

**Aubrey Morris interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
**Aubrey Morris**

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by Young Harris College, The Richard Russell Library and the University of Georgia. We are

delighted today to have as our guest Aubrey Morris, former Atlanta Journal Reporter and Dean of the Atlanta Radio Newsmen. Aubrey, we're delighted to have you. Glad you're here. We're honored.

AUBREY MORRIS: Thanks. Delighted to be here. Who were those sponsors again?

SHORT: Young Harris College.

MORRIS: I think of Zell Miller when I think of Young Harris.

SHORT: Yes, a very famous alumnus.

MORRIS: Right

SHORT: The University of Georgia, of course.

MORRIS: The University of Georgia

SHORT: And the Richard B. Russell Library.

MORRIS: One of the very fine institutions at the university. Very proud of it and what it's

doing.

SHORT: Good. All right, you area native of Roswell, Georgia.

MORRIS: Roswell, part of metro Atlanta, native all the way, several generations.

SHORT: You went to school there in public schools and then you went to the University of Georgia.

MORRIS: Correct.

SHORT: Tell us about your experience at the university.

MORRIS: Well, first of all you've got to get to the university. How in the world would a guy, country farm boy from Roswell, Georgia get to the University of Georgia to the Henry W. Grady School of Journalism which I had heard about from two very good teachers I had in Milton High School in Alpharetta which is the high school I attended just up the road from Roswell in the Fulton County School System. Well, they encouraged me to study journalism and said, "The only thing you can do is go to the University of Georgia," and I thought it was predestined that I go to the university. So I ended up at the University of Georgia with a couple of paper bags, I think, and maybe an old worn out suitcase as we called them back then and a few rag tag pieces

of clothing. One neck tie, I remember, and I remember on the day I arrived at the university at the bus station, west of the arch and the next block headed toward Atlanta well, there was the bus station. I guess it's still there today in Athens.

Got off the bus and by the way, I had been writing for the local weekly newspaper in Roswell in Alpharetta throughout high school and when I got off the bus another aspiring young university student had arrived from somewhere down in South Georgia by another bus and he started across the street and immediately was hit by a taxi cab. So what did Aubrey Morris do? He reverted to his original calling. He became a reporter, got out my notepad, pencil, went over and asked the policeman the name of the student-to-be. "Oh, he's not hurt badly. We're going to send him over to St. Mary's Hospital and have him checked over."

I wrote his name down, quoted the officer and said what happened; he just stepped in front of a taxi. I guess he was enamored at arriving in Athens, wasn't watching where he was going.

Maybe he was looking at the co-eds already. But this student, I remember I got his name and before I went to register at the university I went to the Athens Banner-Herald within the very hour, saw Byron Lumpkin, who was then managing editor of the Banner-Herald and introduced myself. Told them I just arrived to studied journalism and the university, told him what I just witnessed and I told him I had the name of the guy. He wasn't hurt badly, he would be okay but he was taken to the hospital for treatment. He'd just arrived and quoted the policeman saying he would be okay, no charges were made against the taxi driver. That basically was the story, a couple of paragraphs. And Mr. Lumpkin was so taken by this way of getting a news story about a new arriving student being injured by a taxi that he had decided to run a little box alongside the

story about the reporter who reported it, Mr. Aubrey Morris from Roswell reported this story and he had arrived to study journalism at the university.

You can imagine how a new student at the university would have been taken aback by that sudden opening of the door to fame and fortune.

SHORT: So you studied journalism at the university and upon graduation you got a job with the Atlanta Journal?

MORRIS: Well, I studied journalism at the university and during the summer between my junior and senior years I got a job as an intern at the Atlanta Journal, covered city hall and there I got to know the great Atlanta mayor William B. Hartsfield. And he really inspired me even more to continue with my career. So I went back to the university, edited The Pandora during my senior year and on the day I graduated from the university I lived in the old college right across from the law school and I took my few belongings outside and I left immediately for Atlanta. Rode the bus, by the way, back to Atlanta, went to register at the YMCA and went to the Atlanta Journal that afternoon thinking, well, I'd be able to go to work that Monday morning. It was Saturday in the early afternoon and Fred Moon said, "Well, hello, welcome back, Aubrey," said, "You're our new police reporter. You're covering the police beat tonight." So I went to work the night the day I graduated from the university having pledged that I would come back to work. They wanted me just to stay but I told them I was going back. They'd asked me to be editor of The Pandora, the annual at the university which I was proud to do. I'd already picked my staff.

We had it all lined up. So I went back and that's the day I began at the Journal. Don't ask me the year. I think it was '46, '45, '46.

SHORT: You mentioned Mayor Hartsfield. Tell us a little bit about Mayor Hartsfield.

MORRIS: Well, as soon as he found out I was at the University of Georgia he, shall we say, took a liking to me. He was his own best press agent. He knew how to get in the newspapers, always with something positive about Atlanta. But he also was a man of great erudition, is that the word? He's very suave, very smart, very good politician and he knew that it was good to be a member and to be caught "hanging out" to use a modern phrase with certain people if it were suitable. So he found out that I was at the university, what clubs or organizations I was a member of. I'd been elected to the Grid Iron Club, the secret society, Grid Iron Secret Society at the university. He then said, "Well, can you help me get in? Can you recommend me as a member?" And I remember this about Hartsfield in particular, I passed along his desire to become a member of this select group which it still is and he even asked me to go with him and his chauffeur to their initiation meeting at the Grid Iron Club when he was initiated into Grid Iron. And I found out a little bit about Hartsfield believing in each man looking after his own job and letting the other man handle his assigned task.

On the way back to Atlanta late that night somewhere outside Monroe, Georgia the police vehicle -- the mayor and I were sitting on the back seat, the lieutenant driving for him was sitting on the front seat and we were headed back to Atlanta and the right rear tire blew out about 2:00

in the morning. And Hartsfield just sat back there in the back seat. I sat there and I started to get out. The lieutenant started getting out to change the tire. I started to get out and help him.

