

An Interview with
DR. EVANS HARRINGTON
April 3, 1980

Interviewed by
John Jones

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JONES: This is John Jones with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and I'm about to interview Dr. Evans Harrington. We're in Dr. Harrington's office in Bishop Hall on the campus of the University of Mississippi. Today is Thursday, April 3, 1980. It would be best if we could start at the very beginning, if you could tell me something of your early background, when and where you were born.

HARRINGTON: Well, I was born in Birmingham. My father and mother were native Mississippians, but my father was in school at Howard College; it's now Samford, I think, in Birmingham. When I was just a few months old they moved back to Mobile, where my mother's father was living at the time. My mother's father was a Baptist minister, and my father was for a while his assistant and song leader; and we lived in Pritchard, Alabama. Then my father came to school at Mississippi College in Clinton and we moved there, and after that he held churches in south Mississippi and we moved about from place to place. I think I once counted up about a dozen schools I went to before I got through high school, because we moved so often. But Jones County was where I spent my teenage years and the place I remember best before I went into the Navy. I went into the Navy at eighteen and spent two years in the Naval Air Corps, training as a cadet.

JONES: Before the second war?

HARRINGTON: During the second world war. I went in in 1943 and came out in 1945. During that time I received training as an aerial gunner and radioman as well as a cadet. I never saw any action. I never got overseas. I

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came out of there and went to Mississippi College, where my grand-father and my uncles and my father had gone, and even my mother had gone to the women's part of Mississippi College. I got a B.A. there and taught two years at Decatur, Mississippi, and came up to the University of Mississippi and got a Master's Degree and taught for four years at the University High School, which was part of the Education Department of the University at the time. It's now Oxford High School. Then I came back here to the campus and taught as an instructor for about four or five years until I did some further graduate work here, and then taught as an Assistant Professor until I got my Ph.D. I strung that out. I got the Ph.D. in about '68 and have been a professor here ever since, teaching mostly creative writing--well, not mostly creative writing, but creative writing, which is not emphasized a great deal here, that is, in the way of numbers of courses and so on--and Modern American Poetry and Modern American Drama and Modern American--well, the Short Story, which is largely American--and Modern Criticism.

JONES: Right. I want to say for the tape that Dr. Harrington taught me in three of my upper level English courses before I graduated. They were my favorite courses of my entire time here at the University. And out of that experience, I remember you telling us in class that your father was at one time associated with the state penitentiary at Parchman.

HARRINGTON: Yes. Right.

JONES: That might enlighten us a little bit as to your novel The Prisoners.

HARRINGTON: Right. When I went into the service my parents were living in Ellisville.

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My father was county welfare agent there, in addition to holding a part-time church. He moved to a church out from Drew, Mississippi, and then to the First Baptist Church, Tchula, Mississippi. Eventually, in the early '50s, he became chaplain at Parchman Penitentiary. I've never actually lived in the Delta, but I visited them a lot. I never lived at Parchman, but I spent, say, sometimes as much as a two-week summer visit there, vacation, and I heard a great deal of talk. It's just a fascinating place. The Delta itself, for its flatness, for a person brought up in the hill part of Mississippi, is fascinating. It was to me. The Penitentiary, Parchman, was so colorful, although it was a dismal, unhappy situation as any penitentiary is. These camps--I get confused as to how many I imagined my imaginary penitentiary to have and how many Parchman actually has--but it has something around twenty to twenty-two camps with about 150 people. They're in these buildings that were built, I imagine, around the turn of the century. I never did really check into the history of Parchman. It's very unusual. The whole camp is very distinctive and taught you to pay attention to your imagination, and the manners of the prisoners, and all that. I suppose I'm just interested in that kind of thing. I've always been sensitive to the environment. Through my father, who interviewed all the incoming prisoners and was usually brought in when there was some kind of difficulty, I heard a lot of problems of the prisoners and the administration. So I wrote The Prisoners. I started off to write about a person whose experience somewhat resembled an actual prisoner there that my father told me about.

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JONES: This is the character Graves?

HARRINGTON: Yes, Johnny Graves. Then I realized the situation had the assistant warden, who was trying to help free Graves, just about as taut, bound-up and imprisoned as everybody there was. It dawned on me that the prison, from the standpoint of the way I saw life at the time, was pretty emblematic of the kind of vicious cycle of ignorance and struggling to make some meaning of your life that it seemed to me, most of us were involved in, or all of us. So The Prisoners worked on two levels, or three levels really: the actual prisoners there, then the officials there who were somewhat imprisoned by imprisoning the prisoners, and then all of them as emblematic of society.

JONES: Right. At the time you were visiting Parchman, did you have inclinations to write, or did that stir you to try to capture some of that on paper?

HARRINGTON: Oh, no. The first time I had any consciousness that I wanted to write was when I went to apply for a commission in the Naval Air Corps; there was a blank that said, "What do you want to be? What are your objectives in life, your occupation?" And I thought, "I love to read." I had always read. I had the kind of education you get in small village schools in south Mississippi. I had had the standard things you have in high school, Shakespeare's Julius Ceasar and MacBeth, but I'd been mostly an athlete and I'd read Saturday Evening Post magazine and novels that would come to hand. But I loved to read and I thought it would be fun to write. Just "writer" didn't sound very impressive, and I said, "journalist!" I didn't really know what a journalist was. So I listed journalism as my desire. When I came out of the service I still said

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journalism was what I wanted to do, but Mississippi College didn't have but one or two elementary journalism courses. By the time I took those I knew that wasn't the kind of writing I wanted to do; literature, fiction was what I wanted. I took a creative writing course there under Dr. Dollarhide, who's on our faculty here now, and, in true student fashion, I gave the text he had us buy short shrift through college--and I guess I got a pretty good grade in there. I wrote the stories, but I didn't really study the text until I got out and was at Decatur, teaching two years. I had a lot of time there because there wasn't just a lot of life going on in Decatur, Mississippi, in 1948 and 9. I got those books out, those texts of writing by Walter Campbell--his pen name was Stanley Vestal, but his real name was Walter Campbell, I think. There were two books: one was Writing Magazine Fiction and one was Professional Writing. I studied those things and actually worked the drills that Vestal suggested, such as reading stories backwards, or typing some good one you admired on your typewriter to get accustomed to seeing good prose coming out of your typewriter. I did everything you could do for two or three years there. I wanted to write, and I started out to. I knew I wasn't a very good writer from the standpoint of prose. I had worked a lot on my style; it didn't come naturally. I wrote a number of stories more or less according to the formulas and patterns that Vestal talked about in those books. And at that time I grabbed everything I could see about writing at newstands and things I had not read in high school, you know: Dostoyevsky and Dreiser and

