

JOHN C. STENNIS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Department of History  
Mississippi State University

Interview

with

Joseph E. Wroten

by

Jeff Sainsbury

March 31, 1992

## PREFACE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Jeff Sainsbury for the John C. Stennis Oral History Project of Mississippi State University. Jeff Sainsbury transcribed the tape. Dr. Jeff Broadwater and Jeff Sainsbury edited the transcript.

This interview is with Mr. Joseph E. Wroten of Aberdeen, Mississippi. Mr. Wroten was state Representative for Greenville, Mississippi, from 1952 to 1963.

Readers of this oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word. The transcript is intended to preserve the informal, conversational style that is common to oral history. Mississippi State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir or for the views and opinions expressed therein.

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Sainsbury: To begin, Mr. Wroten, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your background before you became a [State] Representative in the early 1950s.

Wroten: I would be pleased to do that. I am a native of Mississippi, having been born in 1925 in a Methodist Parsonage in the town of New Albany, Mississippi. My late father was a Methodist minister from the early part of this century until he died eleven days before the Kennedy assassination in 1963. I grew up, as do most preacher's sons, in the Methodist tradition by moving from one place to another, all in north Mississippi about every four to six years, as the case might be. So, variously, I lived at the communities of New Albany, Indianola - where I was during the 1927 Mississippi river flood - Water Valley, Mississippi, soon after the Depression actuated the closing of the Illinois Central railroad shops in the early 1930s. Thereafter [we lived] at Corinth, during the time when the Pickwick Dam was being built on the Tennessee River, just across the Tennessee state line from northeast Mississippi; and from there, in the late

1930s we migrated to Columbus, Mississippi. We went there in 1938 and I went all the way through high school at Columbus, which is near Aberdeen. And during my senior year in high school, when I was sixteen years of age, we experienced the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In other words, I was a high school senior at the time when Pearl Harbor was bombed. And having started school at the age of five I was about to graduate, which I did, after I had barely turned seventeen years of age, which is a little young for Mississippi tracking of students. I don't know how it came about that I started school at Water Valley when I was five, but I did, and so soon after Pearl Harbor, on February 28, 1942, I turned seventeen years of age and graduated in May of that year from Steven D. Lee High School at Columbus, Mississippi. Incidentally, my class mates and I will be coming back there in April of 1992 for our fiftieth graduation anniversary. With the war upon us I elected to enter college as soon as I could knowing that I would be involved in the armed forces in some manner, and I wanted to get as much college education as I could, with the oncoming of the war. So, in June of 1942 I entered Millsaps College at Jackson, Mississippi, a four-year liberal arts,

Methodist Church- related college. I voluntarily elected to enlist in the United States Naval Reserve program in the fall of that year while I was a student at Millsaps College, before I had attained my eighteenth birthday. The type of program in which I enrolled was a reserve program called V1 at that time. The college that I was attending became the site of a V12 college program, that is a Navy V12 program. I was involved in the initial class of persons enrolled in that program by transferring from the V1 program, as the Navy called it, to the V12 program, and so I proceeded to be in uniform as an apprentice seaman, continuing my college classes during the time of the V12 Navy college program at Millsaps for one additional year. The program, I should say, started up on July 1, 1943, and I was there in that one full year at Millsaps. During those two years, going twelve months a year, I tried to achieve as many college credits as I could, and was quite successful in that. So that after leaving Millsaps to go to the United States Naval Reserve Midshipman School at Northwestern University in Chicago, I was able to transfer back the college credits from the midshipman program of four months to add to my Millsaps credits and to get my four year college

degree accorded by Millsaps College on the basis of two years and four months of actual college work. It was sent to me in absentia in that I was already a young naval officer overseas in the Pacific arena. When I got my college degree at the next graduation time I didn't march down the aisle, but I was mailed my diploma, in effect. I was in the Navy a total - counting the reserve time at college - of thirty-eight months. I was primarily involved in the latter stages of the Philippines operation and I was at Okinawa at the time when the two atomic bombs were dropped and the Japanese officials capitulated. But then I spent another year after the war ended in 1945 in occupation duty in the Navy in Japanese waters, and did this a good bit on the Japanese home islands. In mid-summer, 1946, I became eligible under the Navy points system to be returned to the United States and processed out of active duty in the Navy, although I remained in the organized naval reserve for several years after that. I did come home. One of the lines of demarcation in my life was in connection with a decision I had made while I was in the Navy overseas to change my career aspiration from that of being a medical doctor - having pursued a pre-med course at Millsaps - to becoming

an attorney. So even before I came back from overseas I applied for admission to the Law School at the University of Mississippi. I was accepted and entered law school in the fall of 1946. Incidentally, that was coincident with the coming to the University of Mississippi of a new Chancellor, J. D. Williams, who was one of the outstanding Chancellors of that university. The law school curriculum was a three school-year curriculum but, again, as I had done at Millsaps, I elected to double-up and take as many units as I could - semester hours - going summer and winter, and so I was able to complete my law school curriculum of three years within a two year calendar period of time. Therefore, I graduated from law school with the Ole Miss law school class of August 1948, having enrolled in September of 1946. In the meantime, my family, which had been at Columbus, where I had went to high school from 1938 to 1944, had migrated to Greenville, all the way across the state. Greenville, located on the Mississippi river, was on the verge of a great surge of economic growth. It was beginning to capitalize on the fact that it was a river port city and river traffic, tow-boat and barge construction, and commerce was becoming quite

prominent, and it was a bustling, growing city. Being introduced to Greenville by virtue of the fact that my parents were living there, having come over from Columbus in 1944, I selected Greenville as the place where I would like to hang-out my shingle and practice law. I opened my law office at Greenville on September 1, 1948 as a solo practitioner and remained in the private practice of law at Greenville for twelve years on the basis of individual practice, that is, not involved in a law firm involving other persons. On November 1, 1960, however, two other attorneys and I chose to form a law partnership, those attorneys being J. David Orlansky, who is presently one of the two full-time United States magistrates for the Northern district of Mississippi and the federal court system. The other being Hainon A. Miller who is currently serving in the Mississippi State Senate. I believe that he is currently serving as chairman of the Judiciary Committee in the Mississippi State Senate. Those two and I formed a law partnership which lasted for ten years. I left that firm because I was elected to the county judgeship of Washington County for the first of three consecutive terms during 1970.

Sainsbury: Could I come back to that in a moment, Mr. Wroten.



