

**Reg Murphy interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short. This is Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by the Duckworth Library at Young Harris College and the Richard B. Russell Library at the University of Georgia. I'd like to welcome Reg Murphy, former political reporter and editor of *The Atlanta Constitution*, who's covered and written about Georgia politics for many years. Welcome, Reg.

REG MURPHY: Thank you, I'm glad to join you.

SHORT: With your permission, Reg, I'd like to divide our conversation into three parts.

MURPHY: Alright.

SHORT: First, your early life.

MURPHY: Okay.

SHORT: Next, your reflections on Georgia politics. And lastly, your life after those very historical political careers. So, may we begin by talking about your experiences while growing up in north Georgia?

MURPHY: Well, I was born in Hoschton, Georgia, which is one mile south of Braselton, Georgia, which is in Jackson County. And most people have never heard of Hoschton, Georgia. When I tell people that, they laugh at me. My parents moved to Gainesville, and I grew up in Gainesville, Georgia. My dad was a wholesale grocery clerk. My mom was a first-grade school teacher. I went to Gainesville High School. I played football and basketball and baseball; none of it very well, but we had a great time. And I thought that my high school years -- unlike most people, my high school years were some of the best years of my life. I had a handicap. My mother didn't have anywhere for me to live -- or to stay home while she was teaching. And so, I started school at four, and I graduated from high school at sixteen, which means that I had to date freshmen girls, not senior girls. Not my counterparts, because they were way, way beyond me in maturity. But I had a great time.

Decided to go to Mercer University, and I really wanted to go to Med school. I really would love to have been a doctor, but in those days first grade teachers and shipping clerks didn't make a lot of money. So, I worked my way through Mercer as a reporter for the *Macon Telegraph*. And that's kind of misleading. I didn't work my all the way through, I still lack about twenty hours getting my degree. They did take mercy on me a few years later and gave me a doctorate, but an earned degree I don't have. Loved to work for the *Telegraph*, and that's when I started covering Georgia politics. I covered the federal courts when the courts ordered the University of Georgia integrated. I remember at that time doing a survey, and Herman Talmadge said, "Blood's going to run in the streets in Georgia if they implement that." And Judge Bootle, who had made that ruling, was steely in his determination to follow the law of the land. I don't what his personal preference was and nobody will ever know, but he was resolute in his determination that he would follow the law of the land. And that's how that all began.

Then after that, I moved to Atlanta to cover state politics for the *Macon Telegraph*. And then we had two newspapers, and to be the correspondent for a morning and an afternoon newspaper stretches out your day so that there are two news cycles. The first news cycle is a very difficult one, because you're starting out early in the morning for an afternoon newspaper, and then later in the day, you start another cycle for the morning newspaper the next morning. And I was a one-man bureau, so I found myself on the receiving end of a lot of editor's questions and a lot of long days. Had a great time, however.

SHORT: So, you go from the *Telegraph* to *The Atlanta Constitution*.

MURPHY: With an interim period where I had a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard, and that's one of the great experiences for any journalist. What you do is go to Harvard and you're responsible for completing all of the work in one course. And other than that, for the whole year you're free to monitor any subjects you want to monitor. For example, I sat in on lectures with John Kenneth Galbraith, Henry Kissinger, McGeorge Bundy, all the great people who then later

-- the next year, actually -- went to Washington as part of the Kennedy Administration. So, I was on a not friendly, but knowledgeable basis with all the people who were in the Kennedy Administration. And in fact, my first coverage of presidential politics, except for Georgia campaign swings, was John Kennedy's early campaigning in New Hampshire during that year. One of my treasured photographs is of me standing with John Kennedy out in the bitter cold in New Hampshire, outside, I think, a GE plant greeting the workers. And that was a great piece of exposure for me, having until that point lived my life in the South.

SHORT: Tell us about your first experiences as a political writer at the State Capitol.

MURPHY: Okay. When I first went to the State Capitol, I was still working for the *Macon Telegraph* in Atlanta, and Marvin Griffin had come into office and all of those people who came in with him. My specific instructions from the newspaper were, you see, that, "Everybody accuses the Atlanta newspapers of lying. You go up there and just figure out what's real and just report it. Whatever it is." And I went to the Capitol and began to report. And I discovered that not only were they not lying, it was the politicians who were lying. And wherever you turned in the Griffin Administration, there were people who were stealing.

For example, George Whitman was the superintendent of schools in the state. Actually, that's not true. He was the chairman of the Board of Education in the state. But he also was selling a fair amount of school materials -- books and other workbooks and things -- to state school systems. And I was kind of curious about where his warehouse was and who he was selling through and what his sales' force looked like and how it was being handled, and I began to look around for the facility. Couldn't find it anywhere. Finally, found a phone number and traced it down, and his entire facility was a coin phone booth in College Park, Georgia. After that, I think he left the Board and had some other legal troubles. But that was the kind of thing that happened all the way through the Griffin Administration.

Now, having said that, Marvin Griffin could be the most charming human being I have ever seen and certainly the best storyteller. We used to go into his office for a morning -- it wasn't as formal as a news conference. But we'd go in for a talk with him in the morning, and he always greeted us the same way, "What are you jorees up to this morning?" And I didn't know what a joree was, and it turns out it's a small bird that hides in the bushes and peaks around the corner to see what's going on. And it was a very demeaning term, but he said it in such a funny way that nobody there took any offense to it.

He started a campaign for building rural roads, and that was a big argument. It was actually a very good program. It brought a whole lot of people access to the towns with a much easier way to get there and to facilitate farm operations too. But they were not always clean either. Jack Nelson, who worked for the *Constitution*, found that somebody had been paid for three and a half miles of paving down in Appling County. And he went down there and used the odometer on the car, and found that actually it was about one and a quarter miles of blacktop paving, and that they had paid for three and a half miles of paving. Those were the kinds of things that went on every single day in that administration. And at the end of that period, when we totaled it all up, 32 different state officials had been indicted and 17 of them actually served some time in jail. It truthfully was one of the corrupt times in Georgia politics. I hesitate to say that it was the most corrupt time. I don't know that. Nobody knows that. But it certainly was one of the corrupt times in Georgia politics.