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Tolstoy, all in the same summer, I remember. It gave me intellectual indigestion. I nearly had a nervous breakdown. But I gorged myself. It was almost a monomania to get hold of literature and writing. Then I got the Master's and started teaching at University High School in Oxford, and writing every spare minute. At a point I realized I really wasn't writing the kind of stories that had excited me as a boy; I had gotten to doing what is the equivalent of finger exercises in music, you know. I got so obsessed with techniques that I could hardly write naturally. In a fit of reaction against that I said, "To hell with it! I'm going to write a story that excites me whether it's properly made or not." I realized some time later, maybe during that time, that in writing a story that very much excited me and that I was really into, I was automatically using a lot of the things that I had gorged myself on that had become part of my nature. Immediately I began to get good reactions, and within a year or two I had sold some stories to magazines. By the way, the first story I sold was to a magazine that published its last issue when it published my first story. It was called Today's Woman, which is not Woman's Day at all. It was a different type of magazine. That was in 1953 that I published that. It was called "Souvenir." It was an extrapolation from a story my father told me about an early love he had before he and my mother met. It was about a girl he lived near in the country out in Simpson County. They were very close. He went off to college to be a preacher and made the decision to leave her behind. She sent him some violets packed in moisture, carefully packed. And this was a memory of my father's. He was telling me when I was

twenty-five years old, so he was fifty or so. From that perspective then -- of course, now I'm fifty-four and it doesn't seem very old-- but I was thinking that he'd treasured this. He wasn't a particularly sentimental man. So, I told that story. That was the first one that got published. The next one was -- I'd noticed people were fascinated by Parchman. By that time my father was at Parchman. When I was at a party or somewhere and people would start talking, I would tell them some of the things I'd heard about Parchman and they would just pump me with questions. I thought then, "Well, for goodness sake, I want to write; write about that experience." And I did. My second story sold to Saturday Evening Post. Then I had another story about Parchman in Saturday Evening Post, and I started this novel that became The Prisoners. I had a number of other stories in magazines like Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine and Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Mine weren't really mysteries. They were about Parchman and prison life and action and so on.

JONES: I read the story that appeared in Saturday Evening Post, I think it was in '54 or '56. It had the one scene where a guy named Kritz was with the camp chaplain in a room with some of the camp toughs who were trying to detect who in the camp had been ratting on them to the officials.

HARRINGTON: Yes.

JONES: Was that before you started The Prisoners that you wrote that?

HARRINGTON: No, that was after, I think.

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JONES: And the character of the chaplain whom they called in to find out who had been exposing them and their plots was based loosely on the role your father had to sometimes play with the prisoners at Parchman?

HARRINGTON: Well, no. I didn't attempt to take either my father's appearance or relationship to the prisoners. I took his position, what he stood for. This boy did not believe in God or anything, and that's what interested me about that. Now, I think to the extent that my father asked me why, in modern fiction, the people who were exalted or made colorful had to be such flawed people, had to be such really reprehensible characters -- why couldn't there be somewhere an admirable character who was just a simply good, brave man? I think that that may have influenced me. My father -- I realized in looking back some years ago that nearly every successful story I ever wrote was one way or another associated with my father. It was either a story that he told me which I took and changed, so that he was quite unhappy with it when I published it, or that one I was talking about. Well, even there I changed the story that he told and made so many changes that he declared to my mother, "That story wasn't based on what I told Evans!" There was that kind of suggestion, but I didn't try to make any close, one-to-one parallel.

JONES: You say your father was a Baptist preacher?

HARRINGTON: Yes.

JONES: Would you say that he was an open-minded sort, or how would you say that he influenced your sensibilities?

HARRINGTON: He was extremely open-minded. He wasn't very effective in Mississippi

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pulpits in the Baptist church because they always said he needed more fire. He was much more an educator and of an artistic temperament. I think in his day growing up in the country in the early part of the 20th century -- he was the age of the century, so that in 1910 he was ten years old and so on -- probably the most refined gentleman he saw was the preacher who came out and held the revival every summer, and he aspired to that height. If he had grown up in another environment he probably would have been a professor or a writer or something like that. He was a very sensitive, very thoughtful man. I always thought of him -- you know Matthew Arnold's essay on Hellenism and Hebraism? The Hellenist is always, like the Greeks, interested in learning new ideas and not abiding by strict rules, where the Hebraist is more Puritanical. My mother was more the Hebraist. She believed in rules and that sort of thing. Daddy was always curious to speculate. He influenced me a great deal that way.

JONES: Why at the age of eighteen did you decide to join the Navy?

HARRINGTON: Well, I would have been drafted otherwise, and again, my father's influence. He was more alert to that. I was busy playing football and graduating from high school, and he said, "Son, I understand that there are far more opportunities and the treatment you get is far better in, say, the Naval Air Corps than in the infantry in the Army. Don't wait around and get drafted. Go down there and see if you can't qualify for it." And he pretty well arranged it. I was that oblivious to my fate. That's how that happened.

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JONES: Where were you living when you graduated from high school?

HARRINGTON: In Ellisville.

JONES: Let me ask you this, or let me say this. I'm sure that when you first had a consciousness that you wanted to write -- you say it was around this time in your life -- that you knew that writing was something you didn't have to learn in an academic setting. Shelby Foote, for instance, in my interview with him said he didn't feel that you could combine academics and creativity and come out with something other than an academic novel or something; that probably the worst place to be, if you were a serious writer, would be a college campus. He said almost every poet you know is stuck off away from life on some college campus not producing poetry, but, you know, rather messing with the coeds and that type of thing.

HARRINGTON: Oh, yes, but you don't have to be on a college campus to be a womanizer, as a number of writers' lives would indicate. If you're asking me if I agree with that, basically yes. I think in Foote's generation -- I don't think this will continue to be so, I don't even think it's as much so now as it was ten or fifteen years ago. There has been an increasing acceptance of the writer and his role and the importance of creativity, contemporary creativity, in English departments. It would have been very rare for any college in the Deep South to do what the University of Washington used to do for Theodore Roethke, who had psychological problems in the extreme, and bottle problems. They would send him off to an institution and let him get back to normal and bring him back and let him teach because they believed his poetry was good

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enough for them to make a special dispensation in his case. That's still fairly rare. There's a college in the Deep South that just eliminated a very good writer because he's an alcoholic. I'm sympathetic with that. What I'm trying to say is that there are elements in most people and courses and the whole intellectual climate on a college campus which are by and large analytical rather than synthetic. You know the difference: analyzing is breaking apart and synthesizing is bringing together. The creative imagination is largely a synthesizing thing. It works not in abstractions, but in trying to embody, to put flesh and blood characters together in lifelike situations, rather than saying, "The significance of this is A) B) C)." There are other things. When I took courses I'd hear professors and graduate students casually dismiss Lord Jim as a noble failure, you know, that Conrad tried, and of course he was a great genius and all, but in Lord Jim. . . you wonder, if they can that casually handle Conrad, what in the world will they do with you? You suddenly get a picture of yourself: "Minor Southern novelist of the 1950s." That can make you feel very small and very unimportant, and it's effected me. On the other hand, I was telling a student just today. He was in law school and is wondering if he should go on for a Master of Fine Arts because he wasn't really interested in teaching, but as soon as he got through with law school -- he'd already had some experience as a junior assistant in a law firm and he knew what that life would be; he said it would be just humdrum and he'd be caught. He wanted a few more years to see what kind of writing he could do. I told him it didn't matter, to go

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on if that's what he wanted, but if he wanted to be a writer, he would do that in the wee hours in law school or in the fine arts or slinging hash in McDonald's or somewhere. In fact, I've come to believe if you can ask, "Should I?" you're in trouble. Writing has got to be so obsessive that you don't waste your time asking. I have been, and am no longer, and hope to be again compulsive about writing. Right now -- I notice Willie Morris said in that article, did you see in Mid-South the feature on him?

JONES: Yes.