What I would like to ask you now is about your time as a [state] Representative. I understand that you first ran in 1952. Is that correct?

Wroten: I first began to serve as a Representative in 1952 in the month of January.

Sainsbury: Had you attempted to become elected before that?

Wroten: Oh, no. What I mean by that is that the election was in 1951 and I simply was installed in office as a Representative representing Washington County in the Mississippi House of Representatives in January of 1952, after the election that had preceded that in 1951. I was re-elected two additional times and so as it resulted I served twelve consecutive years as a Representative in the Mississippi legislature. Three four-year terms and my term of office expired at the end of 1963 after I had been defeated for re-election in the Summer of 1963.

Sainsbury: What made you run for the seat in the first place? Had you always been politically ambitious?

Wroten: There had not been an overpowering ambition to serve in public office, but from my formative years I suppose that I had been interested in government and politics and a vacancy came along in the House delegation from Washington county at a time when I simply pondered the question of whether or not that would be a good place for me to be involved in

governmental service in some significant way, and I chose to run for election. So that [is the] sort of way it began. I have never had a burning zeal to hold public elective office throughout a whole career or a lifetime. I was doing this on the basis of weaving that kind of service into, I would hope, a balanced life in which I make some contribution to society.

Sainsbury: Was it around this time that you met Senator Stennis for the first time?

Wroten: I had become acquainted with Senator Stennis at the time when he was running for the United States Senate for the first time, and as I recall I was still a student at Ole Miss law school at the time when I met Senator Stennis. [I] was engaged in several conversations with Senator Stennis in that kind of atmosphere, and I would see him at public gatherings from time to time thereafter and he was always cordial to say a few words with me and to discuss anything that I had on my mind.

Sainsbury: How did you come to meet him initially? Did someone introduce you to him?

Wroten: I chose to walk up to introduce myself when he was speaking at Ole Miss on one occasion.

Sainsbury: Do you remember what he was speaking about?

Wroten: The issues of the day. We were in the post-World

War II period and he was always not only a politician in the finest sense of that word but, in my judgement, a statesman, and he would speak about loftier issues of contemporary history during that period of time. He seemed to have a grasp of what was happening in the world as well as in the nation and in his native state. He had served as a circuit judge in a part of the state where my father, whom I mentioned earlier as having been a Methodist minister, served in his role as a Methodist minister; namely, my father served at Louisville, Mississippi as pastor of the First Methodist church from 1950 to 1956. And Senator Stennis' home was at Dekalb which is not a great distance from Louisville. In some way or other my late father and Senator Stennis became acquainted and they were men who easily engaged in conversation because of the kind of moral and ethical values that they shared. So, although I had met Senator Stennis, as I mentioned, a couple of years before my father went to Louisville, that contact through my father reinforced the conviviality and the easiness of my subsequent conversations with Senator Stennis on through the decades.

Sainsbury: Do you remember anything about the 1947 election?

Wroten: I remember it as being one of the few elections in this century which you might describe as a wide open election; that is, when there is not a question of unseating a deeply entrenched incumbent and in which there are several candidates and the voters have what I would call using a very crude analogy to computers, a user friendly atmosphere for voters. The voter would be in the driver's seat in that type of a situation. And so in that connotation the candidates made themselves accessible to the people in various public gatherings and forums and so forth, and it seemed that the University of Mississippi, where I was attending law school, was a particularly attractive forum for the candidates. One of the reasons for that was that the campus was crowded with thousands of returning veterans of World War II, and those veterans were more mature than your average college student. They were interested in political matters, interested in voting, interested in influencing others in their votes, and so we enjoyed what you might call a bonanza of attention from the candidates during that period of time.

Sainsbury: Was there any opposition to Stennis at Ole Miss because of the fact that he was a graduate of Mississippi State?

Wroten: None. That element was not involved, according to my perceptions, in the student body at Ole Miss.

Sainsbury: With reference to the 1947 election, it has been said that there were some electoral irregularities. Were you aware at the time of anything of that nature going on?

Wroten: No. This is news to me.

Sainsbury: I don't think it was anything major, but there have been rumors circulating that there were a few irregularities that may have influenced the election.

Wroten: I may not have perfect memory in that respect, but nothing at all stands out in my mind about election irregularities in that election.

Sainsbury: You say it was a very open race, and it was. Stennis was very much regarded as an outsider until very late in the race...

Wroten: I think it was more that he was not as well known earlier in the race than he became with his sense of presence, the way he could grasp the attention of an audience with his scholarly and courtly manner, his obvious integrity. Those attributes, I think, brought him up to the surface of attention. He had not been a politician prior to that. He had been a circuit judge and I believe a prosecuting attorney and he had practiced law. But he was not

a professional politician. So in that sense he may not have been as well known when he started into that campaign.

Sainsbury: Turning to yourself now. In 1954 the Brown decision unleashed a lot of hysteria in the South on the issue of desegregation and ushered in a period of what has been called "massive resistance" in Mississippi. You were one of the few politicians of that period [in the state] to dissent from the prevailing orthodoxy. I am interested in finding out why you did speak up against what was taking place in the state.

Wroten: You are absolutely correct in that throughout the whole period of time which embraced the time of Brown v Board of Education through the crisis on the campus at Ole Miss, when Governor Barnett mounted a massive resistance effort against the federal authorities for the admission of James Meredith, a black man, to the University of Mississippi. Throughout that time I was outspoken and extremely active and aggressive in trying to present the other view - against the massive resistance view. Indeed, my stance was that of trying to go in a positive direction to make for an inclusive society and to respect the brotherhood of all persons regardless of race.

Sainsbury: Had you always been a critic of segregation?

