

BOWMAN, William M. Sr.  
INTERVIEWEE

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**Interview # 252**

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**Abstract:** In his interview with Michael Cooke, Rev. William M. Bowman Sr. (1914-2000) discusses his involvement in the Progressive Democratic Party and the Palmetto Voter's Association. Mr. Bowman details the impact these organizations had on the black community in the efforts to increase participation in the political process. In the interview, he discusses how these organizations started and the work they did in an attempt to achieve full participation of the black community. In the 1960s, Rev. Bowman helped organize sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in downtown Columbia and worked to educate local African Americans how to use their right to vote.

\*This is an edited transcript. Our transcription guidelines are available upon request/on our website.

Time	Keywords
00:00:00	<b>MC: Today is February 2, 1986. I'm conducting an interview with William M. Bowman Sr. who resides in Columbia, South Carolina. Mr. Bowman was a member of the Progressive Democratic Party and, I believe, also a member of the Palmetto Voter Association. Mr. Bowman can you give us a brief biographical sketch about your life? When you were born, where you were born, your education and our occupation or occupations.</b>

WB: Well I was born in February 7, 1914 in Dorchester County South Carolina. The son of Joseph Bowman and Arleen Finland-Bowman. I was educated in the public schools there, graduated valedictorian of the local high school, Williams Memorial High School. From there I attended Morris College in Sumter South Carolina where I received my Bachelor of Arts degree. There on I got my Doctor of Divinity from Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina.

00:01:13	<b>MC: Ok. What type of occupations have you had?</b>
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WB: When I came out of school I was a—I started with a little black newspaper called the People's Informer. That was published in Sumter South Carolina.

Before that though, when I was in school I wrote for the local county paper known as the Dorchester Eagle, at that time. I wrote for that and had Negro citizens in the news while I wrote for that. Of course I started that paper and I was with that paper for a long time. Later on I wrote a column for John McCray, and then his paper the Lighthouse and Informer. John took over the Informer. We had People Informer, he had the Lighthouse down in Charleston. So then we combined the two together and had the Lighthouse and Informer. I wrote a column—made some columns for them for years. Before that time there was another paper in Columbia called Palmetto Leader, I wrote a column for that also.

00:02:13 **MC: So when did you first become interested in politics? What stimulated your interest in politics in South Carolina?**

WB: In my county there was a man who was interested in politics and he was a chairman of the Republican Party. During that time they would let just enough blacks, Negroes as we were known in those days, to register so they could keep the party going. Every four years they would go to National Republic Convention and he asked me because I was very well versed. Even though I wasn't old enough to register to vote, he asked me would I come and take the minutes and be a part of that and keep them up. That was how I became started in politics. By the way, a vote at that time—we were promoting Herbert Hoover and the slogan that year was 'Vote for Herbert Hoover and prosperity.' You know what happened. [Both laugh.]

00:03:18 **MC: What was the man's name by the way?**

WB: As I was talking I was trying to think, he was a professor. He taught school and right now...as we talk the name will come to me and I'll bring it back to it. But right now the name slips my mind. I can't think of the name right now. But he was a farmer and also principal of a school.

00:03:43 **MC: Was he black?**

WB: He was black yes.

00:03:45 **MC: He was black.**

WB: He was black. He was a county leader of the Republican Party and the leader of the Republican Party was a fellow who lived in Ninety Six, South Carolina named 'Tieless' Joe Talbert. Ever heard of him? He didn't wear a tie anywhere and was known as Tieless Joe Talbert. Every four years he would carry a number of blacks to the National Republican Convention. He had the—he dispensed with the patronage from the Republican Convention because when the Republicans won, Negroes could appoint people to the post office and work in government jobs. That's what he did.

00:04:28 **MC: Yes. I've heard of that faction. I've heard that that was a faction that did have a number of blacks. Also there was another faction, I believe, called the I. S. Leevy faction.**

WB: Well the Leevy faction came in later. Real later than Tieless Joe Tolbert. Yes. Old Man Leevy ran along with him. That was fairly recently.