HARRINGTON: He said his career was at a juncture, and his current novel was at a juncture. I'm glad to learn the word for what I am. As I understand it, if he's in a period of transition, if that's what he means by juncture, then I'm at a juncture too. I perhaps ruined one marriage -- I'm sure I didn't do it by myself, it was a whole bunch of things, but certainly I contributed -- because I was so obsessed during the first fifteen years of a twenty-four year marriage with writing. It may be more than that, maybe twenty of those years. I should have been in a monastery. Not that I didn't have any sex life, I don't mean to get into that, but I really was not very attentive to my wife. I was not what I know now you can be: a whole human being relating to life. It was obsessive with me. Various things happened. I never wanted to be that kind of writer. I don't think you have to be. I think the 20th century rewards that kind of writer. I don't know which comes first, whether it is that the pressure that is brought on a first-rate writer to get the truth out of himself does something to

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his nerves and psyche so that he has to become an alcoholic or some kind of mess, or whether he was that kind before and we just happen to venerate that kind of artist as a culmination of the romantic agony that Mario Praz writes about. I've speculated a lot on that. But I do know that I would like to have been and probably had the talent to be a novelist of manners if I'd lived in an era where there were real manners, you know. I would still like to record the scene that I see. I don't have as much of the romantic drive that the early Faulkner had in his great work. Well, I'm rambling. I don't know where I am. Maybe you better ask me another question.

JONES: Yes. I know that you have been teaching creative writing...

HARRINGTON: Oh, let me continue that. You asked me about the academic world?

JONES: If you can combine academics and creativity.

HARRINGTON: Yes. There are all those -- Foote had in sight hundreds of teachers of writing who don't really write -- and myself for the last few years. Then you've got also to deal with Robert Penn Warren. But the good writer is the exception wherever you go! There are hundreds of college dropouts who didn't become William Faulkner, you know. By the same token, there're hundreds and hundreds of mediocre and poorer than mediocre teachers who didn't become William Faulkner -- or Robert Penn Warren, you know, more to the point. So I really don't think it matters. I go back: I say about academia what Faulkner said about Hollywood. They asked if Hollywood harmed his talent, and he said, "I don't think anything can harm you if you're good enough." So I really would answer that all of this is sort of beside the point. Milton, on the one hand,

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and Robert Burns on the other, you know, from extreme to extreme. Milton could have, they say, immortalized himself with his Latin scholarship if he hadn't ever written Paradise Lost. There was a man, extremely bookish, extremely academic, and extremely late-developing too, who published one of the monuments of English literature. Then there's Shakespeare who's supposed to have, didn't somebody say, "Warbled his wood-notes wild." We don't know really how much education he had, but he's certainly kind of the opposite of Milton. Ben Jonson, on the other hand, was extremely learned and more into criticism like Warren is today and did his thing. So I just don't believe that there's much to that.

JONES: Yes. Let me pursue another direction, but along much the same theme. You've been teaching creative writing a long time. Do you think that it's something that can be taught? Do you think that someone can by technique only produce great literature?

HARRINGTON: The implications of what I've just insisted on are that if you are a writer, you write whatever you do. But I would like to comment on that question. I have heard, "But can you teach creative writing?" until I've gotten very irritated with it. I finally worked it out this way in my mind: people are not really asking, "Can you teach writing?" If that's what they're really asking, yes, you can teach writing; just as if they were to ask, "Can you teach physics?" you can teach physics. The question that parallels with physics, what they are really asking creative writing teachers when they say, "Can you teach creative writing?" would be to a physicist, "Can you teach

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somebody to be an Einstein?" They are really asking, "Can you make a Faulkner? Can you make a Hemingway?" No, no. And neither can the physics teacher make an Einstein. But you can teach writing. You can teach creative writing. You can teach people to be just about as good creative writers as you can teach people to be physicists, but it takes an individual with talent to be extraordinary, to be outstanding.

JONES: I sure think that's to the point. I know I was always impressed with the simple title of the text we used in our poetry class, How Does A Poem Mean. Miller Williams and, who helped him?

HARRINGTON: John Ciardi. Actually you've got that backwards. That's John's book originally. He created that book and asked Miller to help him with his revision of it. Miller is kind of a protege of John Ciardi's.

JONES: And in that book Ciardi likens the writing of a poem to working out a mathematical problem with the juxtaposition of words and the use of meter and that type of thing. With your help I always found a lot to like in that book. Let's return to the chronology of your life for a moment. We could get off on this for hours. What year did you come to Ole Miss?

HARRINGTON; 1950.

JONES: And you worked on your master's and began teaching at University High School in what year?

HARRINGTON: I got my master's in August of '51 and started teaching there in September, '51.

JONES: Well, I hesitate to ask you this because a Faulkner consciousness is certainly a popular thing to have these days, but when you talk about

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Oxford before 1962 you have to talk about him. Did you ever meet him or come to know him?

HARRINGTON: I was an avid Faulkner watcher as a number of us were in the '50s. Of course, he was doing a lot of travelling and you never knew when you'd see him, but to your great excitement you would see him walking down the street in Oxford, walking across the street in front of your car, a little bitty man with a very long-legged gait he had for such a short man. When I'd be close, you know, standing behind him, almost able to touch him in line at the movie theatre two or three times, you'd want to say something to him, you know. You'd read his work and admired it so much and you feel close to him. I think that's why writers become kind of culture heroes, because they can make people feel so close to them. Finally, I succumbed to it. It's kind of embarrassing to remember. One day I saw him and I said, "I'm going to meet him. I'm just going to stop and introduce myself." I thought, "That would be silly." While I was debating it we passed, and he turned off in an alley between where the old Lyric Theatre used to be and a printing shop. On the spur of the moment I called out, "Mr. Faulkner!" and he turned and I went up to him, and then I wished I hadn't done it. I said, "I just wanted to say, sir, that your works have meant a great deal to me." He said, "Thank you." And that's the extent of our meeting. One impression I took away from that is something Tennessee Williams has commented on: the quality of his eyes was most astonishing. There was a soft blackness about them that you associate with animals in the woods, a very gentle and frightened look. Of course,

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you could say a big burly guy like me in a big overcoat hollering out at a poor shy man is enough to frighten him. But no, I've never seen eyes like that. In Tennessee Williams' biography where he comments on that -- he's commented two or three places on the quality -- he said one time Faulkner was at a party with him in Paris and he looked up and caught the expression in his eyes and he started crying, Williams did, because the look in Faulkner's eyes was so stricken.

JONES: I know here in Oxford he was really misunderstood and not appreciated. Again, Shelby Foote said that sometimes when you asked people in Oxford how to get to his house they would turn their head and spit in the road.

HARRINGTON: I was teaching in the high school in the '50s as we've said, and I would say, "By next Monday I want you to have read and prepared William Faulkner's 'That Evening Sun'" -- oh, it wouldn't have been that but some short story of Faulkner's -- and they'd start snickering and looking at each other, tenth graders you know, and I'd say, "What are you doing?" They'd say, "We know about him." And I'd say, "What is it?" They'd say, "Oh, he's just a drunk, a nocount." They'd heard through their families you know, these tenth graders. This was after the man had won the Nobel Prize. But there were stories all around. During '57 or '58 I took a manuscript down to the express, freight -- what do they call it?

JONES: United Parcel Service?

HARRINGTON: United Parcel Post or something like that.

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JONES: U.P.S.

HARRINGTON: Yes. The man behind the counter said, "What is this?" I said, "It's a manuscript." "Oh, you write books?" I said, "I try." He said, "William Faulkner writes books," and kind of leered at me like, "That's a good joke, isn't it?" I said, "I understand he does." He said, "Of course,

Phil Stone puts all the punctuation in." I said, "Well, I've heard that he did. You reckon that's true?" "Yes, sir," he said; "I hear Faulkner's moving away, he's not going to be living in Oxford. We'll find out then whether Phil Stone did the punctuation." There was that kind of story all around.

JONES: Did his writing affect your writing?