Wroten: Yes. I might illustrate it with a vignette or so [from] earlier in my life. I mentioned the fact that I was the son of a Methodist preacher. I went to Sunday school and church and I learned things that Christians are taught. A lot of those things I learned at my mothers knee. She taught me about the mission program of our church and how it served all peoples whether they were in Africa or wherever they were. Well, I believed what I was taught. So, I remember when I was just a small child, around the age of first or second grade, on the streets of Water Valley, Mississippi. I had occasion to see some taunting of a black man by some white men. It gave me a sense of moral revulsion at that young age of five or six. Skipping on up to the time when I served in the United States Navy in World War II, I was on a landing ship - it was a landing ship medium, so classified. The number of it was LSM 292. I was the junior officer of five officers aboard that ship and, as the youngest and most junior officer -- the commanding officer was a prejudiced man from Boston, Massachusetts it turned out -- I was assigned a number of collateral duties that he preferred not to assign to others. One of those

duties was that in the light of the fact that we were too small to have a ship's chaplain, and he knew of my church background as a preacher's son, he asked me to conduct the worship services for the ship with a full compliment of 60 to 65 persons on Sundays mornings. Well, I started doing that and the first Sunday one of the black steward's mates on the ship asked me for permission to attend the service, and I said 'yes, indeed.' The commanding officer from Boston heard about that. He summoned me to his cabin to dress me down about it. Well, I considered myself reasonably intelligent, and one of my other collateral duties was to keep up with the Navy regulations and keep them posted, and I had read the Navy regulations. I knew that he couldn't force me to conduct religious services in the first place and so very carefully avoiding any problem with respect to a court martial, or anything of that nature, I tried in a straight forward manner to advise the commanding officer that if I conducted the worship services on a voluntary basis -- which it had to be because I was not a chaplain under orders -- that the black steward's mates would be included in the services. When I told him that he paused for a moment, sat down, remained silent from then on about the topic,



and they attended the services every time we had a church service on that ship. I'm speaking about the period of time in about 1944 or 1945, after I had graduated from midshipman school in 1944. So these two illustrations -- from childhood and my wartime experience, a decade before I served in the Mississippi legislature -- will lay the groundwork for why when Brown v. Board of Education came along, I looked on it as a righteous, just thing that was being done by the United States Supreme Court. I was indeed in a very small minority, not only in the Mississippi legislature, but in the state of Mississippi generally.

Sainsbury: You mentioned that your Christian upbringing had something to do with your attitudes on fairness and equal treatment with regard to race. But many people in Mississippi would have had a similar kind of Christian upbringing, or at least would have been exposed to those ideas at the church they attended. I'm wondering why you were so different, why you didn't succumb to the pressures to conform.

Wroten: May I partially answer that question with a rhetorical question? Why is it that some few members of the United States Congress did not write bad checks on the House bank while most others did? You get around to individual choice, individual

conscience. The way one individual is unique. One person thinks one way, another...I would suppose in the light of subsequent history that it may be that [the reason] there were not more people who took the same position that I did -- and interpret my duty in terms of race relations -- may lay in the fact that they were not provided the atmosphere and the opportunity to do that in those days as they have since the voting rights legislation and some of the other developments that in a practical way brought about complete integration of Mississippi society. You don't see people nowadays -- only a few -- who would not sit in the same restaurant with black people or work alongside black people or accord black people the same rights and privileges as others. Why? It may have been triggered by the legal transformation that took place, but I think gradually more and more people have been exposed to an atmosphere and an environment in which this is just deemed by society to be the right thing to do. Even in Mississippi.

Sainsbury: At any time in your career as a Representative did you feel under any pressure to conform?

Wroten: None.

Sainsbury: Attempts must have been made to change your mind.

Wroten: Oh, yes. All the way from acts of persuasion,

cajoling, catcalls, threats, intimidation, threats against my life and my wife's life, the whole gamut of things were tried.

Sainsbury: I wanted to ask you about that. It must have taken a great deal of courage at that time in Mississippi to say the things that you did and to take the stands that you did. Could you tell me in a little more detail what sort of personal hostility you were subjected to.

Wroten: Illustratively, I might respond by saying that from time to time when I would be speaking at the podium or the well of the Mississippi House of Representatives I might be interrupted by epithets, racial epithets thrown at me by my colleagues in the House of Representatives.

Sainsbury: What kind of epithets?

Wroten: They would use the crude words for black people followed by the word 'lover.' They would suggest that I was not sticking up for the white race. They would say "when word gets back to your people they gonna take care of you." Things like that, on the floor of the House of Representatives. In terms of other settings, at home in Greenville my wife and I would receive intimidating and threatening telephone calls as to what might happen to us if I didn't change my vote or if I didn't

vote a certain way on some issue that was upcoming in the legislature. There were bombings going on. My brother was then chairman of the Department of Religion at Millsaps College and lived in Jackson. A Rabbi [who] lived next door to my brother, his house was bombed and my brother was threatened. I was a friend of the Hodding Carter family in Greenville. There was a bomb or dynamite placed at the gate post of Feliciana, the home of the elder Mr. Carter, Hodding Carter Jr., the father of Hodding Carter III, who is the commentator who appears on the Brinkley show from time to time and was former Assistant Secretary of State. There were all sorts of things like this going on and in general just in conversations with fellow lawyers or with people generally there would be all sorts of epithets thrown my way. And on occasions when I would be home on a weekend from a legislative session during the week, one of the older lawyers would summon me to his office and tell me that he was just disgusted with me and fed up [that] I wasn't representing the people of my county and I'd better straighten out and fly right. Things like that.

Sainsbury: How did you respond?

Wroten: Politely, but negatively. I would typically say "I

just have to vote according to the way my conscience leads me on that bill."

Sainsbury: You obviously took these threats seriously. Were you aware of who was making these threats at the time?

Wroten: In some instances, yes. The open threats, obviously. And I was widely acquainted...I was able to infer the sources on others. And I would get threatening letters which were not completely anonymous, informing me that I would die on such and such a day. Things of this nature.

Sainsbury: Would they be well-respected people, leaders of the community or would they be ordinary members of the public?

Wroten: The threats, subtle, overt, and whatever, would come from the whole range of society. All types. There was no doubt about it, a vast majority of the populace of Mississippi [was] involved in the effort toward massive resistance of any degree of desegregation or integration. And with many of those people these views were lifetime views, long-held, and change didn't come easily to them.

Sainsbury: Who in the legislature did you receive most hostility from during debates?

Wroten: Probably the most active in debate in terms of obvious hostility was the late Thompson McClennan

of West Point who was serving as a point man floor chairman for most of the segregation legislation of that era. Others involved were Francis Gohagen, who later served in a state office years after he left the legislature. There was just outright opposition, unaccompanied by threats, from the former speaker of the Mississippi House, Buddy Newman and also from a former chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Charlie Jacobs. I'm underscoring the fact that neither of those persons, Newman or Jacobs, made any threats although they bitterly opposed the positions I took and went out of their way to make that clear. Neither of those gentlemen ever made any threat, subtle or otherwise, to me. But they were among those who reinforced the atmosphere in which others felt freer to make threats against me and my wife. I've not named a number of personages of the era, but essentially it involved the leadership of the Mississippi House of Representatives, the Mississippi Senate, most of the state officeholders of that day. They would not have elected me to anything.

