

Helen Lewis interviewed by Bob Short
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Helen Lewis

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BOB SHORT: We're glad to welcome Dr. Helen Lewis, former college professor, a long time educator, and a campaigner for Jim B. Carmichael in 1946. So it's 1946. Jimmy Carmichael is running against Eugene Talmadge for governor and you were there.

HELEN LEWIS: I had just graduated from college, Georgia State College for Women where we had gotten really interested in politics. Ellis Arnall had allowed 18-year-olds to vote and I was one of the first to be able to vote. As a matter of fact, I was able to cast my first vote for Franklin Roosevelt the last time he ran. And so we became very interested in trying to maintain the progressive government that Ellis Arnall had produced. And since he could not secede himself and had selected Carmichael, we became big Carmichael supporters in the college. And we formed a league of women voters, one of the first of young people, young women students, but we also formed something called the Student League for Good Government. And that was sort of, I think throughout the state. I know the University of Georgia had a Student League for Good Government.

And so when the campaign started, they asked me and George Doss from the University of Georgia to come and be in the campaign headquarters and organize students for Carmichael. And so we did, and we lived in the campaign headquarters at the Piedmont Hotel all summer and had an office called the Student League for Good Government. And we organized students all over the state of Georgia. We had students in every county. We had them in giving out sound trucks. We had some Allen Collie, who was from Grantville, whose mother ran the women's campaign for Carmichael. He was running around in a sound truck. He also flew an airplane and dropped leaflets in some places. We had students writing radio spots and doing those letters to the editor, making speeches at Kiwanis Clubs and anywhere that they were allowed to. But we had students organized I think in every county of Georgia. Well, in the headquarters they

thought we were kind of a joke and we were called the children's crusade and so there was a lot of joking with us and a lot of students hanging out there all the time. It was a very lively place and very exciting summer, and we were so sure we were going to win. And actually, we did bring in I think we always said 100,000 extra votes into that campaign more so than any campaign prior to that had ever had voted in Georgia. And so we took full credit for all of that, which probably wasn't exactly true. But anyway, that's how I was there and we were very excited. We were so sure we were beating both Rivers and because Ed Rivers was running, as well as Herman -- as Eugene Talmadge.

And the night of the election, we were just, you know, exuberant. We were so sure we were winning. We went over into the -- visited the Rivers' Headquarters and talked about didn't he look natural and treated it like it was a big funeral. And so we were just a -- and then when the county unit votes came in and we had lost the election, it was a very, very sad place if you can imagine so. It was a really important time for me because I had just graduated from college and I was going to graduate school that fall. So I left the state and went to Duke University that fall. So I missed all the excitement when Talmadge died and Herman claimed the office and we had three governors. And so I was very -- I just wanted to be back because it convinced me that I wanted to go into politics.

SHORT: Well, did you have a political career after that?

LEWIS: Well, not really. My idea at that particular time was I was going to go to -- I'd already

been accepted at Duke and I was going to go to Duke for a year and then I was going to come back and buy a county -- a newspaper. And some of the people in the Democratic Party were all in favor of that and were going to help me do that. And then I would get into politics. So I was all determined to get into politics. Instead, I go to Duke. It's right after World War II. Veterans coming in. I'd been at a woman's college for four years and so what did I do is get married to a Virginian. Ended up at the University of Virginia and -- but I did come back after the year at Duke and worked for Melvin Thompson.

They called me after the court had decided that Thompson was the legal governor and I had made friends with Dewitt Roberts. And Dewitt Roberts was the sort of public relations ghost writer, he was called, the real ghost for Ellis Arnall's books. As a matter of fact, I helped him do some research for *The Shore Dimly Seen* and so he just insisted I come back and work with the Thompson as Governor and be one of the ghost writers. So I worked there for the year after from '47 and we had a house across the street from the capital, which Herman Talmadge called the haunted house. And I think in one of his big editorials, I was named as the littlest ghost, or the smallest ghost or something and one of the things that I did was, well I answered a lot of letters. You know, the governor gets a whole lot of requests for information about certain things, about departments and what's going on in this.

So I just, I answered letters. He was doing a sort of a weekly sort of fireside chat kind of thing. I wrote some of those speeches and other speeches when he -- I remember Dewitt Roberts had me write one he was giving to a fraternity here at the University of Georgia, and it was supposed to be glorifying the Old South. Well, I was pretty much an activist and a radical in those days and

this was sort of a joke that I was going to have to write something supporting the glory of the old confederacy or something, which was not the sort of thing I wanted to write. So I did that.

Also, one of the things I did was one of the legislators had a son in college who needed a term paper on the prison system. So I wrote a research paper for him on the history of the prison system in Georgia. So those were the kinds of jobs that I had in the haunted house. And I stayed there until June of '48, I guess, and that summer I -- I'd married. I had married in that Fall of '47 so that while I was working there, I was married and we were living in a trailer out at Emory University on the campus for veterans who had come back from the war and who were -- because what happened was my husband, who was a graduate student at Duke with me, when I came back to Georgia he came and enrolled in Emory.