HARRINGTON: Oh, yes. I was looking back at The Prisoners the other day and I was noticing how many -- it's hard to say, but if you read it you'll see: the devices and techniques, the particular way in which Faulkner handles the interior monologue or stream-of-consciousness -- I adopted that to invent the impressionistic experiences of a convict trying to make an escape out of prison. When The Prisoners was reviewed, one or two of the reviewers said, "He has obviously read his illustrious fellow townsman with too much attention." Then I went to the extreme of reading people like John Cheever and Albert Camus, the most radically different kinds of stylists who didn't have any of the rhetoric, any of the style and technique that Faulkner has, to try to break that. I think I did.

JONES: Yes. He was such an influence on all the Mississippi writers of the generation following him, with the possible exception of Walker Percy who says of himself, "You can be sure I didn't learn to write sitting at the feet of old men on the front porch listening to stories." There's a hint of something changing.

HARRINGTON: You mean with writers like Percy?

JONES: Right.

HARRINGTON: Well, I can't think of another to go along with him, you know, who writes like he does. Percy has grafted -- well, the Catholicism he shares with Flannery O'Connor and Berry Morgan -- but the existentialism and the psychoanalytical penchant; you know, he backed into fiction sort of,

out of philosophy and psychology. I think that's unusual for Southern writing, atypical.

JONES: Yes. Plus his M.D.

HARRINGTON: Yes.

JONES: When did you start teaching at the University here?

HARRINGTON: In 1956; the fall of 1955.

JONES: Mississippi was at that time going through something that was, I'm sure, hard on you and others here at the University who were sensitive in one way or another to the race question, you know, following the Brown decision during the period of intense reaction. Professor Silver in his book Mississippi: The Closed Society talks about some of the pressures that were put on teachers here at the University. Do you remember anything about the influence of the segregationists, the Citizens Council, or the Sovereignty Commission?

HARRINGTON: Well, yes. When I was still, I think I was still teaching at the University High School shortly after what they called Black Monday and that judge from McComb (Brookhaven), ah...

JONES: Tom Brady.

HARRINGTON: Tom Brady brought out that book. Didn't he call it Black Monday or something?

JONES: Black Monday, yes.

HARRINGTON: Right about that time there were a couple of men in the legislature who attacked eleven professors up here of the most widely differing types politically and intellectually as being communists or anything they disliked. One of them was an English professor, A. Wigfall Green, who

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was anything, anything but leftist. He verged to the right, you know. He was on McArthur's staff, a military man. He was everything they wanted if they really knew. He was a hawk, you know. Silver was another one of them. And there was a mild little minister here who was maybe chairman of the Department of Philosophy, and he wrote a book on the history of religion. In it he rehearsed some of the early phases of religion that were recorded in which certain cultures believed God was feminine. They translated that in the legislature into a disbelief in God, that he believed in a female God and was advocating it -- and it was just ridiculous. But it was all a part of that McCarthy era, Joe McCarthy era and so on. It started there, and at that time the Chancellor, Chancellor Williams, had to go down to the legislature and swear that he was a good Methodist and that all of the people up here were God-fearing citizens. Then the criticism began to focus more on race and not on communism. That was just an echo of McCarthyism, I guess. The Citizens Council began to build and Ross Barnett would run for office and then there was more and more objection to having a speaker in that might not agree exactly with Mississippi. There was an Episcopal minister who was scheduled to make a speech here who got on a TV talk show and won \$34,000. They asked him on national TV what he was going to do with it and he said he was going to give it to the NAACP. So immediately members of the legislature and the board began to put pressure on the Chancellor to uninvite this man, which he eventually did. That caused the resignation of the chairman of the Sociology Department here. He resigned in protest. There're things like that scattered over nearly a decade that culminated in our riot.

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JONES: Tell me something before we get into that. Did you see here on campus at that time there was that kind of potential in the student body and the faculty for the September, 1962, reaction, for that kind of mass hysteria?

HARRINGTON: No, and that's still a puzzle to me. Two weeks before the students went wild, and they did-- there're those who say it was outsiders, and when we get into that I'll talk about it--but the students booed Ross Barnett two weeks before that riot at a football game. He'd never been a...

JONES: For being a silly old segregationist?

HARRINGTON: Yes. He was never popular here. But, somehow they got caught up in mass hysteria -- I think that's the word for it. They came in from the Kentucky football game, you know, the night of that riot, and the beginnings of it were the kinds of pranks that Ole Miss football fans do. The kind of people, you know, who run up and down the sidelines...

JONES: Raising hell.

HARRINGTON: Yes, and shouting Hotty Toddy. You know, that's that certain kind of Southern ebullience. I was reading in Robert Penn Warren's memoir on Jefferson Davis in the New Yorker of recent times. Jeff Davis, when he was a young man, was where there were some Indian squaws dancing and there was one very attractive Indian squaw and Davis apparently had some drinks and his blood was running hot and he jumped up and gave a rebel yell and wriggled himself; you'd just never think. This maybe is peculiar to the South, I don't know. But that was the way that the riot got started. When it got nasty the students were

appalled. I was there all night and that was my impression, that they got out of it and that more and more you'd see a thug from Birmingham or somebody from Florida who got there, say, at midnight. The riot started something like seven o'clock, something like that. No, I didn't see the beginning of it. By the time I got there those troops that the Kennedys had sent in here had inflamed the honor of a bunch of students who wouldn't have cared, otherwise weren't particularly racist. They were anti-federal government. Now that, you know, is a deep streak. It's been with us since 1948 or so. When we went with Carter it was the first time that we went with a national democratic ticket since about '48. (Actually, Miss. went with Stevenson in '52 and '56) So that is all in there.

JONES: So it came by the election of Ross Barnett to be an issue of race, the fact that the students didn't want a black on campus with them, from anti-communism to an issue of sheer bigotry?

HARRINGTON: Yes. I guess it all kind of goes together. To be a conservative in Mississippi at that time was to keep the status quo, and that was to preclude integration. Everything became magnified and focused. There was somebody who'd written Race and Reason, a very racist book. I can't remember his name, but he'd once been president of Delta Airlines. The Governor declared a so-and-so day, the name of the man who was Race and Reason's author. This man's idea was that the federal government was being very inefficient trying to help these underprivileged people. You can't run an airline that way. The whole attitude of the state was geared to property and efficiency and economy. It became a monolithic structure. Silver's phrase, "The Closed Society," was very

apt, because you just shook in your boots when you spoke out against that thing. It was so wide-spread, or seemed to be, that nobody that opposed it much was saying anything. It was a phenomenal experience.

JONES: Where did your personal sensibilities lie?

HARRINGTON: I was oblivious to politics and those things when I was a child and a teenager, and I went into the service as a child, a teenager seventeen going on eighteen. People would say, "Ah, you got Rankin!" He was about as bad as Bilbo in those days, Congressman Rankin. I think he was more anti-Semitic and it was some of the Jewish boys I ran into in the Navy. I didn't know who Rankin was exactly. I think I'd heard his name, but I didn't know why he was bad. Similarly, they'd say, "You know what you guys do to niggers?" They didn't call them blacks in those days, negroes. And I'd argue for the first three or four months the fairly traditional arguments; they were inferior or something. Of course, I was brought up in the Baptist church. The National Church, the headquarters in, I guess Nashville, sent out these books to pass out in Sunday School class. The Sunbeam Club, you know, the little ones sang a song, "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." I guess a good Citizens Councilor going back and analyzing that would think we were brainwashing them from the word go. But I knew all that and it didn't take me three or four months to realize that the position I was in was defenseless. My change of mind and heart happened very early in the first of the two years I was in the service. So when I came out to Mississippi College in 1945 I was already an integrationist and a defender of the blacks. In 1948 in Decatur, Mississippi I invited a black woman into my living room and sat on the couch with her. We had an old woman renting a room from us, and I thought she was going

to get all of her things and walk out. So way back there before Black Monday I was enraged. I finally realized there was all kinds of open racism in a place like Decatur, Mississippi, in the school systems in 1948, and I was the only person there consumed with rage and hatred against the racism they so took for granted. They were happy people, you know, and I was tied in knots of resentment. I finally learned to live with this intolerable situation so that when the years of the early '60s and the big push for integration and the students from the North came down here, they couldn't understand how I could live with some equanimity in an unjust society, but I'd had about twenty years experience. That was the way that happened with me.