00:04:48 **MC: What about the political climate in South Carolina? Since you were a newspaper writer, what would you assess the political climate for black people in South Carolina in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s?**

WB: Well it was...you could not vote in the—you could vote only in the general election and it was controlled. You had to be poll taxed and it was a control thing. I found out it was a control thing. I thought maybe it wasn't but it was control. They wouldn't let but so many Negroes register to vote. It was, you had to pay your poll tax and—of it was everybody had to pay the poll tax then it was easier for them to vote because they—it was control—the Democratic Party at that time was not a political party it was a private club. They would do the nominating of their people and it was tantamount to election. So actually if a Republican ran it was just out of the question he would ever be elected.

00:05:51 **MC: So if membership in the Republican Party—what did it mean?**

WB: That it was only to keep a couple of blacks happy because at that time no whites would be caught dead in the Republican Party. That was out of the question. If you were a Republican you were isolated. Ostracized from the community.

00:06:17 **MC: So it didn't really have much weight.**

WB: Not have much weight. You would vote once every four years and you'd go down there and it was a token vote. You'd get—most blacks wouldn't get an opportunity to go to the National Republican Convention. Up until after the second time when Herbert Hoover came around, he took over the Party because he said it wasn't effective. That was when some—we got some whites coming into the Party.

00:06:44 **MC: When and why did the Progressive Democratic Party come into existence?**

WB: The Progressive Democratic Party came into existence because we were not allowed to vote in the Primaries. The primaries are the only meaningful election. I think we went to court on that. The court said the primaries were the only *meaningful* election in South Carolina. That there wasn't any meaning—they argued that we could vote in the Republican Party but the courts said the Democratic Primary was the meaning election. I remember the first time—I was

in college. I was taking Civics and we went to the court house to hear the leader Olin Johnston speaking. He was running for Senator. He came out and saw us sitting in the balcony and refused to speak. He said [chuckles] he said that he wasn't going to speak as long as Negroes were in there. That's how he pronounced it. They told all of us to go out and we had to vacate before the speaking could happen. After that there was one boy in our class, he was Emile from up in Spartanburg South Carolina, he could pass. So he stayed in the meeting to get what was said because he could—nobody didn't know any—whether he was white or black.

00:08:19 **MC: As a consequence of the Primary system was tantamount to winning election and because the primaries were not open to blacks, blacks were effectively disfranchised.**

WB: Well yes. Then, of course, Olin Johnston said before Negroes would vote in the Democratic Primaries blood would flow in the streets like water. Then we decided that since we did not have a party then we would organize our own party. That was how the Progressive Democratic Party—I served as the first National Committeeman for the Democratic Party and we went to Chicago Illinois to protest the fact that we could not vote in the Democratic Primary. We paid our way. We raised the money. We paid our way. We went to Chicago and we protested. That was when Truman was nominated as the Vice President. We were supporting Henry Wallace, who was the President at the time. President Roosevelt was nominated I think a third time, probably. We protested and I remember going—we went in to the convention and they gave us—some of the people from other places gave us alternate badges and so forth so we could get in and argue our case. Sydney Hillman, he was labor leader was a driving force in the party at that time. I remember him saying 'How many people do you have registered to vote?' We couldn't answer that because we didn't have any people registered at that time to vote. I remember him using a curse word and saying 'well go back. When you register and vote—organize your own party and when you register and vote' he said, 'they'll be knocking on your door instead of you knocking on their door because a politician lives on votes.' I remember very well, we came back then and started a voter registration campaign to get all the blacks voting. We had thousands and thousands of people. Then that was when we started having some influence. We went to the courts and the courts overturned it and gave us the opportunity.

00:10:37 **MC: Was there any close connection between the Progressive Democratic Party and the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]? Were people sometimes in both particular—**

WB: NAACP was non-partisan in its approach to the election but the NAACP also furnished us legal...the right to get and register to vote and to get into the Democratic Party.

00:11:03 **MC: So they provided financial assistance and—**

WB: No. We supported the NAACP, they just provided the lawyers and we paid them. That's the way it was.