Sainsbury: You've talked about the people that you "crossed swords with," and that was most of the people in the legislature. But were there any members in the

House or Senate who perhaps wouldn't say anything in public, but would come up to you behind the scenes and say "well I would like to have said something but I just can't."

Wroten: Yes. A very large percentage of the Mississippi House of Representatives was composed of those individual representatives who probably held views fairly close to my views but who, for overt political reasons back home, didn't feel free to vote the same way I did or to speak the same way I did. But they would come by after a session would adjourn in the late afternoon, stop by my desk for a visit, and frankly tell me so; they thanked me for my having articulated their innermost views and yearned for a circumstance where they could take the same position and go back home.

Sainsbury: Who were some of these people?

Wroten: Well, I'd have to search my recollection now to identify individuals. But I could if given some time.

Sainsbury: But there were a good number?

Wroten: There were a substantial number.

Sainsbury: What did you think of that. You were speaking up for what you believed was right, and these people wanted to speak but felt they couldn't. How did you regard them?

Wroten: Well, I considered myself perhaps sufficiently experienced in human nature to understand their fears, their concerns, and their outright shortcomings in terms of persevering with what they knew was right. And so I didn't consider it my role to sit in judgement on them. So all I could do would be to wish that they had summoned up enough strength and fortitude to vote the way they really thought. It was more a sense of sadness than it was any other type of competition.

Sainsbury: During your time in the House did you come to meet Senator Stennis again?

Wroten: Yes, indeed. I'd be glad to share something about that. For one thing, Senator Stennis was a popular speaker at civic functions and things of this nature, and occasionally he would speak perhaps to a joint meeting of the civic clubs at Greenville where I was practicing law while in the legislature at the same time. And I would get a chance to speak to him, though not at length on those types of occasions, but kept up my acquaintanceship with him. Then came a time in the early 1960s, before I left the legislature in late 1963....

END OF SIDE ONE, BEGIN SIDE TWO

Wroten: Then came a time during the early 1960s, while I was still a member of the Mississippi legislature,



prior to my departure at the end of 1963 or in January of 1964, when I was visiting Washington, D.C. for a church board meeting, of which I was a member. I was then a member of the general board of Christian Social Concerns of the Methodist Church. It was a group which acted as the social conscience of our great denomination, and I was an active member of that. While in Washington, I went to pay a courtesy call on Senator Stennis at his office in the Senate office building. And I saw that there was crowd of people waiting to see him in the anteroom and I thought "Oh no, I won't get to speak to him." But his receptionist took my name into Senator Stennis and he had her escort me just inside his door ahead of all of those other people waiting and he came bounding over to me with his great big bear hand and grabbed me by the hand and almost wrung it off. He told me how glad he was to see me and ... that he had been reading the Mississippi newspapers and he had been following the Mississippi news through his agents in Mississippi. He had been noticing the stands that I had taken since 1952 really, and [had] accentuated after Brown v Board in literally thousands of votes on the questions involving race relations that were coming through the legislature

during those years. ...That particularly he had noticed how I had been fighting the white Citizen's Council on issues such as their trying to get the legislature to channel public tax monies to their efforts through various mechanisms, such as the State Sovereignty Commission and other endeavors. Indeed, they even were trying to fund out of tax monies -- and I think they did -- a speaking tour by a man named Myers G. Lohman who was a renegade Methodist from Cincinnati whose views were extremely arch-conservative, roughly the equivalent of John Birch-type views or white Citizen's Council views. They did subsidize a speaking tour by him throughout the state of Mississippi. Well, Senator Stennis had watched how I had fought them in my role as a Representative and in my private life as a layman in my church, how I had been fighting that kind of thing within the church. And he said he just wanted me to know that, although he had not deemed it appropriate for him personally to say the same things I was saying publicly because he felt that he could be more effective by staying in the Senate and being available to vote on some of the climactic issues of the day.

Sainsbury: Did he feel that he would be defeated if he had spoken out?

Wroten: Yes. I think he was saying to me that he felt that if he took the same stance as I was taking that he would be defeated for re-election as Senator, which was otherwise unheard of in those days. He was at the zenith of his prowess and political power at that time. So, he was very frank with me. He told me that he had chosen not to take that path, but he wanted to tell me that he prayed for me every night and the positions that I was taking and [he] urged me to keep the strength to keep on saying the things and voting the way I did and taking the stands that I did.

Sainsbury: On the previous occasions you had met Senator Stennis, when you were making stands against segregation, the Citizen's Council, and the Sovereignty Commission, did he ever... [pause] As I was saying, when you met Senator Stennis on previous occasions before this meeting in 1964...

Wroten: Excuse me. It was prior to 1964. It was some time between 1960 and 1963, and it was during the Ross Barnett gubernatorial administration which ran from 1960 to 1964. It was while I was still in the legislature so it would not have been after the end of 1963.

Sainsbury: On other occasions that you met him, did he ever criticize the stances that you were making or

disagree?

Wroten: Never. No. Not the slightest hint of any disagreement. He seemed to feel impelled to let me know that he agreed with the stances I was taking.

Sainsbury: Senator Stennis made a number of speeches at Citizen's Council meetings but from what we can gather he was never a member..

Wroten: I doubt that he was a member, because in that same conversation in his office in Washington he said, among other things, "keep on fighting those white Citizen's Councilors with all you got."

Sainsbury: So he was definitely opposed to what they were doing?

Wroten: Yes. Explicitly.

Sainsbury: Was he opposed to their objectives or more their methods?

Wroten: I'm not unmindful of the fact that Senator Stennis publicly took positions and made speeches which on technical diagnosis would make someone who did not know him, in the sense of my private meeting with him in that office, feel that he was just as much a part of the segregationist apparatus as anyone. It's just my feeling, overall having watched him closely all through that time, that he yearned for an opportunity to take a different stance.

Sainsbury: What you are saying is that he would like to have

been more liberal on the race issue but his constituency prevented him from doing that?

Wroten: Exactly. He felt constrained by the pragmatic necessities, as he saw it, to stay in public office. And I suppose that one of the things that made him want to stay in the position that he did in Washington [was] that occasionally he could strike a blow for justice. He was one of the few United States Senators, for example, who publicly took a stand against Senator Joe McCarthy's tactics. He couldn't have done that, in his mind, if he lost his power base back home.