Hartsfield, "Get back in here. That's his job." Said, "You sit in this." And this was in winter, a cold winter night. Hartsfield insisted on the lieutenant changing the tire which he did. I said, "Well, this guy's an interesting character. I think I'll get to know him a little bit better," which I did.

And Hartsfield was a very obstreperous individual. He let me know all about him. He'd even invite me to his law office. He had a lot of hobbies on the side. One of them was mining. He liked to prospect for minerals in the state of Georgia. He had a wide variety of interests. Well, he had an interest in everything, would invite me up there and then I got to know him. And then one time Fred Moon my city editor at that time gave me a pointed question to ask Hartsfield when I arrived at city hall. And I asked him and Hartsfield picked up a paperweight on his desk, threw it at me. I dodged and it hit the door in the mayor's office. I said, "Well, I'm getting to know this guy. He's really getting to be my buddy I think." So he threw the paperweight at me and then he let out a real wild laugh and his secretary came running in to see what had happened. He said, "Oh, nothing's happened." He reached over behind his desk there in city hall where he had a Coca-Cola cooler where the cokes were cooled by a block of ice and who saw to the steady supply of Coca-Cola there other than Bob Woodruff, who owned Coca-Cola himself and who was Hartsfield's leading confidant among business people. And Hartsfield reached back and got one of Mr. -- Coca-Cola came in everyday and stocked the thing with fresh Coke. Got a coke and he and I drank a cold Coke and then we talked to some more and then he gave me the

interview and I did the story, but I learned incidentally a little more about Mr. Woodruff. Mayor Hartsfield, he consulted people all over the country -- high and low, people in high office, people in low, from the president on down whoever it was and he was just able to make decisions. Like with Mr. Woodruff, he would ride around in a police car late at night, Woodruff would be on the front seat with the police lieutenant driving, Woodruff always smoking a cigar or chewing on one and Chief Jenkins, Mayor Hartsfield, and occasionally they would invite me. As I say, Hartsfield took a liking to me and so therefore I cultivated that because I learned a lot that was going on.

So we were riding around early one Saturday morning. Hartsfield, Woodruff, Chief Jenkins -- Herbert Jenkins, and myself. Woodruff looks out and sees people loitering on the street corner. He takes a drag on his cigar and says, "Herb, clean up that mess." We just keep driving right along. So that's the way politics was in Atlanta when people of power and immense knowledge of the city and its people who knew people all over the city where they could afford to make decisions in the best interest of law and order if you want to call it that, safety on the streets. At that time they simply didn't allow people--there was an ordinance against idling and loitering. You'd be thrown in jail if you even suggested somebody be arrested for that today, wouldn't you? Would you? I don't know. Maybe you have a right to idle and loiter but not to threaten other people on the street.

**SHORT:** Mayor Hartsfield was very interested in aviation.

MORRIS: Hartsfield and Atlanta are the same on aviation. Now, I know we have Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport but let's go back to the beginning. Hartsfield is a member of the Board of Alderman I think it was called back then. He was head of the aviation committee and saw the chance for the city to purchase the old Candler Field which was a privately owned airport beyond on Hatfield owned by a member of the Candler's. I think it was Asa Candler of Coca-Cola. I'm not sure. But it was own by the Candler's and was called Candler Field. That's where owners of private aircraft could take these new toys and go out and have weekends for recreation, fly wherever else they wanted to. But Hartsfield saw what was coming because also at that same time came on the scene a guy named Mr. C. E. Woolman who had been a crop dusting pilot, owned a crop dusting company. A crop duster, by the way for you people who are not familiar was a guy pilot who flew a plane that spread poison over cotton fields and crops to kill insects.

Well, Mr. Woolman's background was in Louisiana in the cotton, the delta cotton land in Mississippi and Louisiana but he wanted to get into the airline business and he came to Atlanta to begin Delta Airlines. And if you mention Hartsfield you have to mention Mr. Woolman who had his shop setup right there right at the edge of Hapeville at the old, old terminal. That was Atlanta's first terminal. Now, I don't know -- there were Eastern Airlines. There were other pioneers like Eddie Rickenbacker, the famous World War I pilot. Rickenbacker started Eastern, Woolman started Delta and together with Hartsfield, they built the airport, taking it away from the upstarts -- Birmingham, Alabama really was ahead of Atlanta in the early days. Hartsfield saw what they were doing and he said, "I want that for Atlanta." Birmingham almost got ahead

of Atlanta a couple of times until Hartsfield boldly started expanding, you know, and convince the business community, the travel industry that Atlanta could become a travel center, which he set out to do.

When I talk about Hartsfield, though, having built the Atlanta Airport, well, that's because for a long time that's what it was called -- Hartsfield. People called it Hartsfield instead of being named after William B. Hartsfield. Hartsfield I would say was the idea man and I think in retrospect Hartsfield would give due credit to those who followed him, who picked up the cue that he gave the city not only during the time that he was mayor but the years to come even up to today because they've all been imbued with Hartsfield's spirit to push Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

I remember, for example, when Mr. Woolman was still on hand when he began service to Paris. I don't know whether it was Delta, Pan Am, International Flight or what it was but Mayor Andrew Young was mayor of Atlanta at that time. I remember a great speech that Mayor Young--later Ambassador Young--made in Paris about Atlanta and about the South, about the leadership that Atlanta was poised to give the world when it showed what interracial progress was meaning to a big city and would continue to mean. Then, of course, Mayor Maynard Jackson, superb leadership. I covered many, many speeches when Mayor Jackson bragged about the Atlanta Airport, when he, himself, went all over the country to get funding to expand to build new runways, to get new technology. Mayor Ivan Allen, Mayor Sam Massell, all of those who have followed right up to Shirley Franklin have done--and I am indeed proud of what they have done to enhance what Hartsfield thought about way, way, way back in Atlanta history.