00:11:18 **MC: So one of the first things that you took on was the issue of the need to register blacks to vote and were there other objectives of the Progressive Democratic Party?**

WB: To vote. Yes. Well it was—the real objective of the Progressive Democratic Party was to see that the franchise be given to all people regardless of race, color, or creed. Of course at that time they had all kinds of things to hold you. First of all it was the poll tax, the next thing about it you had to read and interpret the Constitution. A classic joke would tell that the fellow that asked a fellow to read the Constitution and he read it off verbatim. He couldn't read very well but he let somebody teach him the Constitution. He had a good memory, so he memorized the Constitution then spit it out like that. Then the fellow asked him 'What does that mean?' The answer was—they say that the fellow told him 'I know what it means, it means that I don't care what happens you're not going to let me vote.' [both chuckle] That's the sort of thing they talk about but actually that's what we did.

00:12:40 **MC: Let me back track a little bit. At that convention, I guess that was the 1944 Democratic Convention.**

WB: Yes. When Roosevelt was nominated for the third time.

00:12:49 **MC: Did you try to contest the seats held by the regular South Carolina Democratic Party?**

WB: That's exactly—that's right. That's right. Yes.

00:12:57 **MC: What was the result of that contest? The right of the regular South Carolina Democratic Party to hold those seats.**

WB: Well they won to hold those seats at that time. But we also got the impetus to come back to get people to register to vote. When we got these people registered to vote, we were going to beat them in the general election. See actually the general election was a farce. Nobody actually ever voted...sometime in the general election two people would go down and cast a ballot and that was it. Because that's—you were nominated by the Democratic Party you were automatically elected. So actually...we came back and we got this force. We said that we were going into the general election and defeat these people. Then they started bargaining with us.

00:13:53 **MC: You mentioned one congressman. Were there other people that encouraged you to take the steps that you did take? Did you find any support what-so-ever to seat [telephone rings] your delegation. We'll stop for here.**  
[Recording stops]

00:14:09 [Recording resumes]  
**MC: We're continuing. You were about to address the topic of whether or not there was any encouragement to perhaps successfully contest the seats held by the South Carolina regular Democratic Party that attended the 1944—**

WB: No. No one encouraged—if you had been living during that time, you would recognize that. The Senator from South Carolina, 'Cotton' Ed Smith. We used to call him 'Cotton head' Smith, the other people—the climate was not—I can remember as—old Billy Graham said he was going to come here and have a crusade. It was going to be integrated. He was going to speak from the Statehouse steps. They vetoed it. The Governor vetoed it. He couldn't preach from the Statehouse because if he was going to have it integrated. We moved it out to Fort Jackson. I think at that time we had some 30,000 people that came [chuckles] who came through the Fort Jackson, we never could have gotten 30,000 people downtown. Those are some of the things...the climate was not very, very conducive to political change. Politicians don't change, you have to take it from them. Vote them out.

00:15:32 **MC: Well when you came back to South Carolina after being at that convention, what type of steps did you take to organize a voter registration drive?**

WB: We started going from door to door, house to house getting everybody. We started coaching people about the Constitution. How to read it and those who could not read very well to learn it by heart, teach it to them. They would go down there and we would carry people—the road block was they wouldn't register but once a month, on the first Monday. So on the first Monday we'd have lines of people maybe three blocks long waiting to read the Constitution and to register. That upset us. All during the summer we had students coming in from Brandeis University and—

00:16:29 **MC: Are we talking the '60s here or are we talking about the '40s and '50s?**

WB: We're talking about the '40s and the '50s going to the '60s.

00:16:38 **MC: Ok. When the students from Brandeis are they in the '60s?**

WB: The students of Brandeis came here in the last part of '59s going up to the '60s. Got people registered. We went from door to door and they came and helped us with it. The churches took care of them.

00:16:58 **MC: You're not talking about the Progressive Democratic Party at that time?**

WB: Yes. Progressive Democratic Party was a part of that because at that time—

00:17:03 **MC: But when does the Progressive Democratic Party end?**

WB: Progressive Democratic Party never ended, really, formally. There was no demise—we never said that you were dead. We kept that option open all of the time so that if something happened—In Columbia we had known as the Richland County Citizens Committee, which was an offshoot of the Progressive Democratic Party. We ran as the people—that organization is still a part of the Civic activities of our county. We never buried any of that because we figured that some of these days we may need them again so we still keep them up.