Sainsbury: Do you think that applied to a lot of politicians in Mississippi at the time?

Wroten: Yes, I think so. Senator Stennis was probably the foremost of those in our congressional delegation. Frank Smith, I think, when he went to Congress from Mississippi, took public positions somewhat like Senator Stennis did on such issues, but he also, I think, had the same deep, secret, personal views that would lead in another direction, toward progress in race relations.

Sainsbury: You mentioned just now that some legislators would come to you and say they agreed with what you were saying but they couldn't say it publicly themselves. Did any other whites in the community

give you any support?

Wroten: Yes. Particularly in Greenville where I lived. Greenville is the county seat of Washington County which has been known throughout Mississippi history as one of the more liberal counties basically. To illustrate that, at the time of the Civil War the delegate from Washington County voted against secession at the Mississippi secession convention. And so it's rooted in history. In the 1920s, when the Ku Klux Klan was resurgent across the South, an effort was made by the Klan to take over Washington County, but a prominent author, William Alexander Percy, who wrote Lanterns on the Levee, during the 1920s made a statement publicly that if anyone wearing a white sheet walked down Washington Avenue -- the main drag in Greenville -- that he'd fill them full of buckshot. That typified the leadership position in Washington County. So, the Klan did not become resurgent in that county even though it did across much of the South. And in the 1930s Hodding Carter came there, having been literally run out of Louisiana by Huey Long, and a group of prominent Greenville businessmen subsidized his newspaper operation as he started-up there, and he became legendary. He won a Pulitzer prize for taking a stand about the Nisei camps of

World War II vintage, in a sense a race relations editorial stance, that won him the Pulitzer prize. He went ahead - that was William Hodding Carter Jr., the first of the Carter editors at Greenville. When the racial division was attacked through Brown v Board of Education, at first Carter was taking a sort of "separate but equal" position, but he gradually evolved to when he died, about fifteen to twenty years ago, he had come over to being a very positive supporter of inclusiveness. His son, on the other hand, was always forthright and an outright advocate of integration, doing away with the segregation barriers and so forth, and he really began to run the newspaper for his father in the late 1950s. When he got out of Princeton - he came back home. And so, throughout the 1960s the newspaper there, the Delta Democratic Times, was under the leadership of the younger Carter who was much more liberal than his father was, although a lot of people, I think, still think that his father won the Pulitzer prize for advocacy of a pro-integration stance in race relations; it was about the Japanese Americans who were forcibly removed from their homes and put in the Nisei camps. He came along, too, and he eventually became, as I said, much more liberal himself on the race

question.

Sainsbury: Did you confer with him at all about what was going on in the state?

Wroten: They were among my closest personal friends and have remained so. On one occasion during the Jimmy Carter administration, while young Hodding, Hodding III, was serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Public Relations and became the spokesman for the State Department in the nightly briefings about the condition of the American hostages in Iran; he was the spokesman during that time. During that period of time I had occasion to be in Washington and enjoyed a visit to his home on a Saturday for a seafood gumbo dinner that evening. I was privileged to be there when there were five Assistant Secretaries of State in his home. His wife was one of them and he was one and, as I recall the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs was there, one or two others. His wife was the Assistant Secretary of State for Social Policies or whatever, I forget the exact title.

Sainsbury: That's Patt Dorian?

Wroten: Patt Dorian, yes. We've maintained our friendship through the years. I see him only rarely now when he's back home.

Sainsbury: Aside from Hodding Carter, who else in the



community supported you?

Wroten: I had surprising support, given the political stands I was taking, from a lot of the leadership of the community. As I say, historically it has been a more liberal county than other counties in Mississippi, although within the 1980s, after the Carters sold the newspaper and young Rodding went to Washington, although his mother remained behind, Greenville and Washington County have gone in a decidedly conservative direction. The leadership there is probably arch-conservative now.

Sainsbury: Did you have any contact at this time with black leaders or black organizations in the Delta and the state at large?

Wroten: Oh yes. As a matter of fact after I had been one of two members of the legislature to fight Governor Barnett on the Meredith case - that was in the fall of 1962. The following summer I was defeated for re-election in Washington County, even though it was relatively liberal. But very shortly thereafter, in the same decade, I was elected chairman of the Washington County Democratic Executive Committee on an inclusive slate, a black and white Executive Committee. And in that role we went to the Mississippi state Democratic convention in Jackson, this was 1968, a very

climactic year in presidential politics and assassinations. Our inclusive group took stances at the state convention which were pro-integration, pro-racial inclusiveness, and so we were on the outside of the leadership of the state convention, but we formed our own delegation to go to the Chicago Democratic convention in 1968, and in a credentials fight we succeeded in prevailing over the old guard conservative delegation composed of the congressional delegation and the governor and others from Mississippi, and we were the ones who were seated. It was a racially inclusive delegation from Mississippi that was seated at Chicago in 1968. I was a member of that group.

Sainsbury: That was the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party?

Wroten: No. The Freedom Democratic Party had gone to Atlantic City in 1964 and had waged a credentials fight there.

Sainsbury: Were you involved in that?

Wroten: I was not in the Freedom Democratic Party. I was in the Loyalist Democrats, which was a racially integrated group, which was far more successful politically than the Freedom Democratic Party was.

Sainsbury: How would you have differed ideologically from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party?

Wroten: I guess, in terms of maybe an approach to things.

For example, historically, my role has been up-front in public places like the legislature, in church, community meetings, things of that nature, and in just stances that I take publicly. I have never been one to get involved in street demonstrations and so forth and I had the feeling that the Freedom Democratic Party was more inclined to a different style, a different approach. Although I respected their right to take those approaches, it just wasn't my thing, to go that route. But, I think our ultimate goals were probably the same.

Sainsbury: Prior to your involvement in the Loyalist Democrats, what contact did you have with black leaders?