JONES: Tell me what the consciousness was among the faculty here. Professor Silver in his talk down at Millsaps said one of the real distressing points of his whole life and one of the things that made him realize something about humanity was when people he had known and trusted all during his years here at the University lied in front of the federal courts. Tell me what the sense was among the faculty when they decided that Meredith was coming.

HARRINGTON: Well, to me one of the striking things was what Silver commented on at Millsaps. When the Registrar of the University of Mississippi went before the court, before the admission of Meredith, when he was suing to enter and the University was denying him entrance, they asked the Registrar if there was a conscious policy of discrimination here. "Oh, no." They said, "Then, as far as you know, the University admits blacks?" "Oh, yes, as far as I know." They said, "Are there any blacks on the campus to your knowledge there?" "Well, I think there probably are."

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He's now professor of education over at the education school. I felt sorry for him. He was just the Registrar. Friends asked him how in the world he could blatantly perjure himself, and he said the University lawyers told him that's what he ought to say. I saw his picture later when he had to be there when Meredith was registered, and he just looked very pitiful, a man who'd lost his integrity and then had lost the fight. He lost all the way around. It was a real pitiful circumstance, and largely for trying to be a good ole boy, you know, trying to go along. The Chancellor -- I can't remember the exact details, but Silver has rehearsed that. He asked the Chancellor how in the world he could have said some of the things he said in court, and the Chancellor said he thought it was in the best interest of the University; yet it was near perjury, if not outright perjury. These things just blew our minds.

JONES: I'm sure they did.

HARRINGTON: Another big thing is that when the riot came and the lines were drawn, the social life of the faculty was completely realigned, split. People in whose house you had gone maybe once every week or once a month anyhow to dinner, and you loved their stories and they loved yours apparently -- suddenly they weren't amusing at all because they disagreed with you on this race issue, and you obviously didn't invite them back again and they didn't invite you back again. Instead, you were inviting people you had never particularly cared for who had the good grace to agree with you. It was an odd, odd changeover. I had, as I say, realized in the Navy the wrongs that we were doing to the blacks, but I was still more of the James Joyce type of -- Joyce was a great hero of mine in

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college, and, you know, he was an exile. In silence and cunning he practiced and read and was bookish. I wasn't an activist, in short, anymore than Joyce was, though I was not unaware of the political and social implications of everything that went on. But the day after that riot when I began to see statements from Senator Eastland and Chancellor Williams that it was the federal marshalls who caused all the trouble, you know, I was so outraged from what I'd seen. I'd seen the Highway Patrol of the State of Mississippi going bumper-to-bumper down University Avenue to free the students to attack the marshalls, and sticking their heads out as students came by with hunks of concrete in their hands to go up to throw it at the marshalls or at Meredith, and a highway patrolman would stick his head out and say, "Go kill that son of a bitch!" This is the law enforcement arm of the state, I'd always thought, and I can't really express what a shattering sensation that was. Then the next day all of the misrepresentations, to put it mildly. I felt helpless. Everything was exaggerated and distorted, and I thought, "Here I thought I was doing some good." Some of those students I'd watched go by with those rocks were students in my Modern English Novel course to whom I was teaching the nuances of the stream-of-consciousness in Ulysses, you know, or Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and teaching Modern Poetry and thinking that when I showed them William Butler Yeats' "The Second Coming," it was having an effect. But these guys were out there doing this thing, you know, and I thought "I will never live so that I have to blame myself for having done nothing to forestall this kind of thing again." So I-- right now, next weekend, I'm giving a party to try to organize and get membership to the American Civil

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Liberties Union in North Mississippi. I joined the AAUP. I never had been a member of the AAUP. I joined it because they said that group was going to protest this kind of thing, and I had to do something. And that threw me in the camp with Silver and people like that that I hadn't been in before. I think everybody who was here had their lives radically altered forever.

JONES: As was the life of the state.

HARRINGTON: Yes.

JONES: Can you give me just a short narrative of what happened to you that day and night?

HARRINGTON: Yes. I heard there was rioting on the campus on the Memphis television I was watching right after Kennedy's speech, which I heard.

JONES: Where were you living then?

HARRINGTON: I was living over on Longest Road. It's in the northern part of town, about two miles from the campus. And I...

JONES: Let me ask you before we get started into this, do you want a cup of coffee or a coca-cola or anything?

HARRINGTON: I'm fine.

JONES: You don't need to take a break?

HARRINGTON: No. Do you want to?

JONES: No, I'm fine.

HARRINGTON: And I went out, I don't know what time, 7:30 maybe, and drove around. I saw tear gas around the Lyceum. I drove in up by Chi Omega house.

JONES: They didn't have guards there?

HARRINGTON: No, not at that time. They just had the marshalls and they were ringed

around the Lyceum. I started down University Avenue and saw all those Highway Patrol cars, so I turned and went around the other way and parked in front of where the new Chemistry building is now on University Avenue and got out and walked up to the statue.

JONES: By yourself?

HARRINGTON: Yes. That was when I saw what I was talking about: these Highway Patrol cars bumper-to-bumper going off campus down University Avenue, turning and going out around the Grove where they assembled, I understand, right out here on the side of campus. I went up and stood in front of the old Geology building and just wondered, seeing all these people milling around and the marshalls up at the front there and seeing all the tear gas or haze, and a little tan Falcon came up University Avenue towards them and started around the circle in front of that Geology building. Things started whizzing by my head and hitting that car and I realized people were throwing rocks and concrete at it, and I hit the ground as quick as I could because I was scared I would be hit, and watched that carload of marshalls. A Falcon was little then, in '62, and there must have been six in that car. They shattered the windshield. A barrage would hit that little car at the same time and almost turn it over, and then some would hit it from the front and it looked like it was down on its knees to try to get around. Honestly, it was the most -- I just never had had any experience like that. I hadn't been in the war or anything. Then General Walker stood up on the Confederate statue and talked crazy. He talked so crazy that I couldn't -- they tried to get me later to testify in court because he sued the Delta Democrat-Times and AP for

saying he fomented the riot, and I couldn't testify that he did because he said things like, "You have been betrayed!" They would say, "Who did it? Who did it?" and he'd stoop down to talk to two men in white ten-gallon hats, and he'd say, "You've been betrayed!" and they'd say, "Who betrayed us?" He'd say, "This is the long way round to Cuba!" At that time there was Castro and all, and he was saying, "They shouldn't be here, they should be in Cuba!" Then he finally said, "You've been betrayed by a man named Colonel Birdsong!" Birdsong was the head of the Highway Patrol. Well, they didn't believe that, you know; Birdsong was on their side. Walker just, as far as I could see, confused the hell out of the students. He didn't foment any riot. So I would tell these lawyers that and they wouldn't ask me to come testify. I told them exactly what I saw, and I was right there.

JONES: What time did he get up to speak?