00:17:46 **MC: How did you finance the voter registration drive during the late '40s, I guess, and '50s?**

WB: Nickels and dimes from churches and organizations and people who give. That's how we financed it.

00:17:59 **MC: A lot of volunteer work.**

WB: Volunteer work. We—churches. I know when students and other people came in to help us the churches would take care of them and house them in the churches. I fed many a people in my house and kept them there. People who have us to vote, we'd walk from door to door from day to day. People would go out and call on people. Made every little sermon we'd put in there if you registered to vote hold up your hand. Then we'd have radios. We had also, when I came here in the '40s, we found...we got a radio station going. All of that stuff.

00:18:43 **MC: What about the newspaper?**

WB: The Lighthouse and Informer came here until John left to go to...

00:18:51 **MC: Talladega?**

WB: Talladega. To the school to be Director of Public Relations for them. Then it died out, you know. John also served—he told you about serving on chain gang through them?

00:19:02 **MC: Yes.**

WB: Well all of those kind of things, you know, he one time had done something so they put him—this was the time that Burns was the Governor. They had him—it was really a mess.

00:19:18 **MC: What was the impact of the Progressive Democratic Party on the white establishment? Now, at the convention one Senator mentioned that well what you're doing doesn't amount to much until you start to really challenge the status quo. How long did that take?**

WB: That was not a Senator. That was Sydney Hillman who was the Executive Secretary of the AFLCIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]. He was not. It wasn't a Senator. I don't remember any politician ever encouraging us, even from the very far north. Because this thing is controlled by them. We talked about it. We prayed over it. We argued about it. We finally got Phillip Randolph to talk about, you know, we are going to have a march. The first march on Washington. Roosevelt came in and stopped it by bringing the fellows in and saying 'no don't do that. We are going to give you a little bit of justice.' Peace meal justice came out of some of it.

00:20:27 **MC: When did the Progressive Democratic Party have its first significant impact in the black community in regard to voter registration? Did that capture the attention of the white political status quo?**

WB: When Judge Waring—when the courts said that the only significant election in South Carolina was the Democratic Primary and that all the people had a right to vote, that was when the Progressive Party—we said get in there and register to vote. The reason for the Progressive Democratic Party was to get the right to vote in all elections. That was when we started.

00:21:20 **MC: Did the Progressive Democratic Party start—was that in existence prior to the Waring decisions or—they were after?**

WB: Yes. Yes. They were prior.

00:21:29 **MC: Was that something...they were in existence prior to the Waring decision?**

WB: Yes.

00:21:35 **MC: But did the Waring decision have the effect of perhaps making even more urgent to continue the work of the Progressive Democratic Party?**

WB: It did.

00:21:43 **MC: What did you—when you saw those decisions that outlawed discrimination and allowing blacks for the first time to participate fairly in**

**the primary situation, what was the first thing on your mind when you start seeing this type of decrees being passed?**

WB: When will that time come when Negroes could become a part not only just for voting but get elected to office?

00:22:11 **MC: Did you anticipate that the Progressive Democratic Party would eventually be of no utility to blacks? Was there a goal, let's say, to get blacks once the primary discrimination was abolished, was it possible now to look down at the light at the end of the tunnel and say well there will be a day that blacks would be part of the regular Democratic Party and perhaps the usefulness of this Progressive Democratic Party won't be as crucial as it was?**