SHORT: Speaking of flights to Paris, you were on hand to cover the story of the Orly crash that took so many Atlanta lives.

MORRIS: Yes, one of the--I guess in reporter and newspaper or journalist parlance you refer to a big story. Well, I don't refer to it as a big story just for that reason. It was a big story because it affected Atlanta in a big way because it, in effect, wiped out much of the civic and cultural leadership of this city. I said it didn't wipe it out but it wiped out a lot of it. Just like the Winecoff Hotel fire of years earlier, the Orly Airport crash in 1962 decimated the city of well over 100 of its leaders in the field of the arts in particular connected to the Cultural Arts Center it was called. This is where some 120 of Atlanta's leaders, member of the Atlanta Art Alliance had flown to Paris and to other major cities in Europe, Rome, London, Berlin to study what they were doing in the area of enhancing all elements of the arts for their cities.

This group had been in these cities in Europe for about two weeks. I covered their departure earlier from Atlanta and former Mayor Hartsfield because Mayor Ivan Allen was mayor at this time. He had asked former Mayor Hartsfield to see the group off when they left Hartsfield Atlanta Airport at that time. That was in '62. Well, I imagine my horror on a Sunday morning when the day that I knew they were to return to Atlanta I got a telephone call at church. An usher came up to my pew and said, "Mr. Morris, you're wanted at WSB." King Elliot, the newsman in the WSB Newsroom, the news announcer said the plane crash at Paris has killed the Atlanta people. I knew immediately what he was talking about and I said, "Well, I'll be at the

station right away.” My wife had remained home that day with our children and I left church alone, calling my wife and telling her I was going to the station.

And immediately on arrival, I went to the Air France Office across from the Atlanta Journal Constitution Building on Marietta Street and the Air France staff was beginning to get over the old teletype a confirmed list of those who had died in the crash. But by then it was almost 11:00, it was about 10:30 Sunday morning and Mr. Elmo Ellis, my boss, was at the station. He and Rev. Harry Fifield the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, we were to go on the air, broadcasting as we had done for years the First Presbyterian Service at 11:00 and it was decided between Rev. Fifield and Mr. Ellis that instead of Rev. Fifield delivering his sermon at 11:00 on the 11:00 broadcast would be taken up with my use of the telephone in calling in the names of each victim of the Orly crash as it arrived on teletype.

And at that time, one of the prominent business men was an Atlanta banker, Mr. W. O. Duvall, ran Atlanta Federal Savings and Loan Association and he was at the Air France office and it just occurred to me to get him to tell me a little bit about each one of these people. So we preempted Rev. Fifield's sermon with a broadcast and confirmation of each person and Mr. Duvall was able almost without exception to tell me something personal about each of those people. They were all so important and he knew everybody in Atlanta anyway. As for the crash itself, how does a reporter--remember back then to be on television would have been filming something and supplying the film to New York and putting it on the network. Well, that was that and I was frustrated because Mayor Allen -- I went to city hall by the way after leaving the Air France office, I went to city hall. Mayor Allen had arrived wearing his farming clothes. He liked to go

to his farm down in Heard County, Georgia and piddle around on a Sunday afternoon but just as he got down there, he had gotten out in the fields, called back into his telephone, got the word, came immediately to city hall. I met him there. We interviewed him there and I said, "What are you going to do?" And he decided he and Edwin Stern, the Atlanta City attorney would go to Paris on the next flight they could get out of New York and it would be leaving at 5:00. And I called my wife and I said, "I'm going to get on the plane, bring my passport to WSB, Elmo Ellis going to bring me to WSB to take me to the airport." The mayor said I could go along. I told him I was going along.

So he took me along and we arrived in New York. Mayor Hartsfield, by the way, saw us off at the airport. Stern, the mayor, and myself arrived in New York. I told the mayor, he said, "What do I do?" Because every reporter in New York was at Idlewild Airport. Well, is that Kennedy today? I think, yeah. Every reporter was there. All of the TV film cameraman, radio people. They were there and I said, "Well, you speak from your heart. Just don't be uptight about it. Just go out and meet them and whatever they say, do it. Answer them." Boy, he did a superb job. But man, I tell you, he showed his manhood in my heart by the way he handled that.

Flying out over the Atlantic about midnight that night, headed into Paris, we could look and see the northern lights of the Aurora Borealis, over the North Pole and the mayor was looking out there and just very quiet and I just put my hand on his and I said, "You're doing okay, man." Said, "You're going to get a different audience when you get to Paris." Sure enough he did. A phalanx of photographers, reporters, stumbling all over each other wanting to get to the mayor and everything. He hadn't even been to the site yet. So I told one of the aides to the Paris

mayor, I said, "Well, tell the guys the mayor will meet with them but he wants to visit the site first. How would emotionally be able to respond?" Furthermore, I knew that they would get a better story. He hadn't even been to the site yet.

The mayor got in a limousine, we drove to the site. The mayor looked at all of the luggage of the victims strewn about this apple orchard and a little village at the end of Orly Airport called Villeneuve and the plane had aborted the take off and it crashed and burned in this apple orchard. And the mayor was coming up and then is when I, sort of, kicked in as a report to the mayor, I said, "Mayor, I think the French authorities a little bit overreacted." I said, "You tell them you will see the press now." So they were all crowded at the fence some distance away and they gave the signal and they came like a horde up just as the mayor started looking at everything and they were able to record his reaction as he saw it for the first time, see. In fact, I remember Mayor Ivan Allen looking down. I won't call the name of the victim who died in the crash but the mayor looked down and saw a necktie that he had given one of these victims as a Christmas present.

