

FB 71A

Subject: Leroy Gibson

Interviewer: "Button Project"

Place: Miami

10/13/75

sj

I: This study is conducted through the University of Florida to investigate the impact of the black vote in Florida since 1965. As part of this study, we are interviewing all black elected officials in the state. We would like to stress that the results of the interview will be recorded anonymously, that is, no names of officials or names of ~~critics~~^{cities} will be mentioned in the final report. Thus, we hope that you will feel free to respond to our questions in an open, candid manner. In order to accurately gather your views, we would like to tape record this interview if that is acceptable to you. The following questions are asked to find out how well the voting right's act of 1965 has helped blacks to take part in Florida politics. What year did you first register to vote. (Pause) The first one gets everybody. (Laughs)

G: *If certainly does.*

I: You have to go way back ~~in your memory~~ and remember.

G: *I guess maybe*
G: ~~Just~~ about twenty years ago.

I: What year were you first eligible to vote?

G: I guess about twenty years.

I: How were you registered, by local registration board, or by federal examiner?

G: Local ~~registry~~ registration.

I: Did the local registrars ever turn you down when you applied to register?

G: No.

- I: Have voter registration drives been held in the district in which you hold office?
- G: Yes.
- I: Okay. What organizations, national or local participated in ~~the~~ these registration drive?
- G: Executive Democratic Board of Dade County.
- I: When were these registration drives held, before or after the Civil Rights Act, before 1960, that area, after 1964?
- G: After.
- I: Were they successful?
- G: Yes.
- I: Are there any things which prevent blacks from registering to vote in your district?
- G: No.
- I: Please rate how important you think each of the following items are in preventing blacks from registering to vote. Economic dependence on whites? Very important, fairly important, or not important?
- G: Important.
- I: Fear of physical violence from whites?
- G: Not important.
- I: Complicated registration forms?
- G: Somewhat.
- I: Poor registration hours?
- G: Yes, very important.
- I: Is registration held often enough?
- G: No.
- I: Indifference of blacks to voting?
- G: No, no, not really.

- I: The following questions are asked to gather information on the election campaigns of ~~the~~ black elected officials in Florida. Were you able to campaign freely, were you threatened in any way in your campaign?
- G: No, no.
- I: Were you handicapped by a lack of campaign money?
- G: Yes.
- I: Why did you decide to run for office?
- G: Well, I ~~thought~~^{saw} a need for a change in my immediate community.
- I: Were you convinced by members of community to run, or was it something that you felt that you wanted to do?
- G: ~~Well~~, I was convinced by certain members of our community.
- I: To which political organization do you belong?
- G: Executive Democratic Board .
- I: What were the two or three most important issues on which you campaigned?
- G: Police protection and recreation and better housing.
- I: Do you think these issues were the main problems facing blacks in your community?
- G: Yes.
- I: These questions are asked to determine some of the conditions which have enabled blacks to win office in Florida. How were you elected, at large, or by district?
- G: At large.
- I: How many people are in your area?
- G: ~~Approximately~~ 17,000.
- I: What percentage of the population in your district or area is black?

G: Twenty five per cent.

I: ~~And~~ and about what percentage of blacks of voting age in your area are registered to vote?

G: Would you repeat that, please?

I: About what percentage of blacks of voting age in your area are registered to vote?

G: I guess about fifty per cent.

I: About what percentage of blacks who are registered do you estimate actually voted when you were elected?

G: Ninety per cent of the registered voters.

I: Do you think you got votes from whites?

G: Yes.

I: About what percentage do you, of your vote came from whites?

G: About fifty per cent.

I: In the election in which you won office, how many opponents did you have?

G: Seven or eight, I can't ~~remember~~ ^{recall}.

I: Were any of your opponents black?

G: In my first election, there were one black, and in my second election, no blacks.

I: What percentage of the total vote did you get?

G: I guess about eighty-five, eighty per cent.

I: These questions are asked to determine how well black officials in Florida have been able to benefit blacks they represent. In what ways do you think you have helped blacks in your area by holding office?

G: Well, the main area I feel that mobilizing the community and getting certain programs started.

I: What, if anything, has prevented you from doing a better job? Especially in regard to benefitting blacks in your area?

G: Well, ~~the~~ lack of time on my part. I just don't have the time that I would like to put in the public office, because of my workload.

I: Please rate how important you think the following items are in preventing you from doing a better job benefitting blacks. The office has no real authority, is that very important, fairly important, or not important?

G: Not important.

I: Are you outvoted by white officials?

G: On certain issues.

I: Is there enough revenue available?

G: Yes.

I: Are you unfamiliar with administrative duties?

G: Yes.

I: Is there a lack of cooperation from whites?

G: No.

I: Is there a lack of cooperation from blacks?

G: No.