WB: No. I—

00:22:45 **MC: Did anybody think along those lines?**

WB: We may have had some people thinking along those lines but, young man, you must never dismantle the bridge that brought you across. You must always keep it there for whatever leads you here—and, you know, this is what—this is going on in today's politics. Some blacks because they have achieved some measure of equality in certain things they have a tendency to look down upon things that we—when we go in there and say we need something for this black thing and this is for us because they think we don't need it anymore. Let me tell you, the moment you say you don't need it anymore that's when the man will really put you down. You act—for instance, this ban on the black colleges. You don't need black colleges anymore, they go through on any other college. But as you look at the list of leaders, how many leaders did the white colleges in the last years have created, they haven't done very much creating. All the leaders come from predominantly black colleges because these teachers instill in them, like Negro History week in [Lou?] private Baptist College. Where the library where I went to wasn't any bigger than this room and didn't have this many books as I have in my library today. We had to all get around one or two books to get what we had to do, but we made those things do. You don't dismantle your stuff to go give to another man. Give to other fellows. You better keep some of your stuff. This is what is happening in economics. Do you remember the little black store that used to be around the corner? Now you have to go ten miles to buy something because some big supermarket out in some place and you've dismantled that little black store on the corner. That result of it, when you get in trouble, to this man over here you're nothing but a number. But this man at the black store you could go down and somebody even who's hungry and you could go down and get something from him and say well the church would pay you or we'll come back and see these people are not starving. This kind of thing. I don't ever see a day when you can dismantle—the Jews don't dismantle their stuff, why should we dismantle ours?

00:25:15 **MC: What about your membership in another black local organization called the Palmetto Voter's Association? When did you become a member of that? Were you a member of both organizations at the same time?**

WB: Yes. The VEP was an arm...

00:25:31 **MC: No that's—the Palmetto Voter's Association—**

WB: The Palmetto Voter's Association that was an arm of the VEP. The Voter's Education Project. The headquarters of that was in Atlanta Georgia but the Palmetto Voter's Association was its arm in South Carolina. It was the arm that encouraged people to register and to vote. We had two or three people who became the head of it in South Carolina who was going on to—I happen to know that one fellow right now is...on the staff of one of the Senators here from South Carolina. As is one of his chief staff officers. The others who got up to be in higher politics had been elected to state offices who got in this the Palmetto Voter's Association. It encourages—I'll tell you one thing about politicians, when you start getting people to register and vote, as the Palmetto Voter's Association did, they will come to you. Sydney Hillman was right, they will come to you. You don't have to go to them.

00:26:34 **MC: So his prophecy proved true.**

WB: His prophecy proved true. That if you get enough people registered to vote, the politicians would come to you. He will come to your house.

00:26:44 **MC: When were you a member of the Palmetto Voter's Association?**

WB: Well, I've always been a member of anything because I've been known from the time it started up until—I still call myself a member of the Richland County Citizens Committee, Palmetto Voter's Association, and even though the Progressive Democratic Party does not exist as an organization regularly we still meet, talk about things. Out of that same group of people that meet now there are some people who made that organization.

00:27:18 **MC: But could you put a date for your membership for the Palmetto Voter's?**

WB: Oh that was in the... late '50s.

00:27:29 **MC: Early '50s?**

WB: Late '50s. Between '55 and on that era.

00:27:34 **MC: Were there any significant differences in the goals of the Progressive Democratic party and the Palmetto Voter's Association?**

WB: The Palmetto Voter's Association pledged to be non-partisan. That's the only difference. The Progressive Democratic Party said we are Democrats and the Palmetto Voter's Association said we are non-partisan.

00:27:54 **MC: By the way were you a Republican or a Democrat?**

WB: I ceased being a—as I told you at the beginning, the first time I got involved with politics was because that was the only thing I could be, a Republican. But I became involved in politics after that as a Democrat. I have been on the Democratic—as a Democratic person ever since.

00:28:17 **MC: Since Hoover. The Hoover years.**

WB: Yes. After the Hoover years. I've been voting all my—I couldn't vote before because I was too young. Then after that—I don't think I've ever voted Republican. As a party member unless I was just voting in the local election where I saw and vote for the fellow even though I vote non-partisan most.

00:28:40 **MC: Now the Palmetto Voter's Association, where did it draw most of its members from?**

WB: From the average black person in the community. It was maybe staffed by what we called a little—[telephone rings]

00:28:56 **MC: We'll stop here.** [Recording stops]

00:28:57 [Recording resumes]

**MC: You started to talk about your membership composition within the Palmetto Voter's Association. I believe you started to say middle class, then you cut off.**

WB: It was supported mostly by the upper-middle class but it was for everybody. Really the Palmetto Voter's Association was to get the rank and file of black people interested in going to vote of course.