"I remember that necktie," and then he called out who he gave it to. That was on Monday morning. They followed all Monday, rest of Monday, Tuesday and by Wednesday Attorney Stern and I suggested to Mayor Allen that he hold an ecumenical service. Both of us knew the dean of the American Cathedral in Paris and it's on Avenue George Fifth, a very huge cathedral right in the heart of the city and since these were Americans we figured that would be the proper place and the dean at the cathedral had been dean of Holy Innocence Episcopal Church in Atlanta. We both knew him. So he arranged the ecumenical service which was held on

Wednesday morning at the American Cathedral with the dean from Atlanta saying a goodbye to the Atlantians who had died in the crash and the most memorable music the ecumenical choir sang during that service was an old prayer from the Sarum Primer from the Sarum Rite of the Anglican Church. It appears in hymnals under various forms. It's called "God Be In My Head," or from the Sarum Primer, "God Be In My Head," the first few lines:

God be in my head and in my understanding. God be in my heart and in my keeping. God be at mine end and at my departing.

SHORT: One of the stories you covered while you were with the Atlanta Journal was the tragic Winecoff fire.

MORRIS: That was when I was a single man living still -- as really a cub reporter, a young reporter on the Journal and I got a call from an Atlanta Fireman who was a watchman in downtown Atlanta. His name was Swamp Walker. They called him Swamp because he hung out in what was then known as the underground which is now underground Atlanta, the entertainment site and these were really dark, dank, under the railroad overpasses, dark corners and everything, where winos and people like that would hide out and the police would drive the paddy wagon in there and load up two or three times a night. Well, Swamp Walker was doing his checking down in there one night to see if there was any fire danger and he looked up and saw flames coming out of the Winecoff Hotel up Peachtree Street.

He called me. I'd made great effort to promote sources at the fire department, too. And he

called and said, "Scoop, the Winecoff's on fire." He called me Scoop. That was his nickname. Some of my police friends were calling me that by then and you think I need some water? My wife is handing me a glass of water. Thank you, darling. And Swamp Walker said, "The Winecoff's on fire." I picked up the phone in my rooming house at Juniper and Fifth Street and the dispatcher Yellow Cab Company, Bella Isle ran Yellow Cab Company, one cab company in Atlanta. I said, "Is the Winecoff on fire?" Said, "Yes, it is." He said, "They're jumping out everywhere." Yellow Cab's headquarters was across the street from the hotel. He said the same thing. People were jumping out of the hotel. Tragedy. So my cab arrived in no time.

I was down there, first reporter on the scene of the Winecoff which at that time was the worst hotel fire in history. I think there may have been another one equally as bad since then. I'm not positive but up to that time it was advertised as fire-proof and it was a very popular hotel. Now, I remember Governor Marvin Griffin was governor at that time and the Georgia YMCA, High Y, the YMCA, YWCA young men and women in those youth groups from throughout the state of Georgia were in the Winecoff that weekend for the upcoming legislative session in January. And most of them housed there. Most of the over 100 people who died were these young people.

There were other guests from all over the country, too, of course.

And when I arrived the tragedy was still going on and I called the city editor and we had a whole staff of reporters and photographers in addition to me. I remember Bill Key, our Chief rewrite man -- Bill Key, if there was a big story, I don't care if it was a star reporter anywhere out in the country he called in the store to Bill Key. He grasped the drama of the event and the guy on an old manual typewriter hunt and peck, he wrote the story. He wrote it just like that and handed

the copy over to the city editor immediately so Bill Key did the first story and it was a big story, tragedy, tragedy, tragedy. There were many heroes in that fire. Some of them are firemen who rescued people. On the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire there was an observance at the old firehouse on North Avenue where a very touching moment occurred.

On the event of that fire this police captain whose name I'm sorry, I can't remember, stationed at North Avenue, he rescued a woman and her small baby from one floor, brought her down to another and then brought her down--the ladder truck would reach only so high and then he got her from one floor down to the other by bringing her out the window tied to sheets, she and the baby and then transferred them to that fire ladder and brought her down and saved her. And on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire here's this woman about 45 years old, came up and gave this fire captain a big hug, said, "You're responsible for me being here." Her mother had already passed away but she was there to thank him for saving her back then.

I like to catch the drama of people. People are always big hearted. People are kind. You have to show them the call of duty and they respond.

**SHORT:** Well, after 13 years with the Journal, Elmo Ellis lured you away into radio and you and Elmo Ellis came up with probably the first full-fledged radio news department in the city of Atlanta.

**MORRIS:** That is true but, Bob, there's a little bit of forerunner to that. As police reporter I knew that I wanted to expand my horizon. I really wanted it to be a broader reporter rather than

just covering the tragedy, the pitfalls of human behavior as exemplified in each day's television news cast. I wanted to get out and cover a broader aspect of life. So actually what I did, a friend of mine at the University of Georgia who was working in the Marvin Griffin administration prevailed on me to leave the Journal and to go and start the first public information office at the state transportation department.

State transportation department was in the news back then, too. Always is. And I went over and worked for about nine months under Roger Lawson who was then director of the highway department and frankly that was when Governor Griffin was beginning a new program of road building called the Rural Roads Authority. We really took Georgia out of the mud. He instituted of building, of paving roads in rural communities all over Georgia, a great monument to a great governor. Well, that lost its allure and I liked being a reporter. I couldn't stand being away from the newsroom. So even when I was at the University of Georgia I had wanted to be in radio. So Elmo Ellis was general manager of WSB, our program manager I believe at that time and wanted to begin in earnest the coverage of news by radio.