HARRINGTON: I guess 8:30 or 9:00.

JONES: And the crowd was already at a fever pitch.

HARRINGTON: Yes. And all of a sudden beside him was Duncan Gray, who's the Bishop now. He was a good friend of mine. We shared the same views. And he started trying to talk and hardly got a word out before a hand came up and got him by his clerical collar and snatched him down into the crowd, and I thought, "Oh, my God, I've got to go help him. They're going to break my jaw." I don't know why my jaw felt so sensitive. Once I was knocked out in boxing in high school, and my jaw has dreaded that happening ever since, I guess. But anyway, I thought, "I can't wait

because I am so chicken that if I hesitate a minute I'll rationalize some excuse not to go." And so I put my head down and went barreling across through the crowd. I got over there and saw they had him behind the Confederate statue there. One big burly guy was standing in front of him, and another big burly guy was trying to get to him. The first one was defending him. Duncan was tiny. This guy says, "Oh, no, no man! Don't hurt him! He's a preacher! He's a preacher!" The other one said, "You heard what he said, that son of a bitch said last night on TV we ought to let that black bastard in here." And he said, "I know, I know, but he's a preacher, he believes all that stuff!" Finally the big one kept trying to get to him-- I mean the aggressor, they were both big -- and the defender stopping him, and finally the aggressor said, "You take up for him so, maybe you think like he does!" He said, "Oh, hell no, man. Let's kill that black son of a bitch, but let's don't hurt this preacher."

JONES: Was Duncan Gray hurt?

HARRINGTON: No, no. The defender prevailed and the attacker went off. The rest of the crowd was absorbed by something else by that time. It was just those two and me watching, wondering what would I do with these two. So to my great relief the defender prevailed and he led Duncan over to the Y and got him out of there. Then I went on off. I can go on and on.

JONES: Please do. I don't mean to get you to take up so much time with this, but I think since what we're doing here is trying to get something for posterity for Mississippi, I think it is important that we have somebody on record who was so close to what really was a very climactic event.

HARRINGTON: I went up through the circle to the front of the Lyceum. That's where these people would go surging up there in the dark. There were street lights and cars burning, but it was kind of dark. All of a sudden the marshalls' commanding officer would say, "Load!" Each of them would shoot one of those gas canisters out. The minute they heard it pop and saw it arching across -- it just came across the street and fell in the grass, and the wind was blowing it all over the place -- this mob would scream, "GAS!" hysterically and turn around and run over each other and fall down and curse the marshalls for making them break their legs, you know. I never saw such stupidity! I stepped behind a tree each time and let them all run back this way. The gas didn't bother me because the wind blew it away. They could have stayed there, but gas, the idea of gas, and they'd run away. One time I was waiting for them to come back up. I was standing behind a tree, and something touched me in the back and I thought, "Oh, boy," you know, "I'm found out." I was really thinking about writing about all of this. I was a kind of a spy. Of course, if I'd known that a man was being shot about that time about 100 yards from where I was standing, I would have felt even more eerie. But this man said, "We come to hep yo' govnuh." He was a man with little pig eyes, big fat fellow, said, "We heard yo' govnuh's call and we gon'hep him." I said, "Yeah, but he said do it peacefully," and he said, "Yeah, we know what he meant, don't we." I said, "Where're you from?" He said, "Birminham." I said, "Well, I'll see you," and got away from there as quick as I could. Then I went over in front of -- well, the campus has changed so much -- but I guess it would be about where Hume

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Hall stands now. The old medical building was there. We were hearing rifle fire by then. I'd picked up a friend who was a graduate student here, a good bit younger than I am, named Carson Holloman, who's chairman of the English Department up at Northwest now. We went around seeing what we could see. We heard that Meredith wasn't even in the Lyceum, that they'd moved him up to...Baxter. There were half a dozen redneck types howling obscenities at that building. They looked and sounded more like dogs; you know the ones that get off to the side and bark at you with their tails between their legs? Then the fires were all around where cars had been burned around the circle; the tear gas mingling with flames. A truck came around at one point somewhere like about 10:00. At that time they were bringing in the National Guard. These were Mississippi National Guard ordered to duty. They threw a Molotov cocktail and it spread across one of those troop carriers with the green canopy over it and the flames completely enveloped that canopy with the men in it. We were scared to death, but it burned itself out. It didn't catch the thing on fire, I don't believe. These are memories I have of the thing. About that time we heard that the men had been killed as it got to be around midnight.

JONES: This would be the French journalist?

HARRINGTON: Yes, and that boy that worked for the jukebox company. He was a native of the county. He got killed right where we had been crouching behind a concrete -- I think it had to do with the sewerage line. It looked like a sarcophagus, a big concrete...

JONES: Yes. Near what building?

HARRINGTON: It was where Hume is now. It was the old medical building. But I don't really remember much after that. I think we just got tired and went home. We heard that the National Guard was going to sweep the campus clean. The action for the most part had stopped. I think the students had pretty much gotten out of there. I later heard what the Guard did. They did get rifle-to-rifle and shoulder-to-shoulder and put bayonets on and patrol the campus and clean it out. And the rioters went to town and did some work.

JONES: At some point during the night I've always understood this to have happened: after Edwin Walker had spoken to the crowd up there by the Confederate monument and everyone had gotten together yelling, "We have a leader! We have a leader!" a bulldozer was brought into the crowd to lead the assault. Do you remember that?

HARRINGTON: Yes, and a fire truck.

JONES: A fire truck too?

HARRINGTON: Yes, sir. I saw both of them go right up the sidewalk into the middle of the circle.

JONES: Yes, and did the crowd rally behind those?

HARRINGTON: They were going behind it pretty-- you know they weren't really massed. If they had been I doubt the marshalls could have stopped them. You know they set the bulldozer going with nobody on it, I believe, and this marshall came running across and jumped up in and stopped it. That's what I heard. I saw those things go up and pull to a halt, both the fire truck and the bulldozer.

JONES: When you were walking around, were you trying to talk to students? I know

when Duncan Gray was going around he was saying, "Put that down, go to your dorms; if you go up there you might get killed." Were you trying to tell people that?

HARRINGTON: No.

JONES: You didn't want people to know who you were?

HARRINGTON: Right, I didn't. I saw what happened to one of these professors who tried to argue with the students. He was attacked. As I said, I felt like a spy. I wasn't about to reveal my views.

JONES: After...

HARRINGTON: Except, as I say, where it looked like a friend of mine was going to be hurt. I had to. It was because I'd always thought I was a decent man and I couldn't live with myself if I didn't do it, but I didn't want to. I'm not a hero.

JONES: Was it something that made you really angry? It seems like I would have gone into class the next time we met and not been able to control my rage.

HARRINGTON: Well, we were outdone with the students. Everthing happened so fast, and though I was sure I'd recognized some of them that night, it was early in the semester and I hadn't gotten their names and faces coordinated. To make a specific accusation of anyone would have been impossible. Oh, yes. During the remainder of that semester there were all kinds of underground publications, you know, pro and con. Somebody would make a reference to it in class. I took off about some piece of literature I was teaching illustrating demagoguery. I illustrated with the governor of a state who, during a time of great racial tensions, would advocate that everybody should come up to a University and physically oppose their national

government as a true demagogue. Some thug from the back of the room said, "Are you really calling Governor Barnett a demagogue?" And I said, "I certainly am!" And then felt scared and foolish. You know, I never like to lose control. That kind of thing went on constantly. The AAUP marched nearly every night during that fall semester and spring semester that first year Meredith was there. He was being guarded by marshalls, but there weren't many. You never knew when the Citizens Council would have put some students up to bombing his dormitory or something like that. We went in pairs so we would be logical witnesses and also to protect each other, to just patrol the campus. We had almost daily meetings with students who'd been harassed because they'd maybe had coffee with Meredith and they'd get home and their record machine and all their records would be smashed and shit smeared all over the bed. They'd come and testify to the AAUP and we'd try to get the University authorities on their case, but we were sure the University authorities weren't really trying to prosecute the people who were harassing them. It was just like war.