SHORT: And in those days, Reg, and I'm sure you will remember this, Marvin Griffin was a very strong leader in what was known as the States' Rights Council.

MURPHY: And the States' Rights Council, you know, was his front for all that segregationist effort that he went through. One of his appointees spent a lot of time and money trying to prove that somewhere up in north Georgia and Tennessee, there was some Communist conspiracy that was going to take over the South, because they had an integrated staff, I think it was, or some integrated conferences at least. I've forgotten how much money they spent, but it was an outrageous amount. And then, you know, they had an ally, Roy Harris, who lived in Augusta and had a sheet called *The Augusta Courier*, which always had red type on the front -- big, red, black block type. Spent most of his time exposing that and the Koinonia farms, which was a peaceful little settlement down in south Georgia that had no intention of trying to overturn the world. But it was trying to set an example for how people could live together. And so, if you put Roy Harris and Marvin Griffin and his associates -- all the same group -- segregation was the only thing that mattered in political races. And I remember Charles Pou, who was the great old political editor for the *Journal*, used to say, "If you ain't for stealing, you ain't for segregation." They stole and they segregated. That was the kind of things that were the staple of Georgia politics.

SHORT: It was interesting, I thought, that Marvin Griffin, who was in the Talmadge camp, and Ernest Vandiver, who was in the Talmadge camp, had a big war over the rural roads business and fell apart.

MURPHY: That's right. And Vandiver at that point decided he would go in a totally different direction from the Griffin people. And he began to figure out whether he could then move from lieutenant governor to the governor's office, and he had great connections, as you know. He had connections -- his wife was connected to Senator Russell's family, and he himself had built his political connections. And he came to office with a segregationist platform that said that -- his slogan was, "No, Not One." Meaning no one Negro child -- as they were called then -- could pass through that door and into a white school and integrate the school.

Ernest Vandiver -- I never was sure that he believed quite what he was preaching at that point. He was really a very decent man, a very decent man. And when he announced that he was going to close the University of Georgia because Charlayne Hunter and Mr. Holmes were going to integrate the school in the next day, there was a lot of demonstrating going on. And he told me that on a deadline -- as I was reporting for the *Constitution*, he told me he was going to close schools. And I wrote the story. We used it as our headline the next morning, and unbeknownst to me, there then assembled out of the State Capitol -- the governor's mansion -- about 25 to 30 of his staunchest supporters. And over the course of that discussion, which included Griffin Bell, he changed his mind and the next morning, to my chagrin at that time, because I had been made to look like a fool as a reporter -- but the right thing to do -- announced the next morning that he was going to keep the schools open. They did have some skirmishes, but nothing of any real significance happened during that period. It was one of the acts of bravery in Southern politics to say, "Wait a minute, I'm making a mistake here. I will decide the right thing to do with the help of all my friends." Some of whom objected vehemently, and others who really thought that he was making a courageous step in the direction towards making Georgia a modern place.

SHORT: In addition to the integration at the University of Georgia, I believe it was 1962, Vandiver got hit with two other significant and historical decisions that affected and, I think -- and I hope you'll agree -- changed Georgia politics forever. And that was the demise of the county unit system, which the Talmadges and Roy Harris had manipulated for many years. And then the Baker vs. Carr reapportionment case, which, you know -- "One man, one vote."

MURPHY: Right. Well, when a vote in Fulton County was worth one-hundredth of the amount of a vote in the smallest county in the state, that clearly was the most inequitable thing that could have happened in Georgia politics. And it gave control of the state to south Georgia and all the counties below Atlanta. And of course, what you heard in those days -- if they ever gave the one man, one vote to Atlanta, the block vote, which really meant that that was a code word for the black vote -- would give control of Atlanta to the blacks. What happened instead was that no black person was elected governor, the State Legislature has never been populated majority by African-Americans. The truth is it broadened the base of Georgia politics, and that probably as much as any single thing, changed Georgia politics. Well, certainly more than any other thing, because before that, the state was among the most, if not the most conservative Southern state. And then it moved to probably one of the most moderate, maybe the most moderate Southern state. And that changed the way the state was governed -- dramatically changed the way the state was governed.

And when you add in the reapportionment decision that allowed the state to change the way districts were formulated, so that there wasn't total control in every part of the state -- Democratic rule, actually, not just white, but Democratic rule in a state that was clearly going toward Republican rule. That changed a lot of different things. And in a way, it created a delegation that went to Washington to represent the state that was much more diverse and in many ways more forward looking than it had been before. Not all together, but in lots of ways a way that was significantly different. And the way you could tell that it was going in the direction of Republican conservatives instead of Democratic conservatives was that in the 1964 campaign immediately after those changes had swept through the state government, a team of *Constitution* reporters fanned out across the state just before the Johnson-Goldwater election. And we came back and added all these things together, and I wrote a story which said that unless there was some dramatic last minute change, Georgia will go Republican for the first time in a century. And my editors were very skeptical of that story. They didn't think Goldwater could win, and my heroes all desperately wanted the Democrats to win that year. But Goldwater won, and he won pretty heavily. I don't remember the percentages anymore, but they were substantial. And after that, you began to see a total change in the direction of state government. And became one of the stalwart states in the Republican party.

SHORT: That, of course, benefitted the more moderate Georgians. In that year -- 1962 -- Governor Carl Sanders was able to defeat Marvin Griffin.

MURPHY: Right.

SHORT: Of whom you spoke.

MURPHY: Yep.

SHORT: Simply because of the "One man, one vote" law.

MURPHY: Exactly, and Carl Sanders was in my view a very progressive governor for his time. He would not be considered a big liberal -- he wasn't then -- but comparatively he was a liberal. And he was able to capture the middle of the road vote that was critical. And it also gave power to the larger towns and cities in the state.

SHORT: Let's get back for a minute to *The Atlanta Constitution*.

MURPHY: Okay.