This sounds interesting today with the advent of television and all of the other technology and communications that has come about but here was this new device called radio and WSB Radio had been the first radio station in the South, begun in March 1922, the year of my birth, by the way and Elmo wanted me to come out and begin a radio and news department. He had news announcers but they would have to come in and deliver the news on the air and there wouldn't be anybody to plan radio news coverage, so that was my job. I was a one-man news department until I built up a staff and I hired some guys who later became great radio reporters and

television reporters and we built it on the sound of the news. After all, that's what radio is, is sound. You know, that's the reason radio is still a creative medium. Radio still has its place. And I discovered that by the use of the telephone that I could cover the news anywhere simply by direct call to the station from the scene. If it were a live interview using the mouthpiece of the telephone simply as the microphone for radio. And other stations started doing the same thing in Atlanta and pretty soon the networks were doing that in New York. I wouldn't say that I pioneered that. I'm sure it was being done everywhere all over the country. I'm sure that I was not the pioneer but I certainly knew about it and I started doing it in a big way and that's the way we were able to get a lot of scoops on the news.

SHORT: I can remember you also had a program called "Open Mic."

MORRIS: Yes.

SHORT: That was a great program. I remember it very well.

MORRIS: Is this daily or weekly?

SHORT: I think it was daily.

MORRIS: Daily, well, it was sort of a man on the street interview type thing where you take a

topic of the day, you would have your microphone. In fact, people would see me or another WSB reporter on the street holding a WSB mic. He'd just be standing on the street holding the mic. I guarantee you within five minutes somebody would come up and say, "Mister, would you like to interview me?" And I would.

SHORT: How was covering the news for radio different from covering the news for a newspaper?

MORRIS: It was immediate and it had to be very succinct, very brief, very precise because the details were left for news casts or for print or for a more extended interview for television which soon was very much on the scene and then along came combined radio and television interview which is what we call "talking heads." You didn't see a lot of action on the scene photography. I remember Joe Fain, one of the early photographers. You remember Joe Fain, don't you?

SHORT: Very well.

MORRIS: Joe Fain was a very good photographer. He and I would go to cover a story, I would hold his mic for television. I would hold my mic for radio recorder and we would do a dual interview and that portion of the television news would be my talking head interviewing whoever I was talking to. Or I could have been doing a stand up alone myself, just a commentary describing something or I could have been interviewing a politician, which I often did.

SHORT: Well, let's talk about some of those politicians you interviewed. I guess Herman Talmadge must have been governor when you --

MORRIS: Yeah, I get a little bit personal about almost all of them. I remember Senator Herman Talmadge. I remember succinct quotes that they had. Talmadge had one when we got involved in the Vietnam War. Of course, Dean Rusk, the Georgian was secretary of state. The cold war came along. We got involved in Vietnam after the battle of Dien Bien Phu in which the French War of Indochina, you remember, had been fighting that battle back and forth, back and forth and we were really drawn into it but it really tied in very, very closely to the spread of communism throughout China and Russia. So therefore it became a matter of great urgency and so all of the politicians supported it until it became an unpopular war very much as the war in Iraq. We went in for what the politicians and what I personally think was a just and noble and real national purpose in going into Vietnam to protect freedom and to protect our country because we had become a world power and if we didn't exercise it, it would be a vacuum and somebody else would.

So we went in to Vietnam and then we went into Iraq when President Bush, the War on Terror, these things--and this has to do with the sophistication of the media. Everybody, every consumer of the news nowadays in effect becomes his or her own reporter or analyst or critic and while I don't like to be critical I think the news media is simply evolving. We have to except the fact of the change of technology. We find new ways to do it. If we're going to have a war we sure had

better find a better way to inform the public as to why we're there and what we're doing there because when--you see for the first time as you do today the caskets draped with American flags bringing men and women killed in a foreign country back to their loved ones back here. You've got to approach war in a different way. This doesn't mean the war's not going to continue to happen but we have to get the United Nations more involved again.

We have to get NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization more involved again. These organizations that men like Senator Richard B. Russell, Senator Herman Talmadge, Congressman Carl Vinson, some of the others who are such--we called them hawks back then. They were very much for defense. Were it not for the fact that Richard B. Russell was head of Senate Arm Services Committee and Carl Vinson head of the House Armed Services Committee -- had headed those departments during World War II, we would not have been able, I guarantee you, to mobilize, to prepare to defeat Hitler in World War II. We almost waited too late as it was. So I look at some of those people, they were often the controversy of the day's news. That was the segregation/integration battle where they all got caught--history caught them at a time when the world was beginning to change, communications were changing, people were changing, their views were changing.

The dramatic change of history in this country began, in my view, at the end of World War II. Or maybe during the war we were beginning to see the change because even during the war when African/American citizens of this country weren't even allowed to be in the same units with other fighting men and women in the military, all of that finally changed. Well, we saw that these changes were coming and as I look back on a long career of almost a half century,

reporting these changes as an observer, not a prejudiced observer but hopefully always an open-minded reporter, I was enabled to witness the appearance of Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. in police court representing black men and women who had been imprisoned or Judge Prudence Herndon -- then a black woman attorney, representing them in court.

And then when police chief Herbert Jenkins decided to hire the first black policeman and fireman in the fire department, Hartsfield, again, when they came on the scene I was there to report it, you see. I saw these men of good will; Hartsfield was the exponent of the idea "the city too busy to hate." Ivan Allen carried it on to its fullest during a critical period. Progressive mayors like Mayor Andrew Young, people like that, Mayor Maynard Jackson, Sam Massell, all of these people came along and Atlanta was very fortunate along with another thing had. Atlanta had a group of five predominantly black as they were called universities, the Atlanta University Center. All of the leaders without exception, the leaders of these colleges, Dr. Benjamin Mays, the mentor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

I remember him. They taught others who then taught future generations. Andrew Young on the scene, you know, people like John Lewis, the people that got their teaching from people who knew the change was going to occur and to me, having witnessed that change was one of the high points of my career. And I would think mentioning Martin Luther King, I remember when Martin Luther King, Jr. -- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. went to deliver his first public speech from the back of a flatbed truck on the Metro Street Bridge right in front of the state capital. Is that it on the west side of the capital? And he made his speech. I recorded it on a windup tape recorder, an old tape recorder that you had wind by hand and then I took this audio tape back to

WSB, put it on an editing machine, cut out sound bytes or excerpts from Martin Luther King, Jr's speech. This is about 4:00 or 4:30 in the afternoon and I said, "I'm going to make the 6:00 news for this."