And we married, and I lived in this trailer in the middle of the campus between the post office and the cafeteria. So it was one of those little trailers that didn't even have a bathroom in it and you had to sort of go up the walkway to a big trailer, which had all the bathrooms and here were all these wives, and children, and people running up as the students were going between the post office and the cafeteria. And I wondered how many young men decided never to get married based on seeing how we were living in this little slum in the middle of Emory University. But okay, that's another story. But anyway, that's where I was living. So that summer, I got asked to work with the YWCA office in Atlanta and I had been very active in the YWCA at Georgia State College for women and we had been actively involved in what I call the early civil rights movement because we were going to integrated meetings and things like that.

So I was very interested in the YWCA. So I worked in that office that summer and that's another

story that I'll tell you later, if you would like, about how a group of us got arrested and made the front page of the Atlanta Constitution for mixed dance. But that's another story.

SHORT: Let's get back to --

LEWIS: Carmichael.

SHORT: -- the election of 1946.

LEWIS: Okay.

SHORT: Actually, Mr. Carmichael received more votes statewide than Governor Talmadge, but he was defeated by the county unit system. What was his reaction to that?

LEWIS: Well, we were all just devastated. I mean and at that time, I think that stirred up the whole movement against the county unit system and then with James Mackie, who was at Emory, who began to lead a real campaign against that. And all of us were really, I mean it was a sad place that evening in our headquarters and a lot of people came by, and everybody was, you know, just sort of devastated because we had done, we thought, such a good job and we had brought in the votes. And it was -- so I don't remember any personal reactions that he had. I mean, I just remember the whole sense of distress on the part of everybody who was there.

He was in and out of the campaign office, and as a matter of fact I had a room in the Piedmont Hotel, which was also used during the day for anybody who was there including Jimmy Carmichael, who would be need to change clothes, or dress, or take a shower, or shave. And so I was oftentimes going back to my room and finding Jimmy Carmichael's clothes and this got to be quite a joke with the other students who would come and visit, and they'd say, uh-oh, what's going on here. What is your role in this campaign. But he was not, I mean we were so busy, you know, organizing the students and keeping all of that going that there was not a lot of interaction with him. So in that sense, I'm not that clear on -- I don't think he hung around the office a lot that night. I think he probably went home to his family. I'm not sure. So that's not --

SHORT: Do you recall what part, if any, Governor Arnall played in that race?

LEWIS: No. He must have done some campaigning, but I don't know. And I never saw him much either.

SHORT: That race was typical of Georgia's two-party system at the time. You had the Ed Rivers group, which included Governor Arnall and Mr. Thompson. Then you had the Talmadges who had prevailed for at least 20 years prior to that election. Did Carmichael have any real interest in politics after that election?

LEWIS: Not that I know of because I was away during that next year at Duke and then I was

back for a year in the -- in the office, you know, working for Thompson. And I don't remember him ever showing up, or hanging out, or anything. I think he just disappeared, went back home. We of course was in the haunted house, which was this house across the way and it was more like a press room. There were reporters in and out of there. They came to us for information. The Atlanta Constitution, Ken Turner, was that his name, Ken --

SHORT: Ken Turner, yes.

LEWIS: Yeah, he would show up and check with what was going on with Dewitt Roberts and all of us, and it was -- so we, there was things going on. I think this was the time when they bought Jekyll Island. There was a lot of that going on at the time. So I don't think Carmichael, you know, had any relationship. Now, if he did over in the Capitol, that was kind of across the road and we would maybe go over to the office to pick up mail, and get our assignments, and that sort of thing. But that was our main responsibility. And after that, I don't know that they -- I don't think the Student League for Good Government even continued on college campuses. I think it was a -- such a state of depression and such a state of repression because up until that time, there had been sort of a safe period I felt, call it in Georgia under Ellis Arnall. And we were still going to integrated conference at Atlanta University, Paine College in Augusta. The YWCA was very active in opposing segregation, but there had been crosses burned on campus at GSCW. The woman who headed up this organization for the preservation of white women said that GSCW and Agnes Scott were communists schools because students were going to integrated

meetings. So there was a lot of sort of activism going on in the '30s and the '40s.

By the middle of the '40s, there was this, as I say, safe period. But Guy Wells, who was the president of GSCW, came to the YWCA and said, "I want you to keep doing these integrated meetings, but don't tell me." So what happened was all the activism went underground and I think, and that continued into that summer of '48. These things were secret, you know, and they were not recorded. I mean, you can go to the college newspaper now, look at all the '40s.

There's never a mention of any of those conferences or any of those things that were going on.