I: Is there a lack of cooperation from state officials or federal officials?

G: Yes.

I: Which is worse, working with state officials or federal officials?

G: Both.

I: (Laughter) Has criticism or lack of support from the black community hindered you in holding office? That is, do some blacks not cooperate with you because they feel you are a token in government

and have no real authority?

G: Somewhat, yes, I would have to agree with that somewhat.

I: Are there any other reasons why you might get lack of support from the black community?

G: No, no, well, except that some blacks feel like I work for the city full-time, they fail to understand and realize it's just an appointed position. A lot of blacks feel like this is an educational phase I'm going through now, a lot of blacks feel that I work for the city, supposed to be at city hall every day from eight to five.

I: Do you feel that white officials treat you differently from the other officials, or not, do they consider you the spokesman for blacks, and are you able to only raise certain issues?

G: Yes.

I: What services have you provided blacks in your district that they did not have before you gave office, before you took office?

G: Well, a task force been created which deals ^{with} ~~in~~ social services, which we, ~~are~~ right now we use our revenue sharing money.

I: Please rate how effective you think you've been in each of the following service areas. Police protection? Very effective, somewhat effective, or not effective?

G: Effective.

I: In streets and roads?

G: Effective.

I: In housing?

G: It's beginning to be effective now.

I: Welfare?

G: It, it's effective.

I: Employment?

G: Well, it's beginning now to be effective, just becoming.

I: Parks and recreation?

G: Effective?

I: Water, sewage, and garbage?

G: Effective.

I: Health and hospitals?

G: No, not too effective.

I: Education?

G: Effective, yes, especially for the young, the young people that we just started what we call an after school program which is sponsored by the city that tutors kids who one through six after school, I think this is effective in the area that I was in.

I: Fire protection?

G: Well the county took over our fire department, I think it's ~~very~~ ^{fairly} good.

I: Okay. Have you gotten federal funds for your district?

G: Yes, yes.

I: Could you please list some of the more important federal grants you and other black leaders have obtained for your area.

G: Well, in our area, we have, we are under what we call the Neighborhood Development Program through the federal government so this takes more or less all aspects of, you know....

I: Have you as an elected official or as part of a local committee been able to bring industry or retail stores into your area?

G: No.

I: Have you been able to see that blacks are hired fairly in local government?

G: No.

I: Has federal revenue sharing helped your district or not?

G: Yes.

I: Have there been any black protests, sit-ins, boycotts, ^{or} riots in your city in the last ten years?

G: Yes.

I: What were the issues involved and what were the effects?

G: Police brutality.

I: What, were some of those problems evolved after?

G: Yes, yes.

I: The following questions are asked to enable a reflection of black politics in Florida in general. Frankly, what is your opinion of Governor Reuben Askew?

G: I think he's a very good governor.

I: So does everyone. What is your opinion of other state officials and state representatives?

G: I think we have good representation. I don't have any.

I: Another question I wanted to ask, do you see a national office in the future for Governor Askew?

G: Hopefully.

I: Do you think that winning and holding office in Florida has been worth the effort?

G: Yes.

I: Could you explain a little bit?

G: Well, I'm beginning to see some of the things that I, ^{got} ~~that~~ ^{set out to} I ~~could~~ do, and it's beginning to look bright.

I: These questions are asked to compile an overall group profile of black elected officials in Florida. No individual answers will be

recorded. Type of office you have held, if this, have you held office prior to this ~~one?~~ office.

G: Yes.

I: And what other office have you held?

G: Oh, just re-election.

I: I see. The date you were first elected?

G: ~~1971~~ Nineteen seventy-one.

I: And the date you took office?

G: It was in '71, ~~March~~ March, '71.

I: The number of times that you have run for office?

G: Two.

I: Your age?

G: Thirty-eight.

I: And your occupation? Before the election.

G: Police officer.

I: Your education?

G: I graduated from Florida A and M University, B.S. degree.

(Break in tape)

I: Salary received from your elected position?

G: ~~\$50,000.~~ Fifty dollars a month.

I: Were you active in the Civil Rights Movement of 1960 to 1966?

G: Yes.

I: The church to which you belong?

G: Mount Zion.

I: Are you an official in your church?

G: No.

I: Are there any other community organizations or activities that you are involved in?

G: The Boy Scouts of America.

I: Okay. It's over.

(Break in tape)

I: I'd like to comment briefly on this interview. Mr. Gibson owns his own business, he owns a security service, and maintains a very busy schedule. He was kind and considerate, and asked me if I would make the interview as brief as possible as he was giving me his lunch break in which to conduct the interview. I felt that in order to include the entire interview, that I had better not get sidetracked into a normal probing situation because of his limited amount of time. He did leave the door open for future contact if we desire to include him in any upcoming programs.

(End of tape)