00:29:19 **MC: Who were some of the leaders of the Association that you can recall?**

WB: Reverend C. J. Whitaker who is now the Democratic Executive Chairman for Richland County. I can think of him. I can think of a Mr. J. C. Artemis, who is dead but his son is still interested in it. I can think of McCray who is not here now. Going that far back.

00:29:45 **MC: But was he a member of the Palmetto Voter's Association?**

WB: Yes. Yes. All these people. I can think of some of them, Bishop James who is now back as presiding Bishop of the AME Church.

00:29:56 **MC: What about Hunter?**

WB: Hunter from Darlington was a member of that and I'm trying to think of some other people. The gentleman who was Treasurer of NAACP from Cheraw, and I can't recall his name right now. But he has died a year or so ago. [unclear] Those were some of the people that were in this Palmetto Voter's Association. Jim Felder served as one of the persons in the Voter Education and Palmetto Voter's Association.

00:30:28 **MC: Let me ask you another question: Is there a difference between the Palmetto Voter's Association from the Palmetto Voter's League?**

WB: All of it was a conglomeration of organizations.

00:30:42 **MC: Did the Palmetto Voter's League precede the Association?**

WB: I do not know. I can't give you an accurate count because to me they all came about—that's like asking which came first the chicken or the egg. They all came about the same time. In the meantime that was also the beginning—right after that Dr. King came with his...and we had this...with him. With the organization, which Brother Lowery is President of, SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference].

00:31:15 **MC: SCLC.**

WB: One time we had Palmetto Voter's Association, we had SCLC, and we had this organization...oh I can't think of its name—

00:31:28 **MC: CORE [Congress of Racial Equality].**

WB: CORE! All of these people were here at the same time. [Recording warps, unclear] they were doing.

00:31:32 **MC: And NAACP.**

WB: And NAACP all of—[recording stops]

00:31:34 [Recording resumes]

**MC: —and let's see CORE, SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], and SCLC although they were here they didn't have a very large role to play in the voter registration movement. Primarily it was the**

**NAACP and also groups like you were part of the Palmetto Voter's Association which were much more influential than those major ones.**

WB: Yes. But what that...yes. But now remember we—I don't want to cut you off on that but I—these organizations came in. We had all of people here. We had a CORE man here. We had the SCLC sponsor and the Nonviolent Association out of New York. I'm trying to think of that guy's name. We sponsored workshops for a whole weeks at a time. All of us came together. CORE's been—we've had CORE here. We've had all of these people come in here and SCLC for a long time did have an organization there because we had a cooperative thing. Where we all worked together, even with the fraternities, the...

00:32:48 **MC: Was that Frank Robertson and Ben Mack?**

WB: Yes. Ben Mack and all those fellows. Yes.

00:32:54 **MC: Well I think we have basically—let's ask this last question. What do you think were some of the major achievements and the shortcomings of the two organizations you were a part of? Perhaps we should start first with the Progressive Democratic Party. What were some of the strengths of that particular institution and some of the weaknesses, perhaps they didn't achieve as much as they might have set out to do.**

WB: No organization politically achieved the thing they set out to do. Some of the strength of it was that we had nobody who had any personal ambition. We were all for the good of the people. There weren't anybody with big 'I's or little 'U's running around trying to get some. After it became—after we got all these things we had to watch out because some of the guys who we didn't know at all, they came in and tried to say that they had the black vote in their pocket to some white politicians and it was all a lie they found out. Some of us would laugh because we know and we would say 'Ok let this politician go over there and give this guy \$500, \$600, \$700. Now he was just spending his money for nothing anyway because he didn't have it. Of course we had some charlatans who would try to do it. Now that was some of the weak points. Where you found some fellows who would sit on the sidelines, you would do all the dirty work then they come in and try to—

00:34:21 **MC: Be the bagmen?**

WB: Be the bagmen. [laughs] Sometimes we would laugh because we were soft fellows and I would say to fellows, you know, he came in 'What about so and so?' and I would say 'Well if you want to give him your money, fine.' We have nothing against it because after all we always say they owe something anyway so whoever can get something out of them...well they weren't going to give us anything because they know that we weren't bargaining with them. We were bargaining with power. In fact we had a city election and the guy came to me and

said ‘What do I owe you?’ when it was over. Of course he got elected. I think that time by maybe 40 or 50 votes. Really it was the black community really got him in. I said ‘The only thing you owe me is that when we get ready to see you we don’t have to go through ten secretaries. That we can pick up the telephone and call you.’