In the '30s it was very open and in the newspapers. By that time it had gone underground and by the '50s, the Y had just sort of gone out of business almost. It became just Bible study and devotions, and all of the really activism, I mean when I was there, we had Clarence Jordan coming and speaking. We had Frank McAllister coming and speaking.

SHORT: Tell us who Clarence Jordan is.

LEWIS: Clarence Jordan was a Baptist preacher who had bought this land down in South Georgia and started an integrated farm. And he was harassed by the Ku Klux Klan. People in Americus wouldn't even sell him seeds. He was run out of the Baptist church. It was a dangerous place there, but he continued and developed this Koinonia from which Habitat for Humanity developed and grew. And it still exists as a communal farm with -- and they sell pecans, and fruitcakes, and things like that, and still have an ongoing operation. He died and after that it was not as active as it was before, but it's still a business and still a cooperative farm.

And Jimmy Carter even went there as a student, I think, and did a little work. And I mean it now has a good reputation. But in the early days it was like something that to be destroyed, something of a scourge on the good old South, you know. And anyway, those people came and talked, Lucy Randolph Mason was a real impressive, wonderful woman, a labor organizer. So those were the things that were happening. By the '50s, all of that was gone and the college no longer gave financial support to the Y and they encouraged the denominations, the religious denominations to take over. And so the whole activism, by 1960, a student got suspended and had to leave the college because she attended black conference in Paine and also went to black churches. So all the sort of student activism left the campuses and became part of SNCC, and SOC, and all of those other organizations.

So if you wanted to be an activist then, you couldn't do it through the college as you did in the '30s, and '40s, and '20s even. There were interracial meetings in the '20s and a lot of sort of activism on the part of in women's, southern women's colleges. When I tell that story to people that I was doing all this stuff in the '40s, that it was early civil rights movement, they say, "Oh, no, that didn't start then. It started after '54. It started in the '60s." But that was happening at that particular time. And so, but after Arnall and when Talmadge came back the segregationists really put such pressure on the colleges that they were afraid to do anything. And they soon got rid of Guy Wells, and he ended up working with the Southern Regional Council and supporting, working for the integration of the schools. And so it was a pretty interesting period of time.

SHORT: In looking back in history, what do you think was the turning point in people of

Georgia accepting racial integration as a way of life?

LEWIS: I guess when Eisenhower sent the troops to Little Rock, when there was a real and Lyndon Johnson signed the civil rights act. I mean, it became clear that there was going to be a lot of pressure. I was in Virginia at that time teaching in a branch college of the University of Virginia. Prince Edward County and the Virginia schools, you know, refused to integrate and there were schools all over, and of course that was the beginning of all these little private Christian schools so that people could go -- not go to the integrated schools. But it -- there's still a lot of racism and there's still a lot of people homeschooling, and sending kids to private schools still in the south.

But there's a whole lot more acceptance and I think that's why young people -- some of the younger people who've grown up in integrated schools don't have some of those phobias and problems that some of the older people in the -- in -- their parents or their grandparents had as credible changes, really, in terms of the amount of fear which they had had. I remember spending a week when it was back in the '40s, '44, I guess. I spent a weekend in the dormitory at Spellman living with black students, and eating in the cafeteria with black students and that was, you know, like the first time I'd ever been in a social relationship with black people, you know. And you couldn't go out and eat together in public. And that was the same time when we all got arrested, I mean a little later, it was '48 when we got arrested in Atlanta and I was working with the YWCA.

But anyway, I remember going, eating in the cafeteria and sitting by this, with black women.

And one of them got up and left that was sitting next to me, and the other woman on the other side said, "Oh, I'm real sorry, but you know, she's prejudiced against white people." And it just shocked me because I thought, I'm supposed to be the one that's prejudiced. I didn't know prejudice acted both ways. So all of these were real eye opening experiences, which was sponsored through the YWCA. It was one of the very earliest of these sort of, you know, early civilized activities.

And let me tell you about that summer of '48, if you don't mind. Do you want to hear that?

SHORT: Sure.

LEWIS: Okay. I was -- had been working in the haunted house and I was getting ready to leave and go to Virginia. So I took the job that summer. They needed somebody in the YWCA regional office, which was located I think on Lucky Street. It was and it was a building which had next to it the CIO offices and they had sort of a training center there where they were training union organizers. And we were next door. And so a group of seminarians came to Atlanta to do sort of work with poor people and help build houses, or ramps, or so forth. And there were two blacks in the group and the rest, they were from Vanderbilt, Yale, different colleges and seminaries. And they were sponsored by the interracial commission of Atlanta, I think and they were living on the black campus at Atlanta University.