SHORT: You were one of a great group of writers, Reg, including Ralph McGill and Gene Patterson and others, who worked hard to persuade Georgians to change their old South mentality by looking to the future and forgetting the past. Tell us a little bit about that period.

MURPHY: Well, nobody ever refers to me in the same breath as Ralph McGill. He was truly my hero. I thought he was the most courageous man I ever met. He lived through death threats all the time, and he wrote what was the most perceptive column I have ever read. The headline said, "There Will Come a Monday." And what he meant by that -- and explained in the column -- was that one Monday, sometime, the Supreme Court would come down with the decision that ruled that segregation, the way it had been practiced in the United States, was unconstitutional. And he tried very hard to prepare his reader for that day. Some of them loved him and some of them hated him. There was a man somewhere out in Buckhead who paid his newspaper boy an extra fifty cents a week to clip McGill's picture out of the front-page column before he delivered his paper. And McGill was great about this. He understood what he was doing. He would write about three columns a week that were liberal by anybody's standards, but were very liberal by Georgia standards. And he'd always say, "Okay, I've written my three. Now, I've got to go tell two stories about field trials in Waynesboro, because I've got to win them back somehow."

And he knew that he offended people, but he didn't delight in it. Everybody thought he delighted in it. But that's not true. He didn't delight in it. He worried about it all the time. But he was very literate and he had that sportswriters' background that gave him the ability to connect with people even when they were skeptical of what he was writing. And when I first went back to the *Constitution* as the editor, he was the best thing that could have happened to me, because he would take me to breakfast with them. If there was a visiting Israeli chief of intelligence, we'd go to breakfast and talk about it. If there was a presidential candidate who happened to be coming through town, he and I would go talk to the presidential candidate. And actually, he was very good at developing that kind of sources, very good. And he despaired sometimes with what he was writing about, but he wrote it. And during that period, he wrote a book called *The South and the Southerner*, which will always be one of the insightful books about Southern history.

And Patterson, Gene Patterson was a distinguished journalist. He'd been in London running the UPI Bureau, and he came back to Georgia and began to write a column which was lyrical. He was a true craftsman in terms of being able to write lyrically and beautifully. And he and McGill formed a partnership that lasted for several years, and it was an extremely effective force. He, more than McGill, concerned himself with Georgia politics and with the social trends and all of those things. And then there was a blow-up, and he and Jack Tarver just didn't get along, and he

left. Unbeknownst to me -- I was out. I had left and I was freelancing, doing pretty well for myself. And I enjoyed being a freelancer, although I had two little girls and I drove very carefully, because if anything happened to you as a freelancer, you didn't have any other income. You break your leg and you're in big trouble.

But I was sitting at home one morning at seven o'clock, working on some piece -- I don't remember what it was now -- and the phone rang. Jack Tarver said, "Hello." And he was nice, and he said, "You ever downtown?" And I said, "Well, sometimes." And he said, "Why don't you come by and see me today." And I thought, "Okay, he wants me to come back and be the political editor again, and I don't really want to do that." It was a great job. I loved it, but I didn't want to do it again, because I had begged him before I left the paper, "Let me write anything. Write sports, write fires, whatever." I was tired of politics. And I almost forgot to go. And I walked into his office about one-thirty, two o'clock in the afternoon, and he sat me down and he said -- after not much preliminaries -- "Would you like to be the editor of the *Constitution*?" And I thought, "What in the world is he talking about?" And I thought about it for a minute, and I said, "I don't know. I really need to think about it." And he said, "Well, I don't want you to think about it very long, because I really want you to do it." I said, "Are you sure? Because you've had some problems with editors." And he said, "I'm not particularly sure, but McGill is." I said, "Well, I guess I don't have much choice, do I?" And so, I took the job and became the editor of the *Constitution*. And I was a little more conservative than either McGill or Patterson. I've been always more middle of the road, but you know, you can't really compare yourself to those guys. They were giants in the journalism world.

And there were some reporters. It's important to remember that there were some reporters in those days who also were -- not advocates -- but clear-eyed reporters who did great jobs of exposing things. Jack Nelson was a terrific Pulitzer-Prize winning reporter. Charlie Pou was the political editor of the *Journal* who never got the acclaim that he deserved. Margaret Shannon at *The Atlanta Journal* was a wonderful reporter, very insightful, who later went to Washington to run a bureau for the *Journal* in Washington. And her insights into how the Southern delegations, and particularly the Georgia delegation, were meshing and sometimes not meshing with national politics were insightful. So, there were a lot of really quality people who were working on the front lines in those days to make politics understandable and thoughtful for Georgians.

SHORT: So your becoming editor expanded your duties with the paper.

MURPHY: Yeah, I spent most of my time working with the editors and editorial writers. And because part of my agreement with Tarver was that I'd write a column seven days a week, that took a lot of time. A daily column is a challenge that most people won't ever have to deal with, and nobody in journalism has to deal with anymore. Nobody tries to do that anymore. And that's a wise thing, because I doubt that there are many people in the world who have seven really important ideas a week to write about. But I did. I grinded it out for seven years, and that was about all I had.

SHORT: Saturdays for remembering.

MURPHY: It was sort of a McGill idea in a way. McGill always said he had to bring them back into the fold. And by accident, I decided to start writing about Saturdays for remembering, because I thought I could relate to lots of people in lots of different ways that were homey and

more emotional than the other stuff. Liberals hated them. And I don't blame them, that was exactly what they ought to do. They didn't think they were important enough to be fooling around with. Some conservatives thought they were not conservative enough. But a whole lot of people did sort of remember their high school days and for their college days and for hunting and fishing, and they seemed to relate to them.

SHORT: Let's get back to Georgia politics for a minute if you will. There was a time when both you and I remember that politicians treated Atlanta with a lot of jokes and certainly no attention.

MURPHY: Right.

SHORT: But with the passage of that bill we were talking about -- the Supreme Court decision, really -- they had to pay more attention to Atlanta.