JONES: It must have been a horrendous academic situation.

HARRINGTON: It was.

JONES: Did the state at any time try to infringe on your academic freedoms, your freedom to speak your mind before the classroom?

HARRINGTON: No. There was strong talk of closing the University, and that was the argument the Chancellor used for all of us being as quiet as possible. He kept saying, "This is not the ditch to die in," and we wondered where the ditch was. He'd said that for ten years already. No, we all said and

did, all of us -- well, the night we met to sign that thing ~~Russ~~ Barrett has in his book, you know, that petition saying that Senator Eastland and the University administration and the Governor were misrepresenting what happened, we had about 100 people there, and they all filed out except seventeen of us that were left. They said, "You know if you sign that thing you are signing your death warrant. You'll be fired from here immediately." We stayed and signed. I went home sick. My whole life was invested. I had a daughter in the middle of high school and I didn't have my Ph.D. and I was an instructor and didn't have tenure, and I thought, "You know, I could've just as easily gone out with the rest of those guys and been sensible. Why did I have to?" I was sick. I couldn't eat. But three or four days passed and that petition was published in the papers and nobody's head fell. Others came around and signed it until it got up to about sixty-four, and that sixty-four was the nucleus of the marching and all of that. I guess that was the only time in my life that I had clear-cut issues.

JONES: Black and white.

HARRINGTON: Yes.

JONES: What is the AAUP?

HARRINGTON: What is it?

JONES: Yes.

HARRINGTON: American Association of University Professors.

JONES: Let me ask you this. How long did it take for that controversy to die down? How long was it before you noticed a change in the students?

HARRINGTON: Well, the riot occurred in September of '62. Meredith was here a couple

of years, wasn't he? The whole time he was here things were tense. I'd say by the time of -- wasn't '64 the long hot summer?

JONES: Yes.

HARRINGTON: I think that broke the back -- well, it's my idea that the riot broke the back of the Citizens Council, so that it lost its momentum with the riot because people were so appalled at what had happened. I saw for the first time ever, since that had begun to build up, since Black Monday, I saw two or three members of the legislature get up and speak on the floor of the legislature saying this had been a mistake and a failure, that Ross Barnett was to blame. You know, it had been a monolith, and all of a sudden you saw a fissure, a crack. I told people then, "That is the undoing. If we had to put up with the riot, at least maybe we can get something good from it." The Citizens Council had been shamed out of existence almost. People began to pull up and say, "We can't have this kind of thing." They really couldn't believe that lawlessness could have gone that far. It lost its momentum at that point and then was on the defensive, and then the tide changed in the '64 summer. They were just overwhelmed. There were just so many protesters and visitors from the East shaming everybody that the people -- they would see it on TV all the time; that helped -- just got ashamed of being the focal point of disgust and national contempt. Then, of course, the national legislature in '65 passed all the laws.

JONES: The Voting Rights Bill.

HARRINGTON: And from the riot time on, the Mississippi Economic Council and a bunch of businessmen could point out, "This ain't good for business. Corporations aren't going to come down here." So I really think the old economic

instinct probably did more than anything else to bring Mississippi around to tolerate integration. It's come a long, long way. That is not to say -- I don't think there's ever going to be complete social integration. And I'm not concerned about that. You couldn't make these points to the segregationists in those days, that you weren't asking them to give up their rights to choose their friends. If you said, "Let a Negro vote or go to school, or have political or legal equality," they immediately -- and it got to be downright funny; you wondered if they wanted to get in bed with them because they'd say, "You're trying to have them sleep with our sisters." And still the oldest people, people in their mid to late seventies and early eighties, are just grudging for the most part. I don't think they've accepted integration yet. But the majority of the rest of people have seen that all their fears were fears and phobias and complete mistakes. So I'd say at least by the mid-'60s there'd been a turnaround.

JONES: Yes. It's even strange. By 1970, when I was in the ninth grade, desegregation, indeed total desegregation could happen, and come about peacefully. Mississippi had done a complete about-face, turned itself around completely to where black and white kids could go to school together. Did you notice a change in the typical Ole Miss coed of the 1970s as opposed to the 1960s? Was there a discernable change? Was there more open mind among students?

HARRINGTON: Yes.

JONES: Would you say that it was a different type college student?

HARRINGTON: Well, no. It was just that another acceptance had been added. I remember

when the second black came in. I was to teach a summer class. The head of campus security and the dean of students, Moak, escorted this black in, and for some reason they were late. Everybody had gone out of the class except this one girl. When she saw him out in the hall, she darted first to the right and then to the left and then to the back, and she moaned, "Oh, my God." And I said, "Oh, shut up!" She didn't know how to handle it, you know, and I didn't either. She was going to embarrass the man, and I wanted her to shut up. She wanted to get out of there and didn't know how to go. It was not -- I mean there was no principle involved in that thing. It was just that that had not been made a part of her repertoire of response. That's what I was trying to say. The girl is just the same Chi O or Tri Delt, you know, pretty and rather oblivious to things, having a good time and privileged, but being courteous to blacks is part of her repertoire now. No real big change. She'd been courteous to rednecks for years.

JONES: Yes. Still the same college girl in that poem that the college professor wrote: "To Aphrodite on your leaving...put your ear down next to the conch and see can you make out any noises."

HARRINGTON: Yes. Right.

JONES: To get back to where we started, I think in terms of literature and the Southern novel and Mississippi's great preponderance of great writers, this massive overnight change in terms of history, this complete reversal of sensibility that took place in the late 1960s, do you think this is going to have an affect on Mississippi being still a spawning ground for novelists and writers? Do you think this is going to change what was so

unique about Mississippi that Faulkner wrote about? Certainly there's a different Mississippi today.

HARRINGTON: Yes. It will be quite different. A good writer is going to write out of his experience, and his experience is motels and places like The Warehouse, this -- how would you characterize that?--this self-conscious decor kind of thing that is more or less standard. And with television and dope and pot, it's a quite different generation that is brewing. Which person picks it up will help define what the next Mississippi is. You know, Faulkner created an image of Mississippi that Mississippians were furious about. He said he was mostly writing about the human heart in conflict with itself. He wasn't trying to give a Chamber of Commerce rendition of the state, or either a sociological, properly indexed picture. It was the things that moved him deeply and he thought had universal significance; they happened to have the color of the South about them. Any good writer that we have is going to have the same kind of experience. Do you read much of Barry Hannah? I haven't read that Airships.

JONES: Geronimo Rex.

HARRINGTON: Yes. Now, Geronimo Rex was still more about race and that still is going to be because we've got, what, 37% blacks in the state. It's going to have to be. But it's going to be so different. It already is different in a novel like Joiner by James Whitehead. Faulkner couldn't have written that book. He couldn't have imagined that book, partly because he hadn't read Faulkner. Yes, I don't know what it will be, but it certainly will show...The mood of it is going to have to be different because there is not as much poverty, erosion. Just the physical look of the state in my

lifetime has absolutely been transformed. I drive through the state and marvel, because I remember not driving on gravel roads only-- those were our highways-- but sand trails that dipped down through streams. Now you go down these ribbons of concrete, and green green green everywhere you look-- not just the kudzu-- and nice brick houses where there were hovels, you know, where there were these unpainted farmhouses where the yeoman types lived because that was the best we had. I think Hannah, in that respect Geronimo Rex reflected some of the more urban nature. Even though he has that Gothic old madman in that haunted house where they are at college and in town, it's quite unlike the bucolic kind of life that an earlier generation of Mississippians portrayed.