And, but they asked the YWCA if they would have a little reception for them. So we asked the CIO if we could use their little training room next door and so we had a reception for them. And

I was there in the office so I invited all the YWCA women from GSCW who were in Atlanta that summer. Some had just graduated and had jobs, and one was working with the Red Cross, I think, or the Girl Scouts. It was the Girl Scouts. Others had jobs and others were just home for the summer. So we had a group come in and we were having a little reception, and we were doing some little dance like a little get together thing like the Virginia Reel.

And the police come in. And they said, oh keep on, keep doing what you're doing. And we looked at them and then they had us all sit down, and they called us out individually and said, what would your daddy think if he saw you dancing with a black man. They used the N word of course. So individually they did that to each one of us, gave us a ticket for disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace and then told us to go home and come to court later. So they didn't take us to jail. And there was some preachers there and their wives. There was another black couple. So I think there were at least three black people and 18 white people. Something like that was the numbers. And so we went home.

The next morning on the front page of the Constitution was mixed dance and listed everybody's names and addresses. So I mean I had to call my father up in Cumming, Georgia. And I said, "Look at the paper." You know, explain to your neighbors what's going on. And so luckily he said, "Well, I'm proud of you." But because he had been a pretty liberal anti-Talmadge person for years and the -- but other students and other people, some of the girls lost their jobs. Some of them lost their -- got run out of their apartments. Parents were really upset and, you know, wrote all sorts of letters back and forth, and telegrams to their daughters about, you know, what do you mean being in a mixed dance and that sort of stuff. Well, it appeared then again in the Sunday

papers. It appeared in the Journal and the Constitution, which were two separate ones. And then of course, Herman got hold of it.

So when we were supposed to go to court, the Klan was out. And so we got James Mackie from Emory as our lawyer, and I have a piece -- he wrote up a piece describing what happened and for everybody's family and for everybody to know. And there was a lot of complaints to Ralph McGill and everybody for doing that, and it was kind of a mistake. The police had been watching that place because they had integrated training sessions at the CIO. So they wanted to catch a CIO training session and instead they caught this bunch of YWCA girls and preachers, you know. And so it was a little embarrassing, but it was a very, I mean, a shocking experience for all of us. Finally, we all -- Mackie got the charge dropped to disorderly conduct, got that and just disturbing the peace and we all paid \$25 except for two or three people who lived in Atlanta and agreed -- decided to go ahead and fight it through. But the rest of us had going back to school or had things to do. I was moving to Virginia and so we paid our \$25 and that was the end of it.

SHORT: Who was Mayor back then, do you remember? Was it Mr. Hartsfield?

LEWIS: Might have been. I'm not -- this would be '48. I'm not sure. But we should have -- and I imagine the people who lived here and continued to probably made their complaints to the Mayor. But the rest of us just went our way and got out of it. But that was --and so, the whole, I mean there was this sort of open period I think when Ellis Arnall was there. There was, well,

because he did not fight against the primaries being integrated. He did not fight against the transportation that was integrated during that period. There was a lot of little changes that happened and he was urged to, you know, try to fight against it and he didn't. It was open and then he allowed 18-year-olds to vote and that's how we got involved in politics and we were the first state to do that. And so I feel real proud that I was one of the first 18-year-olds that got to vote.

Well, by the time I was in the campaign I was 20, 21, I guess at that point, but I was still pretty young and sort of idealistic. And it was right after the war, and we were going to have peace and never have war again. And I know one student and I were going around making speeches at Kiwanis about the United Nations and how important that was. So it was like, we thought, you know, the New South was with us until the segregationists came back and put such pressure on schools so that the schools have never -- well the activism, students became active, but they were active without the cooperation of the administration because Guy Wells was a pretty remarkable president of that college. So anyway, that's where we are.

SHORT: Let me ask you a question about, again about Carmichael. I have here a statement that he made at speaking to students at Emory University in 1950 in which he told the audience, "I sicken of these people who are always waiving the confederate flag and telling us what a glorious heritage the South has. No one denies this heritage, but too many of our people want to keep on living on who they are and where they came from." And he encouraged Georgians to embrace change and my question about Carmichael is, if he had been elected, do you think he

would have taken steps towards racial harmony in Georgia?

LEWIS: I think he would have tried. I mean I think, you know, he was still up against sort of a strong, powerful group of people in Herman and that crowd. I mean, Herman's newspaper, the Statesman, New Statesman was just on everybody's case. And so there was -- and there was, but I do think like Ellis Arnall, he would have continued that more safer period for other groups to be active and do stuff. He might not have been able to do as much with his legislature as he would have wanted to do, but I think he would have made a period where -- and I believe, well they did of course get rid of the county unit system. And that was, so there were progressive things happening in Georgia, but it was harder. It was much, much harder when you had, you know, Lester Maddox and the whole crowd, you know, in power there's a limit to what, you know, colleges can do because they're going to lose their money.