Wrotten: One area of contact was in my church. In 1958 there was a Methodist convocation for human relations held on the campus of Southern Methodist University in Dallas. I went with a group from my church conference in North Mississippi, some of whom had never had an opportunity for contact with black people, even in the church. And it was in the setting of the human relations conference that they became acquainted with the black Methodist leaders from our own geographic area. I had known them personally many years before that. For

example, when I was a student at law school at Ole Miss in the 1940s, just after I got out of the naval service, I would go with racially integrated student groups from Ole Miss to Rust College at Holly Springs for Methodist meetings which also were sort of an escapade in terms of danger or whatever in those days. And so I had met a lot of those same leaders in that connotation. But, we built on that and some new black leaders had come along in the Methodist [church] from North Mississippi by 1958, and so I was able to help as an introducer in that setting. Then we came back from there and worked together on projects such as opening up the facilities of our Methodist conference in North Mississippi. Specifically, for example, the Methodist camp, Camp Lake Stevens, five miles out of Oxford, in a hilly section near Oxford. A camp that had been started back in the 1940s. Up until we succeeded in getting it opened up for racial inclusiveness [it] had never permitted black people to use that camp facility. So, I was identified with a group that got it opened up. Then we worked together toward the merger of our conferences and I was merger committees that finally succeeded in the early 1970s in achieving a merger of the North

Mississippi blacks with the North Mississippi whites in the North Mississippi United Methodist church. Then at the national level I was involved in parallel groups. [I] went to all sorts of national meetings where I worked hand in hand with black people to try to achieve goals, through the church, of racial inclusiveness.

Sainsbury: Did you ever know the Rev. Humes who was a black minister and also a newspaper editor?

Wroten: Yes I know Rev. Humes.

Sainsbury: Did you know him personally?

Wroten: I met him.

Sainsbury: What kind of man was he?

Wroten: He came down strongly on the conservative side. He was an apologist for a lot of the work of the white Citizen's Councils, although I wouldn't accuse him of disloyalty to his people or anything of that nature. He found it more convenient to cooperate with the white power.

Sainsbury: In fact, there were a few black newspaper editors of that period who cooperated with the Sovereignty Commission, from what I can gather. People like Percy Greene of the Jackson Advocate and there was an editor up in New Albany who did also.

Wroten: Yes, there have been some disclosures of the negotiations between the Sovereignty Commission and

certain black leaders. I would hope that we may see more of the truth and the light about all of that if all those documents are opened up for the public to inspect.

Sainsbury: Did you know Rev. Brown? He was also a black editor from the Delta. His newspaper was called the Southern Sun.

Wooten: No.

Sainsbury: It was a paper published in the 1930s. I'm not sure how long it survived.

Wooten: Well, in the 1930s I was not in the Delta. In the 1930s I was growing up in Water Valley and Corinth and Columbus over on this side of the state.

Sainsbury: I'm also doing research on an organization of black professionals, mostly educators and ministers, called the Committee of One Hundred. I wonder, by any chance, whether you've come across that organization, or heard that name before?

Wooten: I've heard that term, though it is not the organization of which you speak. That same term was used when I was a student at Ole Miss, in law school, for a religious emphasis week sponsorship committee. I was co-chairman of the religious emphasis week Committee of a Hundred as a student at Ole Miss. Our sole reason for existence was to conduct a religious emphasis week on the campus at

the University of Mississippi.

Sainsbury: Do you know the origin of this particular concept of Committee of One Hundred? I've come across it a number of times.

Wroten: I have called myself a careful observer of Mississippi matters throughout my lifetime, and I don't think I have encountered the term in any other connotation than that student religious connotation at Ole Miss.

Sainsbury: ...I didn't think you would have heard of it before.

Wroten: ...You asked me if I was acquainted with blacks and I mentioned those in the church relationship. I'm also well acquainted with one of the foremost leaders of the NAACP and was involved in joint endeavors politically Aaron Henry. We were very close friends and have remained such through the years, although I don't see him as often or have contact with him as often since he has been serving in the legislature and I moved away from the Delta, where we both lived.... I've just not had occasion to see him much in recent years.

Sainsbury: Did you collaborate with him in the 1950s?

Wroten: Well, in the 1980s, I would say, in terms of Aaron Henry. That acquaintance came about through the work of the Mississippi Loyalist Democratic Party.

He was a leader in that and I made some contributions.

Sainsbury: Did you ever join the NAACP?

Wroten: No. I know that there have been persons of the white race permitted to join the NAACP over the years, but I just never had occasion to be invited and I never volunteered. I thought it would be more effective for me to relate in the ways that I have related, taking public positions and cooperating with their leaders and things of that nature. I might hasten to add that after I had served in the legislature and ended that service at the end of 1963, and after all of the Democratic Party politics that ensued for the rest of that decade, I was elected in 1970 to begin serving the first of three four year terms as county judge of Washington County. That included the youth court or the juvenile court, during those years, too. In that connotation, I also had occasion to be involved in on-going efforts by different groups to form community relations groups and things of this nature. And in my role as a judge I was able, hopefully, to be influential in helping a lot of these community type endeavors to come along.

Sainsbury: We talked about the Sovereignty Commission earlier, and I'd now like to ask you something further about



the Commission. How important do you think the Sovereignty Commission was in Mississippi's campaign of defiance? I have heard it said that they were pretty ineffectual, that they were a kind of bumbling "Keystone Cops" organization. What is your perspective on the Sovereignty Commission?

Wroten: I would not agree with that. I considered it to be a sub rosa, secret organization in terms of its inaccessibility for scrutiny, even by members of the legislature. It had great potential to do great harm and was always in a position to exercise a role in which it could have had catastrophic results on the safety and security of a lot of people, the lives of a lot of people. Even if it was not as effective as maybe those types of constructive criticisms have suggested, it was a great stumbling block to progress in Mississippi. It was there, it was a monolith. It was a means of channeling monies into damaging projects, such as the Myers G. Lohman tour that I mentioned. They reached out of Mississippi and got one of the most radical, conservative churchmen in America to come down and try to destroy his own church in Mississippi through his speech-making and his smear campaigns. Now, I am among those who believe that Erle Johnston has made a contribution in his recent

book [Mississippi's Defiant Years] in which he outlines his perspective about the Sovereignty Commission and how he would not have been one of those who would have let it be used, for example, to cause deaths to people or serious bodily injury or that sort of thing. He saw himself as sort of a stabilizing influence, and I agree with that.... Erle Johnston did try to keep it from going over the edge. But the Sovereignty Commission, in terms of its membership, always had the power to cut the ground out from under even a benevolent director like Erle Johnston, and to do disastrous type things to people. [They] probably did get away with more shenanigans than Erle Johnston countenanced. We won't know for sure, of course, until we see the public record. But I never took it lightly and I never regarded it as totally ineffectual either. I fought it hard on the floor of the legislature.