I made the decision, the announcer, we all communicated. We knew it was coming up. It would be the lead story that night and it was the lead story at 6:00 on WSB, the lead story at 11:00, every half hour throughout the evening it was, in fact, this thing that had happened in front of the capital. But by mid morning the next morning Mr. Elmo Ellis had gotten a telephone call from a very irate woman--a white woman--in northwest Atlanta. This woman wanted to know from Mr. Ellis, "Why is WSB putting this negro"--I use that word because that was her word--"why is he putting him on WSB? We don't need hear that." And Mr. Ellis simply said, "Well, let me let you talk to our news director, Aubrey Morris." Which he did. He transferred her in. She repeated the same thing only she was a little bit more caustic. She was down the line in authority. "Mr. Morris, why did you put this negro on the air?" And I said, "Because it's news. Because he made a speech in front of the state capital and somebody making a revolutionary speech in front of the state capital, if that isn't news, what is? You tell me." She said, "Well, we don't need to hear that." I said, "What do you mean, you don't need to hear it?" She said, "We never heard this before." And I said, "Well, you're going to be hearing a lot of it. If you want my opinion because you're going to be hearing a lot of it right here on WSB because our job is to report the news." And her finally remark, "Well, Mr. Morris, I just wish I had died before it all came along."

SHORT: You were active then in the integration of the University of Georgia and the schools of the state.

MORRIS: In the covering. Yes, very definitely because the University of Georgia being my alma mater, I remember Charlene Hunter and Dr. Hamilton Holmes. I sent Scott Harrington, one of my new reporters I think who had worked in Connecticut, sent him over to do the reporting from the campus at the university. Of course my job as news director was to be in the station to see what we needed to do and oversee our coverage. But that morning I went out to the--before he left for Athens I went out and he was escorted, as I recall, by agents of the state government -- Dr. Hamilton Holmes, a young man in northwest Atlanta who wanted to study pre-med at the university. And I went out and interviewed his parents as he was leaving to head to Athens. That was a way I felt we could cover it and I interviewed his mother and father and it was a great day for them and then I think any open minded Georgian says it's a great day for Georgia. It was a major day in history, wasn't it? Great day for the university.

SHORT: It kept it open.

MORRIS: That kept it open and, of course, all of that was done simply because the leadership of the University of Georgia, the Board of Regents, the leadership, the president of the university, the state leaders, the governor, the lieutenant governor, the adjutant general, state board of education certainly because they knew the public school integration was coming, too, see? They

all knew that the time had come and that Georgia would lead the South. If not lead it, be certainly among the leaders in peaceful desegregation.

SHORT: I believe you covered the Sibley Commission Studies.

MORRIS: Oh, yes. You know, there are several desegregation basically of public education, public accommodation throughout the state of Georgia. Didn't involved just leaders. It involved progressive business leaders, education leaders, community leaders, newspaper, journalists throughout the state of Georgia. You know, coalescing to help to make Georgia a state that we could all be proud of rather than the laughing stock of a nation or being stuck with something we didn't really believe in because we knew it was coming, we knew in our hearts that God makes decisions and that we can't be God and play one man against another. That was the way we approached it and when the University of Georgia -- I knew there would be no trouble. I knew it had to be covered, though. I knew that it was an item of public interest and I look back and I have nothing but praise for everyone who participated over at the university, everyone who had a part in it. Because it wasn't just what happened that day. That was just the beginning of something that happened. It's now a university of equal opportunity.

SHORT: Aubrey, if you will I'd like to go back to 1956 when the Georgia legislature passed a series of laws prohibiting funding for local schools that were closed. That led to the Sibley commission.

MORRIS: Effectively leaving out those that integrated.

SHORT: Right, that lead to the Sibley Commission and as I recall you covered most of the meetings of that commission around the state.

MORRIS: That is correct. I as news director of WSB radio made it my personal responsibility to cover not a few of them, not part of them but all of them because I wanted to know what all the people of the state of Georgia geographically thought. So that meant Mr. John Sibley, the prominent Atlanta attorney who had held many positions of importance and the state board of regents and public positions of importance locally and very prominent attorney and banker, trust company of Georgia, highly respected, well, he was named chairman of the Sibley Commission. And the then governor, that would be Governor Earnest Vandiver, named him chairman and asked him to write a report but there was no prohibition against news people covering the meetings. Of course that was one of the purposes -- to air and see what the people thought. So that provided me as a radio man a good chance to broadcast the voices of people who knew the importance of their public schools and who were not afraid to speak out.

There were those on both sides of the question who appeared at every meeting, though. Mr. Sibley gave each one of them their due time in a courteous manner to express their opinions but in retrospect it appears to me that the hearings of the Sibley Commission gave the political leaders every ounce of political leverage they needed to stand by a continuous operation of

public education in the state of Georgia in every aspect from public schools to the university. I went to these hearings. I reported and as I recall they were held weekly, so they gave plenty of time to do a thorough job of reporting and this included the most vehement opposition to integration of schools. I included the opposite end. I included the middle of the road. I included every aspect. Frankly, we aired what people had to say. And when you talk about the education of your children you speak from the heart, you speak your innermost feelings. And it was an emotional albeit historic and certainly culturally enlightening experience for the people of Georgia.

SHORT: Aubrey, it's been said of you that you would go anywhere to get an interview. Is it true that you once interviewed President Jimmy Carter in the men's room at the WSB radio station?

MORRIS: You mean I've got to reveal all of this? Okay, you want the wherewithal.

SHORT: Exactly.

MORRIS: This was during the--what happened in Teheran where some of our people were kidnapped, Jimmy Carter tried to rescue them. What was that crisis?