MURPHY: They did, and it was a good thing that they did pay more attention to Atlanta. The politicians who had scoffed and discounted everything that Atlanta needed to do, now had to think about it. And as a result of that, they began to be a lot more helpful to the growth of the city. Out of that came a lot of good things. For example, they began to cooperate to some extent with Bill Hartsfield, who was the mayor in Atlanta. And when the schools were integrated in Atlanta, they furnished a lot of the state troopers and a lot of the help that kept that from being as bloody as it could be.

I remember the wonderful, old, African-American minister named William Holmes Borders, who used to say that the country was better off because Georgia was better off; and because the county unit system was gone, Georgia was going to be an important part of the country. You could go to his church on Sunday morning, and he was a spokesman for a peaceful integration of not just the schools, but the churches and for social life. And when I went back to the *Constitution*, one of the pieces he inspired me to write was that no civic clubs in Atlanta had any African-American members. And I remember saying, "You couldn't have written that in the days before the county unit system fell."

Then, the campaigns shifted toward Atlanta. And by the time of that Goldwater victory in '64, it was clear that everybody had to pay attention to it. Carl Sanders had paid attention to it, and he made in my view a very good progressive governor because he did work hard to get Atlanta, Macon, Columbus, Savannah involved in politics. For example, the Atlanta school systems were starved because of the way money was allocated. They didn't get nearly as much money as the schools out in the state. They didn't get any money even for -- or not much money for -- what became the Hartsfield Airport -- the Atlanta airport that suddenly got a lot more money from the state. And a lot of other improvements happened because of that.

SHORT: You mention Mayor Hartsfield. Can we talk for a minute about the political leadership in Atlanta during that period?

MURPHY: Sure can. Bill Hartsfield, in my opinion, was the person who started the road toward peaceful desegregation, by saying Atlanta was a city that's too big to hate. And it was. It was a city that knew that it was moving. Not everybody liked it, but knew that it was moving. He had a police chief named Jenkins, who was a very good police chief, and he was determined to

keep order. And then, following Hartsfield, Ivan Allen came along, who I believe was one of the best urban political leaders in the country. Ivan Allen was a tremendously progressive guy. And during his time, they began that "Forward Atlanta" campaign. I think it was during his time. And that campaign produced all of the shift toward thinking of the South as a place to establish national company headquarters. He always wanted to bring in bigger fish than just the branch office. He loved the idea that the branch offices were moving to Atlanta, but he really thought that he could be more ambitious than that. And as a result, Atlanta had a growth spurt unlike anything I've ever seen. I left kind of in the middle of it. I moved in the middle of it. But during that time to the late '60s and early '70s, when the rest of the world was in turmoil because of the Vietnam War, Atlanta was growing economically on almost an everyday basis. There was a new announcement of something new economically happening in Atlanta that was a result of the Atlanta political leadership.

SHORT: During that period -- boom period, I call it -- certainly Georgia and Atlanta was one of the most lucrative spots, I would think -- I would say, for business in the country. Do you think that was because of the new people who were moving into the state, or because of the drastic change that we had made in our politics?

MURPHY: It was a combination of the in migration and the politics. But the politics that were changing it were more important than anything else, I think. For example, Georgia Tech went from being a very good technical school to being a true great school. And its business management groups and its innovative groups were enhanced dramatically by the fact that it was then getting some state support. The University of Georgia was beginning to be a much better place. What people had always called a great party school was moving toward becoming a good research university. Those were things that were significantly important.

And during that period of time, other good things were happening too. Some people didn't call it good, but Martin Luther King came along and made peace with the Atlanta leadership, and began to promote things. Morehouse College began to be an important producer of middle-class and leadership African-Americans. The other schools at that point were struggling -- the other historically black schools were struggling, but they also were producing some middle-class and upper-class people. And that combination created an incredible petrie dish of how one finds economic growth. And as a result of that, the city went through a building boom that was unprecedented in the South, and its old rivals, like Birmingham, were outgrown just dramatically. They were left in the dust by this Atlanta transformation that most of us didn't really understand at the moment how important and significant it would be to the future of the state. The future of the state was more or less determined by that growth spurt.

SHORT: You mentioned Dr. Borders. Prior to 1964, I guess in the Kennedy election, weren't the majority of the African-American leadership in Atlanta Republicans?

MURPHY: Absolutely. The Republican delegation to the national conventions prior to 1964 were composed of blacks and whites. And in 1964, Dr. Borders and Dr. King and other leaders like that -- Andrew Young, other people -- brought into the Democratic Party a lot of the African-Americans. That year, going to the Johnson -- not inauguration -- convention, they were a significant number of the people who went to that convention. And they then got a majority of the black vote, but by no means an overwhelming amount of it. Only in the '64 election, I think,

did that vote flip. I'm not sure that's right, that may not be right. But a large number of people changed parties. And that was because the Republicans had gotten a lot more conservative and the Democrats had opened up the doors. And because Atlanta then had a vote, as opposed to the time of the county unit system when Atlanta didn't have a vote and black folk were just totally unimportant in Georgia elections.

SHORT: Governor Vandiver is said to have played a role in the Kennedy election when he helped Robert Kennedy get John F. Kennedy out of jail. Do you remember that story? Is that a true story?

MURPHY: I knew Robert Kennedy reasonably well. And Robert Kennedy interceded with President Kennedy to get Dr. King out of jail, and who else interceded in that was Griffin Bell. Griffin Bell then was the chief of staff to Ernest Vandiver, and was about to become the Georgia campaign manager for the Kennedy campaign in Georgia. And between them, Vandiver and Griffin Bell were the people who convinced President Kennedy to intervene. And all of this was very sub rosa at that moment. Nobody was aware of it until -- give him credit -- Charles Pou at *The Atlanta Journal* broke that story. And there was great disgruntlement with him for breaking that story, but it's true that that's what happened.

SHORT: Dr. King was in jail in DeKalb County on a traffic violation.

MURPHY: Which was the most trumped up, outrageous, foolish arrest anybody had ever heard of. And everybody knew it was just a trumped up charade. It was disgusting. Made no sense.

SHORT: Reg, we Georgians have had great success in making fools of ourselves in politics, in the eyes of the nation in 1946, when we had three governors, in 1966, when we couldn't elect a governor and had to have the Supreme Court to tell us how. What kind of record is that?