JONES:

And as we become more and more homogenized we lose those things about Mississippi that made it the Deep South in small, what everybody had always thought of the Deep South. I was at the Governor's symposium during his inauguration and I heard Eduora Welty say about Greenville-- which is a cultural phenomenon-- that at one time when the town had a population of 20,000 people there were seventeen published authors there. You know, there is a question about what it is in this state that could have produced that many writers, and in one place to boot.

HARRINGTON:

I took my turn, I think everybody has to take his turn at trying to explain that phenomenon. I published this article in the Delta Review some years ago. I think that writers of Faulkner's generation and even of Welty's, and to some extent of mine, had a certain kind of innocence. They weren't in the cocktail party circuit in New York City or London or Paris, and they read a masterpiece by Dostoyevsky or Conrad or Tolstoy,

and they thought, "That is a masterpiece," you know, and it didn't get the confetti of small talk and party chatter saying, "Oh, well, Tolstoy's passe now." I heard Robert Frost say in 1956, "Tolstoy was a great talent, and a great confusion." This was at an intellectual gathering that Mississippians don't get into very often, or didn't in that generation, and don't still very much. They had a respect for the word and for novels and short stories and for writing. It was possible to write something that had, they felt, we felt, significance. With that went the fact of loving words. That was your chief escape from boredom, which was my other point in the article. There wasn't anything to do! You couldn't drop in and catch the latest opera or something as you could do in New York or any of those other places of civilization. And usually the writing type, the book reading type, is not going to care a lot for football and baseball. That was about the only entertainment we had, that and church socials. So you read. You learned to love the words. You thought they had genuine and lasting significance. It was a kind of monument if you wrote it and got it right. You escaped from boredom. And you also didn't have yourself distracted by literary gossip and politics. I think that had a lot to do with it. I don't think I would have ever written The Prisoners if I had realized what odds were against its ever getting published. When I found it out through getting that one published, I guess I was not as sanguine about undertaking another one.

JONES: Is that why we never have seen another one of your novels published?

HARRINGTON: I really don't know. I've tried. Of course, I've published three novels under a psuedonym, but they were done hastily.

JONES: I've never known that.

HARRINGTON: You didn't know that?

JONES: No.

HARRINGTON: Yes. Well, I don't tell the psuedonym. There're some people who think they have sleuthed it out, but I don't acknowledge it. I suspect that the second one of those is the best thing I've done. A handful of my closest friends say that that book is the best book I've written.

JONES: Can you tell us the title-- just kidding.

HARRINGTON: I wrote it hurriedly. I used a lot of people rather literally; I didn't disguise them very much. They are still around and I'd just as soon not. At the time too I was writing mostly for money. You could write ten thousand words and an outline and get a \$2,000 advance back when \$2,000 was about like \$5,000 would be now. I got started that way, but by the time I wrote the second one I saw that I could have a lot of fun and they would still buy the thing and pay me the money. I did some things I'm right pleased with then. I guess I put some of my energy in that way. Then I got hung up on a riot novel, a novel about the riot. I tried to write that three different times and got sometimes 120 to 150 pages and I'd realize I was still angry and I had the good guys and the bad guys and I didn't have my perspective. Then I got more and more into academia and teaching. Then I had divorce in my life and a new marriage and a completely new experience of a kind of communication that I hadn't ever known before. That made me reassess everything from my relationship to God on down. I haven't given up writing. I think maybe in a couple of years, when my term as chairman is up and I can go back to having some

more time, I hope to do a good deal more writing.

JONES: Do you suppose you'll ever write that riot novel?

HARRINGTON: I don't imagine so. I know that that experience will alter anything I do write. You know, the kind of bizarre impressions I got showed me more how to imagine reality. It's just the thing you wouldn't ever imagine! That's what's significant and memorable about an experience like that. It educated my imagination a great deal.

JONES: When were you appointed Chairman of the English Department?

HARRINGTON: January a year ago, I believe. No, it was the previous fall I was appointed Acting Chairman, and then January a year ago, Chairman.

JONES: Do you all have a revolving chairmanship, or whatever you call it?

HARRINGTON: No, we don't. Every four years there's a review and the chairman can be relieved or he can step down or he can be continued.

JONES: I want to say something on the tape about what you're doing here, which is certainly different from when I was here. This semester you have Willie Morris on campus as writer-in-residence, and I understand he's the first one.

HARRINGTON: Yes. Well, we had Elizabeth Spencer, but she was not really called writer-in-residence. She was just starting as a novelist. She taught creative writing here. So I guess, yes, the first writer-in-residence who has that relationship to the University, instead of being fully employed.

JONES: Was it your idea to get Willie to come down, or tell me how that happened?

HARRINGTON: Larry Wells, who got his Ph.D. here some years ago, and who is married to Faulkner's niece, Dean-- Larry and Dean went to hear Willie at Southern. Willie had already sent me a message that he would be interested in

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teaching here a semester, that he wanted to come back down to Mississippi. This he told them. They came back and brought the message, and I said, "That would be great. We'll see. We don't have any money for a position. I don't know how it can be done, but I'd love for him to do it." So Larry Wells began to talk to people and call people in Yazoo City, Willie's home, and elsewhere in the Delta, and asked if they would contribute to it. He worked up a contributor's list that was very impressive. It looked like we could probably raise the funds on the outside. We wrote Willie and asked him. We proposed a certain salary and a certain teaching situation, and he agreed to it. Then Rufus Jones at the Office of Development, with the names that Larry Wells had given him and then names that some of those people gave, it kind of snowballed, and we brought it in. The only credit I could take for that would be being responsive to it and being very happy to aid it in any way that I could. This I did engineer: we're certain to have Ellen Douglas here in the fall. We hope to have her one semester every year. There's talk that Willie's going to stay here. It's not talk that he's going to stay here; he is going to stay here after his semester with us is up. He's going to rent a place in town and stay until he finishes his novel, which could be into next year. We've talked to him. Our Chancellor's interested in having him stay with us, but he doesn't want to teach on a permanent basis. He would like to do it in the spring, and that would be a very good combination.

JONES: I'm surprised he intends to stay in the South that long, but I guess he's decided it's time to come back.

HARRINGTON: Yes.

JONES: I think it's wonderful that you are able to get these things done for the University.

HARRINGTON: We have hired in the last two years, three years, six people who among them have published eight books and eighty articles and who are fine teachers. I've got the reports from the student evaluation, and they get very fine reports. You always hear that people who publish steal their time from the students and are not really interested in teaching, but these people get extremely good results from the student evaluations. Also, there's a way to sense good teaching if you've been around a campus a long time; you can tell by the way the students go into the class, the amount of enrollment, and the way they are talking as they walk down the halls. This department is in the best shape professionally and personally that it's been in thirty years that I know of.

JONES: That's really exciting. We're about to run out of tape, and it's about 5:00, so I want to say before I turn it off that I appreciate you sitting and talking with me. If there's ever anything that you want to get in the form of a permanent record, just call me and I'll come back and we can sit and talk again. I've enjoyed it.

HARRINGTON: Okay. I've enjoyed it too.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by John Jones)

(Final Copy Typed by Janice F. Porter)

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