And colleges were, I mean I know during the '30s, a group of YWCA girls at GSCW went to Fort Valley and had a day talking to black students and faculty. The word got out that they had caroused and had an orgy with black male students and this was, this woman who headed up, I've forgotten her name. Do you remember the name of the woman who headed up that Society for the Protection of White Women? She called Talmadge and sent letters to all of the legislature about this affair and Guy Wells had to fire the YWCA Secretary named Polly Moss. They claimed that she had negro blood because otherwise there would be no way in which she would have allowed those students to go down to Fort Valley.

Well, it was at that point that she -- that Talmadge, you know, when he got the whole school

system discredited, you know, he required Guy Wells to get rid of the accountant firm because they were progressive democrats and had been working with the Y and taking students to interracial meetings. And made them fire another teacher and hire this woman who was a real segregationist. And the only way he was going to get any money was at that time. So having a segregationist, a strong segregationist in power meant that the colleges and universities, well all people who were relying on state funding to tow the ground. You know, so it would have made a big difference. It could have made a big difference in the activity of students and in the type of teaching that you got. I know that the faculty got really, really scared. I read some things.

The YWCA kind of went underground as well as in the '50s and they formed, their conferences were no longer called interracial conferences. They were called human relations conferences. And they, Ella Baker, Casey Hayden, Mary King were all on the payroll at the YWCA as they were helping SNIC get organized and they were doing these interracial conferences still and calling them human relations conferences. And they would offer to go to a college. The YWCAs were, in many of these colleges, were no longer being supported by the college, but they would call people in the sociology department or political science department and suggest that they come. And they would talk, do a lecture on human relations. And they were able to get into the colleges under that, under human relations rather than the YWCA.

So I mean there was a whole lot of underground work that was going on, but it was hard to do, much harder to do in the '50s and '60s. And the black colleges were more open, of course, and the private colleges were more open, but the state colleges pretty much, I mean, you know, suspended students, they were careful not to let things be written, editorials for integration.

There was one woman at Auburn who's a novelist now. I read in the paper the other day that she got suspended -- she got suspended because she wrote an editorial for integration at Auburn University and she -- Seton, her name is Seton. She has a new book out, doing book signings lately. She wrote the book *On Peachtree Street* and all of those.

SHORT: Anne Rivers.

LEWIS: Anne Rivers. Yeah, Anne Rivers Seton. She got suspended from Auburn for writing in the college newspaper about a pro-integration. So it was -- the colleges clamped down.

SHORT: Atlanta's business establishment supported Ellis Arnall in his race against Eugene Talmadge in 1942 and Mr. Carmichael again in 1946, but they never surfaced again until Carl Sanders ran in 1962. Some people give Sanders credit for being a New South governor because of his moderation on racial issues and his progressive program for Georgia. What was the civil rights movement at that time?

LEWIS: Well, by then I was -- what was his day?

SHORT: He was elected in 1962.

LEWIS: 1962, I was in, living in the coalfields of Virginia and it was kind of like I had

disappeared from the civil rights movement. I'd been active in those early days at GSCW. By the time I got to the University of Virginia in '48, the first black student came into the law school there and he and I were on panels together and talked about stuff. But then I ended up teaching way out in the coalfields and the issues there were strip mining, black lung disease, union reform. And so my students and I got very much involved, and I got very much involved in the United Mine Workers and all of the problems there.

So the civil rights movement just kind of passed me by. I would read about it in the paper. I'd read about it Selma and say, oh my gosh, if I had been, stayed in Georgia I would be there, you know, I would be involved. I would have been involved probably in the sit-ins in Atlanta and stuff like that. But I was not -- I was not there. And I was involved and got in trouble, actually, as a teacher and with my students in some of the protests against strip mining and working with community groups and activist groups in the mountains. So I left the civil rights movement. So when I came back to Georgia, I was out of Georgia for 50 years.

So I moved back to Georgia ten years ago and it's kind of like the politics of something I don't even understand anymore. I mean, it is another world. I mean, we had no republicans when I was here. Now, I mean we had the conservatives and the liberal democrats and so it's probably better that they call themselves what they are now instead of pretending to be democrats when they weren't. So it's like just it's -- I've had a hard time relearning Georgia politics and it was -- it's sort of sad because that was going to be my life at one time. But then marriage and becoming a college professor, teaching sociology and anthropology and being in the coalfields for 40 years really got me involved in the Virginia politics and then -- but only on sort of that. And

Appalachian studies, is I started one of the first courses in Appalachian studies and have been very much involved in Appalachian regional kinds of issues and particular around mining.

And so I lost -- I was no longer involved in the sort of real southern civil rights movement. But I followed it in the newspaper, but that's all. So Georgia politics, I just disappeared from my life.

SHORT: You hear a lot of criticism of federal programs nowadays. What effect do you think the Appalachian Commission has had on Appalachia?