MURPHY: It's about as bad a political record as you can have. And it tells you about as much about how the leadership in this state, how awful it was, as anything ever could. You know, Talmadge, Arnall, and Thompson were all trying to figure out to change the locks on the door at the governor's office. It was the worst kind of politics, and everybody in the country, I guess, was mesmerized by it. I don't really remember being conscious of it. I mean, I knew about it, but I wasn't really reporting at that point. But it was just sort of this stupid kind of thing.

But all that went back, you know, to the Talmadge era. Gene Talmadge started all the stuff with his campaigns, like, "Yes, it's true that I stole, but I stole for you." And then his wool-hat boys climbing in the trees and yelling, "You tell them, Gene." He'd say, "I'm coming to that." His three-dollar tag and, you know, the squire of Sugar Creek foolishness, all of that. And it was great drama. And it was just lousy leadership, but that's how it was.

And then, Herman came along. Herman took up right where his father left off with terrible, terrible tirades about segregation and things like that and blood running in the streets. And you know, according to both court records and legend, he may have had more to drink and did more women chasing than just about anybody. His wife certainly thought so anyway, and left him.

And then you move along and you get to Marvin Griffin. And you get to the corruption of

the Griffin years and you get to all of that, and it just built up a case where nobody could make all of this work. And it had to impede growth in Atlanta. Atlanta being situated where it was, at the crossroads of all the rails and all of the airlines and everything else, had to grow, but they managed to keep a damper on it for a very long period of time, because the rest of the country thought that Georgians were just complete idiots. Which never was true. There were plenty of very smart people, but a lot of them were congregated in areas where they had no political power at all. So, it was an impasse that only the Supreme Court could have broken.

SHORT: Well, in '46, you say you weren't reporting it, but that was one of the incidents in government where the guy who got the most votes lost.

MURPHY: That's true. And every single person in America who was thinking about it, said, "How in the world can that be? What are those people doing? What are they thinking about? What kind of elections are they having?" That also was a time when there was really a very wide spread of vote fraud, very widespread. Down in Telfair County, they actually went out and got names off tombstones and registered those people to vote, and cast votes for them. George Goodwin won a Pulitzer Prize for exposing that. The joke used to be that they had more votes than they had pine trees in some of those counties. There was no accountability for it at all. And nobody ever was punished for it.

SHORT: Yeah. Those votes, which were alleged to be alphabetically cast, got Herman Talmadge in the race for governor that he won when he was appointed by the Legislature.

MURPHY: Right. Exactly right. And all of those votes -- remember, they kind of held out all the votes in several south Georgia counties until they knew where -- for two or three days, until they knew that they would then be important votes to be cast in the election. And some of the ballot boxes disappeared and never were found. They were probably at the bottom of some abandoned well or something like that. I don't know where they were, but nobody could ever find them.

SHORT: That was the county unit days.

MURPHY: Yep.

SHORT: I remember reading Roy Harris, who said that he could change the outcome of an election in more than thirty-nine Georgia counties, even after the polls had closed.

MURPHY: That's right. I had forgotten that.

SHORT: It used to be said that all you needed to become governor of Georgia was fifty thousand dollars and Roy Harris.

MURPHY: That's right.

SHORT: That's the way our politics was at the time.

MURPHY: That's right.

SHORT: Now Reg, if you will, let's move ahead to 1966, when ironically the guy who got the most votes in the governor's race lost.

MURPHY: You know, when you think about it, that's sort of the heritage of Georgia politics. The heritage is that we did everything backward for a long period of time. And that one didn't make any sense at all, or to me it didn't make any sense at all. How that one happened I still don't understand. Maybe somebody else will clarify. You know, what would really make history would be for somebody to go back and redo that race and trace all of the ins and outs of that political campaign, because Bo Callaway clearly won that election. Didn't he?

SHORT: He did.

MURPHY: And how they decided to overturn it in the legislature still is -- I mean, I sort of know the history, but the result was bizarre. And if you think about Lester Maddox and about what he represented in those days, he was the most peculiar combination of politician I've ever been around. He chased people down the street with his pickaxe -- axe handle, I mean -- and yet he had some fairly humanitarian ideas. He did some stuff that I respected, like he threw open the governor's mansion every once in a while, had people in. They don't do that anymore. He would talk to various and sundry groups that disagreed with him. He fought with Zell Miller every day, but they weren't really all that far apart on some things. He didn't know how to deal with the Legislature. That's not true, he did know how to deal with the Legislature, because they elected him. But he wasn't very effective with them after that. And yet, when you look back on it, he was pretty -- I remember one time, I wrote a column about something, I don't remember what it was anymore, and he wouldn't allow the paper to be brought into the Capitol anymore. And Ben Fortson, who was the secretary of state, got himself a bucket and a rope, and somebody would put a paper downstairs and he'd bring the paper up with his rope and his bucket. And those were the zany kinds of things that used to happen in Georgia politics.

SHORT: Well, you've covered many, many significant stories over the Capitol over the years. Which are most imbedded in your memory?

MURPHY: The Supreme Court decision about the one man, one vote. I remember it came down at about two o'clock in the afternoon one day. I guess it was a Monday. And I spent from then until the time -- whatever the deadline was, probably 8:30, nine o'clock at night -- trying to piece together all the ramifications of what that was going to mean. And I haven't read that story -- I don't read stories like that anymore, but that I remember was pretty comprehensive coverage we did at that point. And I figured it was the most significant, long-lasting, far-reaching decision that we were going to have in Georgia politics maybe ever. Looking back on it, I think it may have been the most significant, epic change of era in Georgia history.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about the effect of civil rights movement on politics. Most of the news during that period emanated from Atlanta, because the civil rights' leaders were located in Atlanta.