Sainsbury: I read Johnston's book in preparation for this interview, and I came across a reference in connection with the setting up of the Sovereignty Commission in 1956. From what I understand, on the first ballot you voted in favor of the Commission being set up. Is that correct?

Wroten: It is correct, and I think Erle Johnston tracks

that as well as I've seen it recorded. On the first vote William Winter, who later became governor, and a few of us, thought that the way it was presented there...that what it was going to be was something like the Virginia Commission on Constitutional Government which simply published copies of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and a lot of documents from our Founding Fathers. [We thought that it would be] a sort of stabilizing thing when there were those who were so rabid and radical in Mississippi that they were viciously attacking the U.S Supreme Court, for example, for Brown v Board and things like that. So, it came up rather quickly and that is the way it was presented on the floor of the House. And so we did, on the initial vote, vote that way. But Erle records what happened when we were able to talk around and find out overnight or within a day or so what was involved there, and then obviously the rest is history.

Sainsbury: I just wanted to get your version of events.

Wroten: Right. My motive was that I thought it would be another sort of clone of the Virginia Commission on Constitutional Government. They had been mailing all over the country copies of the Bill of Rights, the Constitution and so forth.

Sainsbury: Whenever you are mentioned in this period the name Carl Weisenberg is also mentioned in the same context. What was your relationship with him?

Wroten: Carl was a good friend of mine. He was older than I and we came from entirely different backgrounds, but we found a mutuality, a friendship that stayed with us through the years. Unfortunately, Carl died. I think, a couple of years ago. Initially, I couldn't quite figure Carl out when he first came to the legislature because he did a little play-acting on the floor of the House by making a speech or so in which one would think that he was Adolf Hitler reincarnated...in terms of some of those racial bills. But, he did it in a sort of cat and mouse type game. I never completely understood Carl's mind on that, but he assured me later that what he was doing was playing with them; that he wanted see how he could catapult their emotions into a sort of a laboratory experience of doing that. But very soon it became clear where his heart truly lay, and he became one of the fiercest opponents of the old guard and the positions that they were taking. He didn't always vote with me on those matters. But when the clutch time came he did. On the key legislation involving the Ole Miss crisis Carl and I were the only two members of the

entire legislature who took the positions that we did. We had dinner together quite often and we would talk. By the way we cooperated to help our constituents with a lot of major port legislation. He was interested in the port at Pascagoula and I was interested in the port at Greenville on the Mississippi river and we spent a lot of our working hours, since we were sort of ostracized by most of the others, working on port legislation. Notwithstanding all of the hostility toward us, we were quite successful in getting our legislation through. I don't know whether they were intimidated by what they thought we might say or do, but we were able to get our home folks legislation through.

Sainsbury: I would like to turn now to your electoral defeat in 1963 when, I believe, Walter Sillers was very influential in getting (you) unseated. Was that the case?

Wroten: Not quite. He was certainly opposed to me and he offered my opponent the opportunity to resume his position as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee if he should be re elected. But I was watching and listening and observing as closely as I could and I don't think that Walter Sillers spoke with any of the leaders in my county. He dared not

because he knew that I had strong support among the leadership of Washington County and he would have lost face with a lot of the leadership of Washington County, his adjoining county to Bolivar County, if he were caught opposing me overtly. So, he really didn't take an active role in it. My opponent was a man named Hilton (D.) Waits.... Hilton's brother had been elected to the legislature in the early 1930s from our county, and had died. So Hilton became his successor. I don't recall whether he was appointed initially and then ran for election, but he began to serve as a Representative from my county, and served continuously up until his defeat by a newcomer, a young farmer from the rural part of the county, in 1959, the year Ross Barnett was elected governor. Deloache Cope beat Waits because Waits had become inattentive to the needs of our county. He beat him on the merits of things like that; people who weren't so much interested in the race question... Cope served for four years and then we had a sort of free-for-all. We had a free for all type system, but then the post system had been established where you ran for an identifiable post. Waits was so much in opposition to my point of view that he thought I was the most vulnerable, which I

was, and so he ran against me and beat me by not too big a margin.

Sainsbury: That's for the nomination?

Wroten: In those days we didn't have a viable Republican Party in our county, but this was for the election to the legislature.

Sainsbury: So what did he run as?

Wroten: He ran as a Democrat. Oh, the election was in the Democratic primary which in those years was tantamount to an election, because there would be no opponent in the November election after the primary. He beat me in the primary. It was probably the most hard fought political campaign on a local level in the history of this state.... I mean, really.

Sainsbury: Was it a close call?

Wroten: [A] fairly close call. I carried all of the county except his side of the county over at Leland, but the vote was so overwhelming in his home town that it overcame my narrow margins in Greenville and down the river side of the county. In other words, I still carried Greenville, the county seat town where I lived, the most populous community, but by a narrow margin. He carried his home town by a huge margin -- where he practiced law all of his life.

Sainsbury: What do you remember now about that campaign?

Wroten: I remember everything about it. It was one of those campaigns in which, although we didn't have access to television, the newspaper fight was as hard as you'd see. On the current presidential contest on TV, I mean, it was that prominent. Each and every day for the whole year, you might say. Full page ads, all sorts...

END TAPE ONE, BEGIN TAPE TWO

Sainsbury: Did you seek or obtain endorsements from influential Democrats in the state?

Wroten: No.

Sainsbury: Did Waits?

Wroten: No. He was an introvert and he would not willingly go out and even ask somebody to vote for him, but he did in that campaign. He did not seek, to my knowledge, any endorsements from other politicians, but he got a major endorsement in Paul Johnson, who was running for governor at that time, and I think that's the time when Paul was elected governor -- young Paul. He made a speech at Leland in which he just castigated me up one side and down the other in favor of his friend Hilton Waits. But he did that on his own. Paul Johnson did that because I was the enemy. I was the outcast. I would not vote the white Citizens' Council line, and so



forth.

Sainsbury: How influential was Sillers' offer to appoint your opponent to the Ways and Means Committee?