LEWIS: It's modernized a lot of stuff, but it also -- it opened it up with big roads. I was always critical of it. As a matter of fact, when Jimmy Carter came in as president I was on his list to be the Director of the Appalachian Regional Commission. There was no way I would have been selected because I had been fairly critical of the Appalachian Regional Commission for putting their money into such -- not really doing anything. For instance, land reform is one of the biggest problems in the mountains. When you have 80% of the land and minerals owned by coal companies, there's no way that those counties can really, you know, make big changes. They don't have the resources. So you can put in big roads that helps people get out, but the mechanization of the mines, the consolidation of the mines, the lack of safety in the mines were such big, big problems. And what happened was the coal companies kind of co-opted the politics in those states and in those counties.

And it was just -- so they did not -- I had to force, I was with a group that forced the Appalachian Regional Commission to do a land study on land and minerals. They had never even done a

study which said how much land and how much minerals we even owned or do anything about the tax structure. There was no severance tax on coal when I got up there. And I started with some of my students and people in town. And some of the little local coalminers, operators joined in trying to get a severance tax on coal. The small operators were told by the big companies where they had to sell their coal. Get out of there. And it took several years, but eventually there was a severance tax on coal and now all those states have it. So but there was -- it was -- they, okay, they've done some good stuff. They built some schools. They did some water systems and I used to go with groups and they've done some good stuff with education, but they have not gotten to some of the root causes and maybe they never would or could. But so I've been sort of a semi, I wouldn't vote to do away with it, but I also would like them to be more involved in sustainable grassroots community development.

SHORT: What did you think of Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty?

LEWIS: It was helpful. It was really helpful. It was good. I guess they lost the war, but there's -- there's still a lot of poverty because nobody's dealing with the root causes. And so you have continuing problems with poverty, out migration. I don't see, you know, maybe -- I mean, right now the mountain top removal type of mining and the real push now for more coal and using more coal in our energy crisis is -- is absolutely devastating what's left of the mountains. And what's so sad is it's going to effect -- it's effecting the water resources for the whole eastern seaboard because they're covering up rivers and covering up streams with all that overburden,

and water tables are dropping. I mean, this is not the way, this is not sustainable. There's never -
- it's not at all sustainable. So.

SHORT: What do you think are the root causes of poverty? Is it education as most people think?

LEWIS: It's the great division between the rich and the poor, which is the greatest we've ever had and the tax system which favors corporate businesses. I mean, we need land reform in many places too and we need, I guess that's why I'm an Obama supporter. I don't think even there he will be able to do all that needs to be done, but this sort of the way in which corporate capitalism has taken over without any sort of criticism of it, you know, the market is going to solve it all. It is not. We've got to have more regulation and we've got to have a greater distribution of the wealth and we've got to put some resources in the of hands of rural communities, and rural policies, and agro business policies have got to be changed. We got to go back to more regional agriculture and it's -- there's just a whole lot of structural changes I think that need to be made. I mean, the economy is not a moral economy and so that's it, I think, is that distribution of wealth. We need some jubilees.

SHORT: If you were asked to give advice to a young student in Georgia College and State University now, who is interested in becoming involved in politics, what would you say to them?

LEWIS: I'd say do it. I mean they need to participate. They need to not just vote, but they need to really get involved and as 18-year-olds they can, you know. I -- when I did the inaugural lecture for the new president down there and what I did was talk about the '40s and the kind of civic education we got, the kind of participation in trying to develop integration and I just said they need to go back to having more civic education, more political education, and more participation in politics by young people. I think -- I don't think the League of Women Voters still exists down there because it's now a coed school and the YWCA hardly exists, and there's no other organization pushing. The denominations don't push it. The social gospel is kind of dead.

And so I would like to -- I think it's happening and some of it is happening through service learning. Students have been asking for more responsibility to the communities where they live and to the communities they come from. And they go and work with, you know, poor or what's communities and sort of that has sort of brought forth a group of students now that are pushing to be more activist. So I see movement in some of the colleges and so it's time the administration got on board and made this more possible. And because those were the experiences that educated me more than a lot of the classes. It was those extra -- I went in 1945, I took a bus from Atlanta, Georgia to Hartford, Connecticut, three day journey and worked -- I was with a YWCA project called Student in Industry.

We all had to go out -- we lived at a coop house. It was interracial. There was a young Japanese there who had come out of the concentration camps. There was a black student from Harvard whose parents were afraid for him to even come to that summer project because there were two

young girls from Georgia going to be there, white girls, and they were afraid that they would mistreat their son. But we became really good friends. We all had to get jobs and at night we had seminars on labor and industry. I mean that was an incredible education. I worked in a place that made the Norton Bomb Site and they put me on as an expediter to run around the factory to put things together to make things produce, but they did it mostly as a joke because I spoke with such a southern accent that they thought it would amuse the workers.