MURPHY: Right. Well, when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed in Atlanta it brought together people who didn't necessarily all live there at the beginning, who all moved there. And the Southern Christian Leadership Conference became a formidable force in politics. And it was implemented -- people forget this now, but it was rather supplemented by the fact of some other organizations being there. I remember the Urban League was located directly across the street from the *Constitution*. And Vernon Jordan, who then was not the famous Vernon Jordan he is today, had an office up on the third floor, and he was running, I think, the Urban League at that point. And my office was on about the same level as his, and in those days we didn't live in hermetically sealed buildings, so we could raise the windows. And he would raise a window on his side and yell across the street, "Reg, you want to go to lunch today?" And I'd go to lunch with him, and we'd talk about all the civil rights movements that were going on. And the civil rights movement included some firebrands. Ralph David Abernathy was one of them. Lots of other people joined in all of that.

And then they began to fan out into the smaller communities. A memorable one was in Crawfordville, Georgia. They started this in an effort to integrate the schools in Crawfordville, and the school system made an arrangement so that they could transport all the white children to the next county by school bus. But wouldn't let any black kids get on the bus. And so, the state troopers out there were tackling these young high school kids like they were playing tackle football to keep them off of the buses. It was just terrible. I went down there and I was covering the story, and that was the kind of thing that was a spark that created all kinds of furor. Dr. King came down there, and Andy Young came down there, and there was a red brick church about a mile outside town where all the African-Americans gathered to listen to Dr. King speak. And he spoke. And at the end, they decided that they would march into Crawfordville. And Crawfordville was a little town -- hometown of the vice president of the Confederacy, of course. And they began to march, and it was about mile, a moonlit night on a black top road. Along the way, in the shadows, because the moon was very bright and the trees were casting big shadows, the state troopers found three guys with guns waiting in the shadows. Nothing happened as a result of them finding those three people. Andy Young led them. Dr. King went back to Atlanta and they had a rally on the court house square. And as a reporter, I remember I was in one of those telephone booths that used to be on court house squares that were wooden and I was in there trying to dictate a story back to the paper. And a bunch of rednecks began to tilt the phone booth back and forth, slamming me from one side to the other when I was trying to get the story written. Those were the kinds of things that changed the perception of America about what was going on down here, and brought all of the demonstrators who eventually would go to Selma for the march and that would cost Dr. King his life down in Memphis.

But by then there was a cadre of younger people who carried on that fight. It was perhaps the biggest clash between two cultures that this country has ever seen. The culture of white supremacy and the growing culture of black explosion of anger was the one thing that I sometimes thought would blow this country apart. Because after Dr. King was assassinated, those riots in the cities all across America almost tore the place apart. And for the next week for *Life Magazine* I covered the slow march through Atlanta of Dr. King on the case line, and took the film from all of the photographers. And there were worldwide photographers. I had a huge bag of film. And there was a pool from everybody. And I took it back to New York and we had it developed and produced some of the most dramatic photography anybody's ever seen, and that sealed the fate of the segregationists in the South. Those images were stronger than anybody can now remember. But there was a photograph in the church of Mrs. King with a black manteau

over her face, but her face visible through it that ran on the cover of *Life Magazine* that was the epitome of grace in a world that had just been torn apart. And it resolved the country to move forward and to rid itself of segregation.

SHORT: You were around when Jimmy Carter mounted his great campaign, first for governor and then for president. Tell us about that.

MURPHY: Okay. Well, Jimmy Carter had been in the Legislature, and I will tell you that he was not my favorite state senator. We had discussions. And he decided that he would run for governor and he decided that he would run against Carl Sanders. And he thought that he could figure a way to beat Carl Sanders. I always believed he decided to run because he saw it as a stepping stone to bigger things. But the way he ran the campaign, you would have believed that he didn't have ideas about bigger things. First of all, in that campaign he began to call Carl Sanders "Cufflinks Carl," because Carl was a nicely dressed man who probably should not have been wearing cufflinks, because Georgia folks don't like that. And that resonated with a lot of people. Then, in the last stages of that campaign, things got kind of tough. Sanders had become a part owner of the Atlanta Hawks basketball team. And there was a photograph of him with his arm around one of the black players. And they were drinking, I guess, some champagne after they had won some kind of a title, I don't know what one. And that then was circulated all over the state, and the Carter people claimed that they didn't have anything to do with it, but it wasn't clear that anybody else had anything to do with it. It was pretty clear where it came from.

Then, with two or three weeks to go in that campaign, Carter went to Montgomery, Alabama, and asked George Wallace for his support and endorsement in the campaign. And Wallace was the symbol of the people who stood in the schoolhouse door to stop any desegregation. Then, in the last two or three days of the campaign, Carl Sanders was trying to talk about some kind of progressive things, and Jimmy Carter visited five of those segregationist academies -- those private schools that were set up to avoid desegregation. And his last visit prior to election day ended up at Roy Harris' house, the man who claimed he could swing thirty-seven counties in the old county unit days, because he was a really rabid segregationist. And that's how Carter ended the campaign. And it just overwhelmed the electoral process. And he won. He won pretty well.

And two weeks later, *TIME Magazine* published a very important piece. And the cover of the piece was a photograph of Jimmy Carter and it called him, "The New Face of the South." As if he had run a very progressive, forward-looking campaign -- to the astonishment of just about everybody. And that was his stepping stone. And then he forecast for all the rest of us -- previewed for all the rest of us -- of what his governorship and his presidency would be about. It was micromanagement of an awful lot of things. Part of what he tried to do was a government reorganization that I thought was pretty good. He wanted to streamline some things and he wanted to make some things work better. But his budgeting process, it wasn't zero-based budgeting, it was sort of, "Let's see where we're going here." And he argued about everything, just created all kinds of dissension within the Legislature.