Wroten: It is hard to measure. But it could have persuaded some of the businessmen types or some of the industrialists, particularly those who were newcomers to the county. The county was still growing then. Industries were coming in, and so forth, and persons transplanted from other states who didn't know me, didn't know him, might have been persuaded by the fact that it was publicly known that, although he had lost his position as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee when he was defeated in 1959, if he were re-elected that Sillers would reappoint him to that. So, that could have pulled a few votes by those persons who weren't motivated otherwise between the two candidates. It could have contributed to the small margin that he had. But, again, Sillers made no public statement except: "if Hilton Waits is re-elected I will reappoint him." Most people regarded that as an act of political friendship more than Sillers necessarily doing it against me. Again, Sillers, for a variety of personal and political reasons, was not going to come out and attack me. He had differed with me.

Sainsbury: When you had come up for re-election prior to that, had you encountered any problems? I'm interested to know why it was in 1963 that you lost and not earlier?

Wroten: The tumult became more accentuated as the decade of the 1950s progressed. For example, when I was first elected in 1951 there was not any major upheaval about the race question. The next time I ran, when Governor (J.P.) Coleman was elected governor, it had still not gotten to white heat, even though Brown v Board had intervened. A lot of people were still wondering "what does that mean," instead of "this is something that we've got to fight." So, in that election it had not heated up quite so much. Now, in 1959, though, when Waits was defeated, I was re-elected to my third term by the largest vote for any political office in the history of Washington County, after eight years of opposing the segregation policies of Mississippi. Now that's a paradox.

Sainsbury: You had been opposing the Sovereignty Commission by that time?

Wroten: Oh, yes. By then I was opposing the Sovereignty Commission, speaking publicly against the channelling of monies to the white Citizen's Council, opposing the massive resistance efforts

which were going to go as far as to pass a constitutional amendment to permit the closing of the public schools, to close the public universities. I had been fighting that with every word I could say, anywhere, every position I could take. And still, in Washington County my vote was the largest vote ever recorded at that time in the history of that county.

Sainsbury: How do you explain that?

Wroten: I would cherish the hope that notwithstanding the fact that a lot of the voters in Washington County differed with my stance on this, that they respected me as an individual, they respected the fact that I was trying to speak up for what I deemed to be a righteous cause, and were willing to give me their confidence and maybe even -- as I mentioned in our discussion about Senator Stennis -- maybe there were a lot of people who agreed with me but who were not yet ready to say so publicly. So, it might not have been as badly anti-inclusiveness as one might speculate. Let me use a cliché: I might have been elected by the silent majority. It had a history of being a very liberal county. Perhaps, looking at Washington County in that context, you might reason that when I got beat, the year after the Meredith riot, that was

the anomaly in that county. That was the unique political exercise and not the one where I was elected by that big majority, particularly if you view it from this standpoint. After I was defeated in 1963, just a short time later in that decade, I was elected at the county Democratic convention -- there was no active Republican Party -- I was elected chairman. I went with the delegation to Chicago, came back a couple of years later, was elected one time as county judge, four years later elected again, four years later elected again. Finally, by the way, I was defeated for county judge after another set of values got involved. Although we never had any gang activity while I was a Juvenile Court judge, and we had only five petty possession of marijuana drug cases in twelve years for the young kids under eighteen in that county, I was perceived as soft on the juveniles. Somebody had convinced the voters that when a juvenile commits an offense that juvenile should be removed from the community and sent somewhere out there -- the question of the money to keep somebody somewhere like Siberia, Alaska, or somewhere, doesn't enter their minds. Keep them out of the community from then on; purge the community of this child. Well, I couldn't do that. Instead, I

enlisted the aid of over four hundred trained adult volunteers to work with them. We set up group homes, halfway houses, and boys and girls clubs, scouting.... All of those types of approach to juvenile delinquency, for which I got my just reward of being defeated at the end of my third term. Then I got involved in this.

Sainsbury: Finally, Mr Wroten, what is it like being a liberal -- you obviously are liberal on the issues we've talked about -- in a state which tends to be very conservative and intolerant of any dissent?

Wroten: Let me set aside my disinclination to go with terms like "liberal" - in putting somebody in a box, as either a conservative or a liberal. I know earlier in this conversation I have spoken of conservative efforts and liberal efforts and so forth. But, I have been among those who don't like to really make it rigid because one may be liberal on race questions and archly conservative on economic questions, for example. So, setting that aside, and understanding full well what you're asking me about how have I survived given my views on, say, progress in race relations, living in the atmosphere that I've lived in. Well, I think I have a view that it has only had the facade of being all that arch conservative on racial matters.

I think that the white people of Mississippi, for example, were liberated more so than the blacks by the legislative accomplishments of the 1960s and the court accomplishments. I think this set more white people free than it set black people free, to do and act as they would. For example, in my office here, where we have both blacks and whites, their social intercourse is probably freer than it would be in Boston where that commanding officer commanded me not to let a black attend my worship service. I think it's freer in this office, for example, than it is there. This generation of younger people who have grown up primarily in the last couple of decades don't have that bitterness and that hatred for the opposite race that people had back in those days. In my judgement, it's probably a joint question of respect for the law on the one hand, and leadership on the other. Our leadership in the South and in Mississippi kept us chained to the mindset of the Reconstruction period for all those intervening decades. Had there not been the exploitative, racist politicians I think our people might have much earlier voluntarily gone ahead into more racial inclusiveness. One reason I know that is that I grew up in the church and I know that on every hand there were people who felt

that we should be making that kind of progress back in those years. Even before Brown v Board.

Sainsbury: So you think it would be fair to say that the leaders in the state haven't shown the proper leadership on this issue?

Wroten: Yes, if we're speaking in a time frame of history that would lead us from the days of Reconstruction up until the 1960s when the United States government saw to it that the barriers came down. Once the U.S government saw to it that barriers came down, there has just been a great outpouring of love and friendship in this state. One of the best examples of it is in the secret ballot box whereby, as I understand it from the statistics that I've seen, we have more black elected public officials through the secret ballot process in Mississippi, numerically, than any other state, even the most populous state. That's a statement. I guess what I am saying is that "why didn't I encounter more hostility and why has it not been more difficult for me to live [in Mississippi]," which I've done all of my life except the time I was in the Navy [during] World War II. [It's] because I'm living among people who think and do like I do. Maybe they are not as outspoken. But the people that I've always associated with

believed, more or less, like I did, with some exceptions.... In other words, there is another Mississippi than that which is the popular stereotype.

Sainsbury: Mississippi wasn't this monolithic...

Wroten: No. [It] never was. The racist leadership among the politicians would have had people and the world believe that. But it never was. Otherwise how do they explain me...? They're the ones who need to do the explaining.

END OF TAPE



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