SHORT: Hostages were taken over in --

MORRIS: In Teheran remember?

SHORT: Yes.

MORRIS: This was during Jimmy Carter's presidency and it lingered on for several days, the hostage taking and this country was really getting ready for some action. Secretly, of course, the military prepared several different plans for their rescue and I don't remember what had taken place the night before but I think it was an aborted rescue and Jimmy Carter was at his farm in Plains that Sunday night and this was Monday morning. I went into WSB Monday morning and it was about, 5:00, 5:30 and the guard at the back door said, "The president's inside." And I said, "What?" I knew darn well it was something. He was fixing to make some kind of a statement. He may have been about to announce that they had launched this rescue. I'm sorry. I don't remember the specifics but I remember it was an important day in that major news event and I went rushing inside and the man in the news room said, "Yeah, the president's downstairs. He's getting ready to do a national feed to the TV network. It's going to be a joint feed to the nation." And I said, "When is he going to do it?" They said, "At 7:00" I said, "How am I going to do this?" I think it was at 8:00. Little mixed up in my times. At any rate, I knew that I had time to get an interview with Carter before he spilled the news to the rest of the country. So I had pretty good relationships with the president since he'd been in the legislature from Plains and during his time as governor.

I went rushing downstairs to the TV studio and they said he's in the makeup room where they dust him up to get ready. Went in there, "No, he's just gone to the men's room." So it was rushing on the time for my 7:00 news. And I think about six or seven minutes before then and he was in the men's room and I said, "We got a major news cast at 7:00. He's going to talk to the nation. Why should I wait an hour?" So the secrete service agents outside the men's room said, "He's in the booth." I said, "Well, how long is he going to be?" And I heard this voice say, "Is that you, Aubrey?" I said, "Yeah, it's me." He said, "Well, come on in." So I went in the men's room and he was there at the booth--the toilet booth. Shall we say, you know, making the fine adjustments to his coat and everything and about to walk out of the booth and I said. "I'm going on the air in six minutes. I want you to tell me basically what you're going to say about the crisis in Iran." And he gave me about three or four minutes. As he came out to be rushed upstairs to get ready for the TV thing, I was getting ready to go on the air without doing any editing on the tape. So we just got the engineer to slap it up on there.

SHORT: Well, you interviewed during your career every president from I guess Truman to at least Regan. Do you remember anything special about some of those interviews?

MORRIS: Yes. Harry Truman. You know, Truman never visited Atlanta as president but he came pretty soon after he left the office of the presidency and I got a tip from one of the airline employees. He was traveling by commercial plane and I and a group of other reporters went out and met him at the plane and walked down the steps, went in the old terminal and he sat down

and all the other reporters--I usually would be ready to throw in a question and everything and I said, "Let's get a sound byte. I'm going to ask you Mr. Truman, how does it feel to be an ex-president?" He shook his finger up and said, "Son, I'm not an ex-president, I'm a former president."

SHORT: That's a good story.

MORRIS: Very short and to the point. I'm going to tell you another one on that. I don't know whether you want to record this or not. I think maybe you might not. Truman was a very temperamental individual and you remember it was Truman at Yalta with Churchill and others and you remember the existence of the state of Israel came into being. What was the name of the ship that kept taking refugees from Germany, getting them into Israel? What was the name of that? Odyssey? At any rate I'm going to tell you this and I'll tell you what I did with it. When Truman got off the plane the Jewish War Veterans Auxiliary was celebrating Jewish War Veterans Day which was separate from the regular poppy day, November 11th when Veteran's Day is celebrated. They have a different day of observing it and they pass out poppies raising funds for Jewish war veterans. And this lady came up to pin a poppy on Truman. He said, "Get away, lady, get away. What are you trying to do, lady?" He didn't want her touching him. "Well, Mr. President this is a Jewish War Veterans Day and we want to pin a poppy on your coat lapel." He gave her a dressing down just like he did me, he said, "Why don't you Jews celebrate war veterans day when everybody else does." He said, "I created Israel." And then the woman

and everybody was taken aghast and I got back to WSB and I was listening to the tape. I came to that, I just flipped it out and laid it aside. I said, "I'm not going to use that. I didn't use it."

Now, that's what you would call an old time editor versus today. That might have been used today. Am I wrong or not? He was beside himself but he was mad because they were not celebrating war veterans day when everybody -- you know, he was a big World War I veteran himself.

SHORT: Captain in the military, yes. Any other presidents you remember?

MORRIS: Yes, Eisenhower. I'll give you a little rundown on President Eisenhower.

Eisenhower came to play golf at the August National Golf Course, stayed in Mamie's Cabin, which they built over there. And on this particular visit to Augusta, Mr. George Humphrey who had a plantation at Thomasville, Georgia secretary of commerce I think he was a big Rotarian and he spoke to a group of Rotarians centered around their Monday regular meeting at the Atlanta Rotary Club at the old [indiscernible] Plaza Hotel. And I arrived there, took the elevator up to the Rainbow Roof where he was to speak. And when I got up there these secret service agents said, "You can't come in here." I said, "I cover this meeting every Monday. Yeah, I'll be covering the meeting. Don't you worry about that." So they asked somebody from the rotary, "Yeah, Mr. Morris, he's well-known here, yeah, he covers it." I did, I covered it, so pretty soon Harry, this military aide that Eisenhower had, Harry Vaughan, remember him?

SHORT: Yeah.

MORRIS: Captain or Sergeant Harry Vaughn arrived and I marched over to him directly. I said, "I'm Aubrey Morris WSB. I cover this meeting every Monday and, of course, if I can I'd like to get a few words from the president before his speech." He said, "Well, what can I do?" He had already said, "They're ain't going to be any press. This is going to be off the record." So Harry Vaughn decided to open it up after I started talking to the president anyway without asking Harry. That's the way you had to get a lot of stuff.