And in the middle of his term, he began to lose popularity in the state, a fair amount of popularity. And at the end of that administration, the polls showed that he could not be reelected. He decided that he would run for president. And the day he announced, I wrote what was the most famous column headline I'd ever written, or ever will write. It said, "Jimmy Carter is Running for What?" -- with a question mark. And I made fun of his campaign, because I didn't

think there was anyway in the world he could win. And then I realized he was going to win, because I had known all the national political reporters from covering campaigns with them. And they would come by my house and they would tell me, you know, how proactive he'd been and how progressive he'd been and how he would like to be the most -- they thought he'd make a great president. *The New York Times* decided that it was going to profile one race by one candidate; on a weekly basis it would tell the story of how the campaign was going. And it chose Jimmy Carter as its subject for that series that it ran, so that every once a week -- I think it was on Monday -- Jimmy Carter was featured, and his campaign was featured -- what he was doing in the campaign. And it got a man who wasn't all that well-known in the country to be well-known over the course of the summer. And he won the primaries.

And then he went into the presidency, and he was very fortunate. Gerald Ford had pardoned President Nixon, and Gerald Ford unhappily had stumbled and fallen coming out of an airplane -- coming down the steps from an airplane. And everybody made fun of it, about how he stumbled all the time and how he was a clutz. Carter took advantage of that, and he got elected. He ran a good, good presidential campaign, a really good campaign. They were very tightly organized by then. They were awfully young and they had a lot of enthusiasm. And he became president. And a lot of Georgians moved to Washington as a part of that administration. Some of them left after a period of time, because they didn't like how things were going. But a lot of them stayed and remained after his presidency. But the same kind of alienation took place in the presidency that took place in Georgia politics. They used to say, and I don't know if this is true or not, but they used to say that one of the things he did in the mornings in the White House was decide who'd have access to the tennis courts that day. I don't know if he did that or not, but that was the running joke. And then of course he lost forty-nine states to Ronald Reagan.

SHORT: You were a good analyst of presidential politics. In fact, you wrote a book entitled *Southern Strategy*, back in the Nixon days.

MURPHY: Yeah. I tried to do a thing state by state of how people were beginning to change, and how Nixon was playing both sides of the political road in trying to use a Southern strategy that was not strictly based on race. But his civil rights groups had toned down dramatically what had been happening under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. And he and his associates in the White House did that. I wrote that book in conjunction with Hal Gulliver, who then was the associate editor of the *Constitution* and a real scholar of Southern politics. Between the two of us, we took those states and analyzed them pretty well. And some parts of it now wouldn't read very realistically, because they're kind of out of date.

But one of my favorite stories about that was Jim Folsom, who then was the governor of Alabama. And he and a silver-haired governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia were meeting in the Southern Governor's Conference. And they went out on the Navy boat one day, because the Navy wanted to show them something out in the Norfolk harbor. And they were meeting out there, and they wanted to show them how one of those planes could take off from the back of the aircraft carrier. And unhappily, the plane took off, got out about three or four hundred feet over the blue waters of the Atlantic and it nose dived. The pilot ejected. It got up in the air, but didn't get it up far enough for the parachute to really be effective. It came down and he hit the water with a splat like that. Plane fell into the water, crashed. Jim Folsom turned to this aristocratic Virginia governor, nudged him in the ribs, and said, "If that ain't a show, I'll kiss your ass." Never seen anything quite like Jim Folsom. He literally would lie down on the State House

grounds and take a nap every once in awhile. He was a funny, funny man. Anyhow, all of those people were beginning to try to change their politics. And Nixon was not helping them at all, and they were trying to understand where the South was going to go after this turmoil of the civil rights movement.

SHORT: Well, as editor of the *Constitution*, I'm sure you met many unusual characters, including one that was not very pleasant.

MURPHY: Oh, I think you might be talking about the colonel. Yeah, you're right. One day, I was sitting in my office and the phone rang -- or my secretary came in and said, "There's a man on the phone. He needs to talk to you about some donation." In those days, editors of newspapers did help people make charitable contributions. And the man said that he had two or three hundred thousand dollars in gallons of fuel oil that he'd like to contribute to some charity. Would I help him find a charity? He said he was changing out of one business and into another business. I thought, "I don't know." But I said, "Yeah, I'll look into it." And I went down and asked our legal guys if there was any real tax benefits as he claimed, and what to make of that. And they said, "Yeah, that's plausible. He probably could." So, I called around. I called you and the Rabun Gap School, and I called the Egleston Children's Hospital and somewhere else, and sort of began to allocate some of the fuel oil to people.

He was supposed to come by one night and pick me up to take me down to the lawyer's office so I could sign some papers, he said. But he didn't come by that night. And he came by the next night, and when he walked into the house, it was clear to me that I didn't want that man in my house. He was very nervous, a big male, red face; obviously very nervous. And I had an eight-year-old upstairs doing her homework, and I needed to get him out of there. So, I went out and got into the car with him to go sign some papers at his lawyer's office. Instead of him taking me to a lawyer's office, we went out and he was driving, and he pulled a gun and he laid it across his elbow where he was driving. And he said, "You've been kidnapped." And I said, "I don't have any money." He said, "No, newspaper does, but that's not what I'm after. We are going to straighten out this lying, leftist press in America." And I said, "Well, I don't know how you're going to do that."

But he made me put some tape over my eyes, and said, "Get out." And he came around and led me to the trunk of the car. Bound my hands and my feet behind me, so that I was a bowed position, and put me in the trunk of the car. And for most of the next forty-nine hours, I was in the trunk of the car. And every once in a while, he'd take me out and I'd have to make a tape. And that's how I communicated with the office. At the end of that period of time, he demanded 700 thousand dollars from the newspaper. And lots of people joked later that they never thought Jack Tarver would pay seven hundred thousand dollars for me, but he did. And there were a lot of FBI people standing around when Jim Minter, who then was the managing editor of the *Constitution*, delivered a suitcase full of money. I got into the car, he made me get into the trunk, but then through the -- you can talk between the front seat and the trunk of the car, very hot back there by the way. And I thought, you know, the way I left, the FBI's got to pick him up now. This is easy. They've seen him, they know what he looks like, they've got helicopters overhead, they've got guys out in the field chasing horses -- pretending to, when they were really observing the exchange. And damned if they didn't lose the car when night came.

