ole Miss before it was over with. You can't whip the army of the United States, you know, unless you just want to get slaughtered. But I don't think I'd do

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anything different, industrially or educationally.

JONES: You still believe the same way you did in 1960?

BARNETT: I really do.

DITTMER: Well, we certainly appreciate having the opportunity to talk with you.

JONES: It's been very interesting. What I'll do is take this tape back to the Archives and type it up and let you see a copy of the transcript before we put a final copy in our library.

BARNETT: I wish you would let me look it over.

JONES: I'll certainly do that. We appreciate your time.

BARNETT: You know, we don't have the fun in politics today that we used to have.

JONES: Yes.

BARNETT: We had a candidate once in Leake County where I was reared. This was around the time I was ten or eleven or twelve years old. His name was Tommy Weir, W-E-I-R. He was running for county attorney. "Come up mothers, I want you to come up and listen to your next county attorney. Come on up closer, I want you to come on up closer. That's right, come on, come on. I want to talk to you about your chaps. Your chaps getting mixed up with these Northern and Eastern boys coming down here getting your chaps in trouble? I'll put them in jail! I'll bring your children to you by the hand until we decide what's best to do for them. Why, I'm going to be elected. The sentiment is so strong for Tommy Weir you can cut it with a knife. He's even gaining in the animal world. I passed old Hayes Kirksey Mill's pond this morning and the frogs were

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hollering WEIR, WEIR!" and he'd sound like an old bullfrog, "WEIR." And then he said, "To show you that it's even spreading in the animal world," he said, "I passed old Thomas's house over here near Madden and a great big old red rooster jumped up on the gatepost and hollered, "Go WEIR!" He was running against a prominent lawyer, and he beat the socks off him. The next morning I was in my brother Bert Barnett's office, the chancery clerk, and the lawyer Weir had defeated, Frank Leach; Frank Leach passed and Bert Barnett said, "Come here, Frank. What happened to you yesterday?" He said, "He's the scum of the county that beat me. Roosters crowing. Frogs hollering. It's the damndest thing I've ever heard of."

DITTMER: Oh, yes. The campaigns seem pretty tame compared to the old ones.

BARNETT: Oh, yes. We had a trial at Carthage a long time ago. They had gotten Seth Ellis for manufacturing moonshine. The courthouse was jammed full of people. The judge banged his gavel. Percy Lee of Forest was district attorney. The judge said, "Call that case." The clerk called the case - "What says the state?" Percy Lee says, "The state's ready." Judge says, "What says the defendent?" Seth Ellis was pretty smart. He was a horse trader and bootlegger over there at Carthage. "Judge, I don't know what to say. I don't know how to conduct myself, I ain't got n'er lawyer. I ain't got no money. Judge, what can I do?" People began to sympathize with him, you know. He says, "You can defend yourself." "I can?" "Yes, you can." "You won't put me in jail for asking questions?" "No, you can ask questions if you want to." Well, Arthur Tucker got on the

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witness stand and testified he saw Seth operating a whiskey still in the Pearl River swamp near Carthage. He said, "Now Arthur, I'm going to ask you some questions. You ain't going to lie, are you?" Everbody laughed. "You going to tell the truth?" "Yes." "Didn't you help me put up a still down in the Pearl River swamp here about three years ago?" "Yes, I did." "Me and you used to play marbles together? Now you've gotten high in office, and I'm still a bootlegger and a two-bit horse trader." Everybody laughed. "And now you want to send me to the penitentiary for making a little corn whiskey here." They put Arthur McKivley on the stand. He was the deputy sheriff. "Now Arthur, you and me's always been big friends?" "Yes." "You ain't going to lie are you?" "No, I ain't going to lie." "Didn't you ask me to slip you a drink of moonshine in a gourd through the fence at the Leake County Fair last October? And you drank ever drop of it?" "Yes, that's right." "Now, you still want to send me to the penitentiary?" "Yes." He got a hung jury. They wouldn't convict him. Percy Lee told me, "Ross, I don't want anymore Seth Ellis cases." He was a bootlegger and horse trader at Carthage. He didn't deny it.

JONES: That's a good story, Governor. Thanks again.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by John Jones)

(Final Copy typed by Kathleen Smith)

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