SHORT: Well, you got a lot, didn't you?

MORRIS: I don't tell it facetiously. I don't do this at all. That was just my technique. Because I love people. I love the challenge.

SHORT: How about Haile Selassie?

MORRIS: Haile Selassie, not many reporters get an opportunity to talk to an emperor but his Highness Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia came to Atlanta not long after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Went out to South View cemetery to visit his grave. There were a large number of reporters there. This was to be a very brief visit where the emperor would simply arrive, visit the cemetery, pay his respects, put a wreath at Dr. King's grave and then leave and go back to his private jet at the airport. And he placed the wreath, went back to his

limousine. Instead of going to where he placed the wreath, I went to the limousine and talked to his military aide of the Ethiopian army. I said, "Is it okay if I get just a few words with the royal highness before you leave?"

And his royal highness came in and got in the back seat of the limousine. A little lap dog, a little wire haired terrier dog that was shedding his hair pretty badly at that time. He jumped in the emperor's lap and he started petting the little dog. And I was invited to get in the limousine, sit right by the dog which was between me and the emperor and I turned on the machine. The emperor's English was a lot better than mine, very well educated and he had some very profound words to say although very brief and he told me, "Well, just don't take over a minute," which I didn't. I was so awe struck by this experience that when the limousine pulled off all of the other reporters came down and said, "What'd he say? What'd he say?" I said, "Listen to it on WSB." So I went rushing over to a service station to a telephone to do a live report, cued up the tape machine to where I could play what he said, got ready for it, learned that I had forgotten to turn on the machine. Fortunately, my lame brain did remember the exact words that he had said.

SHORT: So you were able to report anyway.

MORRIS: I reported it anyway.

SHORT: Let's talk a little minute about WSB. WSB has been the premiere radio station in Atlanta for a long time but nowadays they've turned into a talk station. What do you think was

the reason for that?

MORRIS: Simply innovation. You know, I might answer that by saying, when you get in your automobile now do you prefer to listen to music, to talk, or to information, or do you have a special digital radio where you listen to transmissions of all sorts, all of the technology that's available in the world? Well, the first person that ever asked me what I thought about talk radio, I said, "Well, nobody ever asked me when I was putting all these people on the air who are making the news, in a way it was talk radio." I think that the advent of talk radio -- beginning in New York, Chicago and other places, Los Angeles -- was simply an innovative way for radio to provide more variety for its listeners whether it was shock radio, shock/talk or whatever you want to call it, opinionated, political, right wing, left wing, conservative or what. My assessment is that this type of entertainment and after all isn't communications of all type, showbiz. It's showbiz how you're getting someone's attention. You can bore them. You can put them to sleep. You can get the quick turn off like I used to call people who complained at WSB. I said, "Well, just turn it off." I would invite them to turn it off. I said, "I hope you'll keep listening but if you just can't stand it, but this is the way it is."

But on, like--who are these people? We had one the other day. It was on one part of Obama's trip to Europe where some guy on CNN during a talk, he had another guy who had his same point of view. Their idea was to blast this thing without any reply, no counter view, no opposing opinion. In other words to me it would have been better had they had, as we did on many occasions on WSB, we held discussion programs but if it were an interview with some person

about a particular book, for example. For example, if someone wrote a book on Watergate, I interviewed principle writer on Watergate, what was his name?

SHORT: Who? The Washington -- Bob Woodward.

MORRIS: Yeah, Bob Woodward. I interviewed Bob Woodward at WSB and I played the devils advocate in the book a lot, too. I said, "Well, to what extent is the news media, the press, under the guarantees of the United States constitution, what liberty does it not give --" As my dean at good ole UGA, Dean John Drewry of the School of Journalism told his students, "This does not give you liberty to call fire in a crowded theater. It gives you the responsibility," and I think that's what our founding fathers meant, the responsibility to open up a breath of fresh air into clouded issues, to shine some light upon a subject and to give the viewer or the listener or the reader an opportunity to assess the situation themselves where they do the thinking. They think what they want to instead of having someone come out and never once did I attack anybody I was interviewing. I was there to get their opinion. You wouldn't do that. You don't do that.

SHORT: Let me ask you this question. How in your opinion do modern broadcast journalists compare with those of your day?

MORRIS: There are probably many more consumers of modern broadcast journalism or modern journalism today than ever before. More consumers of information getting it online with new

technology; however, at my age I'll have to admit upstairs in my home I have two computers. We have email access and I use a computer for writing today. I was much more comfortable when I had an old linotype machine and then a manual typewriter and then an electric typewriter. But I think you've got to be a sophisticated viewer or reader. You got not to be a dummy and not ask questions just because somebody says something. You don't take it as the gospel truth. You ask your own questions. Use your own intellect to apprise a situation like a presidential campaign, how do you come to a consensus. For example, if you're a modern consumer, my grandchildren are far, far ahead of me. They understand every aspect of computers. In fact, one of my grandchildren now a junior in high school is teaching computing and working in the computer department of a local college.

So it doesn't mean you don't have these things but you got to have the overall general education. A liberal arts education needs to be there to go with every other aspect that you focus on. In other words, you've got to be able to --

SHORT: Speaking of education, if you were asked by a young person today who is interested in a career in broadcasting -- news broadcasting, what advice would you give them?

MORRIS: Get a liberal arts education focusing on economics, politics, geography and especially languages and sociology.

SHORT: Well, Aubrey Morris, it's been a great pleasure to be with you today. We've enjoyed

this conversation and I want to thank you on behalf of Young Harris College, the Richard Russell Library, the University of Georgia and myself for being our guest.

MORRIS: Thank you, Joe, by the way, Joe is an old fellow Atlanta Journal reporter. From how many years ago, Joe?

SHORT: I was there in the 1950's.

[END OF RECORDING]

**University of Georgia  
Aubrey Morris**

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