So that was my job for the summer until they discovered that I had worked in the library and they put me then in a room with all the patents to develop a library system for all of their papers and things. So they finally put me to work at a decent job, but that summer was an incredible education and so I think through service learning at colleges today that students are beginning to participate more. And so my advice is to get involved in politics. It's pretty important.

SHORT: Well, you certainly have and you've had a wonderful career. I want to thank you on behalf of the Richard Russell Library and the University of Georgia for being with us.

LEWIS: I'm pleased to have been asked. Thank you for letting me tell some of my story.

SHORT: Anything else you want to say?

LEWIS: I don't think so. You may want to read this thing that I wrote about the -- well, you have a copy here. That's mine. He'll give you a copy, but you need a copy of that because it

really gives you a lot of names of everybody in the -- who were involved in this project in the Carmichael campaign headquarters. I think --

SHORT: One of my great heroes in this life has been a fellow named Walter Brooks. I guess you won't remember Walter Brooks. He was associated with Senator Talmadge, Governor Talmadge. He was my mentor as a speechwriter and he had -- he had the most respect for Dewitt Roberts you'd never believe. Dewitt Roberts was his hero.

LEWIS: Well, Dewitt was a great friend of mine. He was so upset that I went onto Duke. He wanted me to stay and be part of that. They had my whole life planned. Dewitt had my life planned. Allen Collie whose mother was the head of the women's campaign and they were big politicians and came out of mill owning families in Grantville, he was at that meeting when we all got arrested. And he and I were kind of boyfriends that summer. I mean, they had the idea that he was going to be governor and I was going to marry Allen and then we were going to be the first family of Georgia. That was the scheme.

Well, I said, you know, that he had just graduated from Princeton and he was kind of a Kennedy sort of person. He got killed next summer. He was a pilot and he was with the National Guard and there was a crash and he died. And so that ruined that little episode. Besides that, I had gone to Duke and then met someone and so that romance was gone. Wasn't much of a romance. It was just kind of a little flirtation and it -- so but they were -- Dewitt had it all planned and then he had it planned that I would buy this county newspaper. And a friend of mine, Amelia Nodeler

was running a newspaper in the town and she was a GSCW student. And so then I would run for the legislature. They had it all -- my life planned and I was excited about it until I changed my -- changed my plans and became a college professor instead.

But I've always was, as a teacher, I must say that I was all more of an organizer of students than I was the proper lecturer. I got them involved in grassroots groups, involved in United Mine Workers and black -- but this was the -- their families problems. I mean the students started Virginia Citizens for Better Reclamation. As a result, I got fired and it was for nurturing radical students, the dean said. So I must say that I was politically involved with my students in all these social movements in the mountains and that to me was -- I told the dean, well I thought that was what teaching was all about, nurturing radical students. So anyway, so I continued to be active and active politically wherever I was, but which made it difficult, I mean somewhat difficult, you know, in terms of, you know, the administration.

SHORT: Did you know Doug Wilder?

LEWIS: I mean I didn't know him personally, but [indiscernible] yeah, I know who we was.

SHORT: He was a great friend of mine.

LEWIS: Oh, great. Great.

SHORT: When he ran for governor, well he was lieutenant governor. When he ran for governor, I helped host a series of fundraisers for him --

LEWIS: Oh did you? Good for you.

SHORT: -- in the city of Atlanta.

LEWIS: All right. Good. Yeah.

SHORT: He was elected and then reelected.

LEWIS: Uh-huh.

SHORT: Very nice guy.

CRAIG BREADEN: Can I ask a question while the camera's still rolling, because I just, I didn't turn it off.

LEWIS: Oh, you didn't turn it off? Oh. Yeah.

BREADEN: I wanted to ask one more question and Bob can chime on this too, but what impact

do you think World War II had and the end of the war have on the election in '46 for governor? Or was there an impact? Because Ellis Arnall was obviously elected as the war was beginning for the United States and taking this more progressive path. And then with the close of the war, did that have impact on what happened in '46?

LEWIS: I don't know. I think it was more the sort of, the beginnings of a rise in the sort of beginning to integrate facilities and things that really produced more fear on the part of people that influenced it more. Because actually there was sort of a euphoria at the end of the war. I mean, you know, about peace and prosperity and that should have helped more than hinder.

BREADEN: And he did win the popular vote.

LEWIS: Yeah. Yeah.

SHORT: Well, the problem being was the county unit system.

LEWIS: Yeah.

SHORT: When you take three small counties with a population of 30,000 and equal a vote in Fulton County, which has a population of 400,000, there's no way in the world you're going to -- winning the popular vote is going to get you elected. You got to run in those counties. You got

to have county organizations. You got to have the sheriffs and the county commissioners and all those people out there turning out the vote for you. And that's why the machine in Georgia was so powerful. It started with Eugene Talmadge in 1926 when he ran for agriculture commissioner and extended through 1962 when the county unit system was abolished. And the county unit system elected all the governors between that period and therefore you didn't get candidates running because they feared losing because they couldn't win out in the usings.