00:35:11 **MC: What was this gentleman’s name? Can you...?**

WB: Mayor Bates. Lester.

00:35:16 **MC: Lester Bates?**

WB: Yes. Of course he kept his word. He was pretty good—he was a pretty fair politician and a good friend of ours.

00:35:32 **MC: What were some of the—ok what about the Palmetto Voter’s Association? Did you have similar problems with that organization?**

WB: No. I don’t ever remember that because its primary object was to get people to register to vote.

00:35:44 **MC: So there wasn’t the pressure to try to get the political maneuvers. Since it was non-partisan it didn’t have that particular...**

WB: Yes. Yes. Oh no. No it wasn’t. Yes. Our job was getting—see here is what happened in the black community. If you get the voters on the book they will come and ask us who are we voting for. That was the weakness of the whole structure—I found it a weakness. Because it is an awesome responsibility for me to sit in this office and then somebody comes and say ‘Who are we voting for today?’ I would like for the people to walk to the polls and say ‘I have evaluated what this fellow has done or what he is doing and I’m going to vote for him.’ We still haven’t gotten out of those woods yet.

00:36:34 **MC: Why was that a problem do you think? That people would after you had taught them how to register, when they came down after being certified to vote they didn’t feel confident about who to pull the lever for.**

WB: Because politicians have two faces. The same man who said that blood would flow in the street like water was back saying ‘how are you doing? You are my friend.’

00:37:10 **MC: That’s Olin D. Johnston? [chuckles]**

WB: Yes. Olin D. Johnston. Or Senator Storm Thurmond who stood on the floor in the senate and filibustered as long as anybody ever did, who also when election time had come would be back in South Carolina sitting on the front pew of my

church on a Sunday morning with his family visiting. [both chuckle] So...Floyd Spencer who is an ultra-conservative but who has a young man on his staff who used to work for me at the radio station and one of my good friends. He's been on his staff as long as he's been there. These are the kinds of things who he keeps in touch with. So you have to be careful saying look just because he shows up election time does not mean he's going to be the best fellow for you.

00:38:05 **MC: So people were generally confused about who can I—**

WB: Yes. They would come to you and say 'Well what is he going to do for us?' and so we have to have politicians. If the guy doesn't keep his word then we say 'We are not going to vote for him.' Always if you got the other votes split you can always put somebody else in.

00:38:28 **MC: So that was some of the problems that the Palmetto [chuckles] Voter's Association had. Any other issues that perhaps I didn't address or perhaps you want to talk about before we close out?**

WB: Well I just want to thank you for stopping by and I hope that I have been able to contribute something for that Oral History. I don't know of anything else that we can do in these last years of mine. The only thing I want to do is to see that we have a good country in which my children and my grandchildren can grow up in and feel that they are citizens. They don't have to be penned in by the color of their skin but rather by what they know and how much they apply themselves. I am concerned, however, by a lot of young people who have not had to come through the things that we have come through and that they are not taking advantage of the opportunities that we have given them to succeed. They all think that they don't have to do certain things. But I want to tell you now I told some young people the other day that if they don't watch out all the gains that we have had would be taken away from us because there is a mood in this country for ultra-conservatives and if you don't believe it you just wait around.

00:39:48 **MC: Well there's an old saying that people say from time to time, revolutions can go backwards.**

WB: Yes. That's right. That's right. That's right. Whether you like it or not the man who is in the White House can change like a pendulum. He changes with the date. Whose picture you saw on the front page of the paper—I saw the picture on the front page of the paper when I had just come out of Florida, Reagan hugging a black astronaut's father here in South Carolina. Whether you believe it or not that as a lot—makes a lot of impression on the people.

00:40:27 **MC: Symbolism versus substance.**

WB: That's exactly right. That's exactly right.

00:40:33 **MC: Well I believe this has been a contribution I thank you for your help on this matter. Thank you very much.**

WB: Your welcome.

00:40:40 **End of Interview**