And then we drove somewhere, and he stopped the car and came over and got out, and said, "Get out of there." And he untied me. I was standing there and he said, "Don't move." And

drove off. And I thought, "Hmm, this is not going to be good. This is where I die. Somebody's going to come along and I'll end up in a ditch." Instead, nothing happened, and I went into a Ramada Inn. And I said, "Give me a room." And the guy, of course, knew who I was by then. I said, "I'm not coming out until I hear a voice outside that tells me there's somebody out there I know." And FBI came out and brought somebody out. They took me down to the office. We identified him from photographs, They went out to his house and picked him up. And they recovered all the money. They said he was the only one involved. But they found twelve thousand dollars worth of marked bills in his wife's wallet. So, she probably knew something about it.

And we went to court. And the court convicted him. And he got forty to fifty years. And to everybody's amazement, an Appeals Court overturned the ruling. They said there'd been too much pre-trial publicity, all of which he'd asked for and demanded. And we had to go down to Key West of all places and have another trial, and they convicted him again. He got exactly the same -- forty to fifty years of prison time. And I think he served nine of them. And I haven't seen him since.

SHORT: You haven't heard from him, huh?

MURPHY: No. Long story, sorry.

SHORT: After leaving Atlanta, you went to, I think, San Francisco.

MURPHY: I went to San Francisco.

SHORT: Yeah.

MURPHY: Where Patty Hearst had been kidnapped. And two weeks after I got there -- I think it was two weeks -- they picked her up on the street in San Francisco, wandering along, and she went down to the Redwood City Jail outside San Francisco. Her father was in New York, and he asked me to go down there and sit with her until he could get a plane and get there. I went out there, and she didn't want to talk to me at all. She was mad at everybody and she certainly didn't want to talk to me. And then we went through that long trial, and her father and mother were in terrific pain all during that period of time. Awful time. However, she has rehabilitated herself and she has done extremely well. She's a mother and serves on the Board of Hearst Corporation and is a very responsible person.

SHORT: And then to Baltimore.

MURPHY: Yeah, went to Baltimore, the most antiquated newspaper operation I'd ever seen in my life. They still were the dullest, grayest type you've ever seen. And they had a morning and an afternoon newspaper, and neither of them was doing very well against the Hearst newspaper in Baltimore -- *The Journal American*. But ultimately we prevailed and had a good time. One of my proud times was to have an afternoon where we got two Pulitzer Prizes in one year. And it all became a very successful operation. After awhile, we sold it to the Times Mirror Company, which owned the *L.A. Times* and some other papers, and it was based in Los Angeles. And I went on to their newspaper -- on their executive committee, and did that for awhile. And

then I decided that I really wanted to get out of the newspaper business and I retired, I thought. I took off for a period of time, and went to the *National Geographic* for five years.

SHORT: And then you retired again.

MURPHY: I tried to retire again. I haven't been able to do it yet, but I'm going to.

SHORT: Let me ask you this question about your profession.

MURPHY: Yes.

SHORT: How is technology changing journalism?

MURPHY: In the big cities it's ruining it. The days when newspapers could afford the investigative reporting that they traditionally did are gone. Most of the advertising has gone. Most of the support that they had claims to have gone to the Internet or to cable television. Most people are getting a lot of their news these days from blogs, which have very little reason to be totally accurate. The community just no longer supports newspapers the way they did, and if they do, they read it on the Internet. And the truth is that newspapers all made a terrible, terrible decision when they decided to give away their news from the Internet instead of sell it. And now they're having a very hard time trying to figure out a way to make people pay for what they've become accustomed to getting for free. And I don't have a lot of hope for some of the big city newspapers. Now, small town newspapers are doing a lot better, because there is no other source of news in a small town. And more importantly, there's no other way for the merchants to market except through advertising in the newspapers. And they will last for a longer period of time, but the technology has absolutely outrun the days when newspapers were the vital force. They used to be the best franchise in town, and in most places they are not anymore.

SHORT: Let me ask you this, Reg, do you think that web journalism meets the standards that we're accustomed to in the print media?

MURPHY: No. It doesn't come close. There is not a Jack Nelson to dig into things. There is not a Charlie Pou to dig into things. There is not a James Reston who can talk authoritatively about Washington in *The New York Times* on a frequent basis. There is not anybody who is pointing out how many errors and rumors and misconceptions that both the blogs and the television talk shows -- the cable television talk shows -- are creating. And consequently, what you see is you see a complete impasse in Congress. It's just totally blocked. You see an incredible amount of anger in the public, because they've heard all these crosscurrents about "Is Obama -- was he really born in Honolulu?" Of course he was. But you know, you get all these crazy theories running around that aggravate people -- different kinds of people. Democracy does not work unless there is a common body of factual knowledge from which people can make decisions. And we don't have that anymore. Now, were newspapers flawed in the past? Absolutely. All of them were flawed. But compared to the amount of misinformation that's being spewed around the country now, it's not even close. And I despair sometimes -- not despair, because we will find a way out of it. But for right now I despair at the kinds of information that people are trying to deal with.

SHORT: Do you think newspapers will ever be profitable again?

MURPHY: I can't imagine how they will be, because they have two problems that -- they have three problems that other people don't have. They've got heavy capital costs from building plants and modernizing. They've got heavy costs for newsprint that -- the air is free and the newsprint is not. And they have transportation problems of delivery that technology is going to have a hard time overcoming. Yes, you can deliver it over the Internet, but it would take forever to get it done. And sorting it out would be very hard to do. So, I think there will be a way to put it back together, but in the form that you and I think of newsprint -- papers that we can hold in our hands and read whenever we want to read them -- I don't see much future for that.

SHORT: Well Reg, it's been a very insightful conversation, and I deeply appreciate it.

MURPHY: It's fun for me to go back and think through those things.

SHORT: Is there anything we've forgotten?

MURPHY: Well, I probably have forgotten more than you have, but I don't think we've forgotten a lot. We've ranged over a lot of subject matter.

SHORT: A long period of time.

MURPHY: Yes, sir. I've enjoyed it.

SHORT: Well, on behalf of the Duckworth Library at Young Harris College and the Russell Library at the University of Georgia, I want to thank you for being our guest.

MURPHY: Well, thank you sir. I appreciate it.