LEWIS: He was an incredible speaker too. I mean I went to one of those big rallies and the first thing he'd do and get up on the stage, and it was an outdoor stage, and he had people up in the trees that were going to yell to him. And he would, you know, and they'd say, "Take off your coat, Gene." Red suspenders. "Tell us about your son, Herman. Herman's fitting in the war". And then he did this whole thing about the farmer has three friends, Sears Roebuck, God Almighty, and Gene Talmadge, you know. And he was incredible. I mean it was just the show. It was a wonderful show and he was just that real populist leader among -- he had bragged that he never carried a county with a streetcar in it. You know --

SHORT: Didn't want to carry a county with a streetcar.

LEWIS: Yeah, didn't want to carry it and he could jump on the media and all this media against him and that just proved to be fine. When I got to the coalfields, it was kind of like the coal companies had the same kind of control over local politicians in the coalfields, that Talmadge

and his gang had over Pine Tree counties, you know.

SHORT: You know, if they gave Oscars to politicians for acting, Eugene Talmadge would have a mantle full of them.

LEWIS: Oh, wouldn't he.

SHORT: Because you know he was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of the University of Georgia. Brilliant man.

LEWIS: Smart as a whip.

SHORT: But he was a 135 pound lineman on the Georgia football team. He was an accomplished boxer, but you would think that he was just an old dirt farmer from Telfair County. And he had people convinced of that and they never, never saw through his acting ability.

LEWIS: Well, my family were always anti-Talmadge. My father was a rural mail carrier. He almost got fired once, I think, when I think maybe it was when Ellis Arnall got elected. He put aspirins in the mailbox of this man he argued politics with, a big Talmadge supporter. Well, he got reported and he almost got fired from carrying the mail because he had done this with this aspirin in this mailbox. And so I grew up pretty strong anti-Talmadge, but I must say I admired

the old man for his acting ability and his, I mean he was incredibly entertaining as well.

SHORT: What do you think caused all of his demagoguery?

LEWIS: How you get elected. It's how you get elected.

BREADEN: Did he lose to Arnall in '42 because of the UGA scandal and -- ?

LEWIS: I think it was. I think regardless of, you know, poor farmers and wanting the small, you know, cheap tags and all that sort of stuff and feeling he was on their side, they still believed in education and they wanted their kids to get a good education. So I think that whole thing, that allowed Ellis Arnall to get elected. And so if that was the main thing was to get those colleges reaccredited so that people's kids would have a decent education. And --

SHORT: And Arnold had a lot of plusses. Arnold had been, you know, attorney general. He was very well liked. He had the legislature behind him and that's important.

LEWIS: I was sorry that he never got a real good federal position or continued in politics, or was able to continue in politics. I mean he just kind of was not, I mean he was thought -- I mean I know he was recommended for several positions in the federal government. I mean 'cause he was a good politician and a good statesperson, statesmen. So but I did do some work on his

book.

SHORT: *Shore Dimly Seen*.

LEWIS: Yeah.

BREADEN: What did you do for that?

LEWIS: I just did some research. Dewitt Roberts wrote the book. I mean mostly.

SHORT: You know, ghostwriters aren't supposed to say things like that.

LEWIS: I'm not supposed to say that. He helped with the book. He did the major research. He did some of the research. We did some of the research.

SHORT: I used to face that all the time. People said, who wrote his speech. He did.

LEWIS: Yeah.

SHORT: He did. And I wrote speeches for governors and never saw them until they walked out the door with them.

LEWIS: Well, I think that -- the few little speeches I got to write for Thompson, his little fireside chat things he did, you remember those?

SHORT: Oh, yeah and I always felt sorry for Melvin Thompson because when he served those two years he really never had a chance. The legislature was opposed to him because it had elected Talmadge and they were angry because the courts had overturned them. So they didn't give him any money. They did nothing for him and he sat there for two years, you know signing executive orders and making civic club speeches, but he really never had a chance.

LEWIS: No. And so that was my big moment in politics in Georgia, which is not much of a big moment. So I left and went to Virginia, but we all were kind of scattering at the end of that campaign. I tell you, we were talking about leaving the country. Bill Allen, who had been one of the PR people there and everybody was talking about leaving. Ed Bridges I think was one of the reporter's names that worked with us and it was some possibility of my going to work with the Atlanta Constitution and I was kind of thinking about that and had talked to them about it. And then, but then that the whole marriage, going back to graduate school and becoming a college professor. So but because I was a little bit more of an activist as a college professor, that career was fraught with danger too. Okay. Well, thank you so much.

SHORT: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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