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Interview with Kerwin C. Swint

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KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH KERWIN C. SWINT

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

KSU ORAL HISTORY SERIES, NO. 151

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
KSU Oral History Series, No. 151
Interview with Kerwin C. Swint
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Location: Dean's Conference Room, College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Kennesaw Campus, Kennesaw State University

Part 1 – Monday, October 29, 2018

TS: Kerwin Swint is professor of political science, director of the School of Government and International Affairs, and interim dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Let's start with your educational background, or if you want to go back even further, I've got a feeling you might be from Georgia, although I am not sure.

KS: Yes, I'm a native Atlantan, one of the last. My parents lived in DeKalb County. I was born at Crawford Long Hospital in Atlanta, went to Cross Keys High School in DeKalb County, and graduated from there in 1980. Fortunately, I was admitted to the University of Georgia.

TS: Fortunately?

KS: It was the only college I applied to.

TS: Was there any doubt that you were going to get in?

KS: Well, I hoped not. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't, but I got in. I was undecided for my first couple of years there. I took different classes and didn't really have a firm idea of a career when I was a freshman, or even a sophomore. I finally decided to major in political science.

TS: How did that come about?

KS: Well, they said, "You are going to have to declare a major after a certain number of hours." I said, "I really love politics and history, and so I guess I'll major in political science." I had taken, at that point, probably two or three political science courses, and enjoyed them tremendously. So I guess I decided to go with my heart, my passion, and I majored in political science.

TS: I heard a rumor that you knew Ralph Reed at the University of Georgia [Ralph E. Reed Jr., conservative political activist and executive director of the Christian Coalition in the 1990s]. I wanted to ask you whether there was any truth to that rumor.

KS: Well, yes, he was there. He was a year older than me, if memory serves—

TS: He's about nine months older than you, according to my math.

- KS: Right. So when I was a freshman, he was a sophomore. I would see him on campus. We didn't know each other. We weren't friends, or even familiar, really, with each other, but I knew of him, and I saw him on campus. The most pronounced memory I have of Ralph Reed is coming out of a UGA football game. This would have been, I guess, in 1980, when I was a freshman. He was there in the throngs as people were leaving Sanford Stadium, waving his arm and shouting, "Are there any President Reagan supporters in the crowd?" He had no compunction against being that public and that out front, and that was my first brush with him, I think. Someone said, "Yes, that is Ralph Reed."
- TS: Okay. I just wondered if that was how you got interested in politics, but it sounds like you weren't that close.
- KS: What got me interested in politics was watching the Watergate hearings on TV with my father when I was a kid. It was over the summer, and I was home. I was around twelve years old, and I just thought, "This is interesting." So I got interested in politics.
- TS: The Senate hearings and all of that?
- KS: Yes. Yes.
- TS: Okay. Any mentors in your undergraduate days at UGA?
- KS: Well, Chuck Bullock [Charles S. Bullock III, expert in Southern politics, Richard B. Russell Professor of Political Science] was one of my mentors, and [James E.] Jim Campbell, who was a professor of political science there at the time [1980-1988]. He is long gone from there now [to Louisiana State University, 1988-1998, and the University of Buffalo as UB Distinguished Professor of political science, 1998-present]. He was also a mentor of mine. My advisor was Loch [K.] Johnson. A lot of people know Loch Johnson [as an expert on American foreign policy and intelligence]. He was just a fount of knowledge and guidance, so I guess I had several mentors.
- TS: You mentioned Loch Johnson, I guess, for the advice he gave. What about Bullock and Campbell? How were they mentors?
- KS: Well, Campbell, I had several classes with him. He was probably the friendliest, the closest I got to, because I would ask him about political science and about academia. In fact, I would talk to him after I graduated from Georgia. I would go back for a visit every once in a while and go see him. And then Chuck Bullock, I took every class you could from him.
- TS: I think I still see his name in the paper on occasion.
- KS: All the time, all the time. An odd thing is my son is a junior at Georgia right now. He is a political science major, and he has Chuck Bullock! So I had him in the 1980s, and my son has him right now, so it's interesting.

TS: How about that? So these guys were obviously teaching undergraduates.

KS: Yes.

TS: Good. So you graduated in 1984 with a degree in political science, and you went to Washington then, didn't you?

KS: Yes, I sure did.

TS: So what were you doing there?

KS: Well, I wanted to work in Washington. I was a political science guy. I was involved in volunteering in campaigns in the early 80s.

TS: That early? Any particular ones?

KS: Well, I was involved in the Reagan re-election campaign in 1984 with the College Republicans.

TS: So you were involved with the College Republicans?

KS: I went to meetings and helped pass out literature and stuff like that. I went to Washington when I graduated and looked for a job. I wanted to be in D.C., and I was fortunate to be able to get a job at the Department of Commerce. I worked for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA ... at the Department of Commerce from 1985 to 1987.

TS: What were you doing?

KS: I was in the Department of Business Affairs, working as a staff assistant, basically. My title was Confidential Assistant to the Director of Business Affairs, which sounded really dangerous and sophisticated, but really I was just somebody who went to meetings, took notes, and helped write newsletters and that kind of thing. Then in 1987 I moved over to the Civil Rights Commission and worked there as a staff assistant.

TS: I bet that was fun.

KS: It was interesting. It was interesting, yes.

TS: When did you come back?

KS: Came back in 1988, to Georgia. I had met a young lady in Washington, D.C. She is actually from Northern Virginia. We decided in 1987 to get married. I had a B.A. in political science in Washington, D.C., and I said, "I think I need a little more training or direction or guidance." So I said to Sandy ... that's my wife ... "I want to go back to Georgia. What do you think?"

TS: Before you were married?

KS: Before we married, that's right.

TS: What did she think?

KS: Well, she had been to Georgia on several visits, and she loved Atlanta and the Atlanta area, and so she was open to coming back down here. So that is what we did.

TS: Now, with these positions, you didn't have to have a political connection to get these jobs, did you?

KS: Well technically, they were Schedule C political appointee positions.

TS: So who helped you out getting the jobs?

KS: You know, I don't really think anyone did. I can't remember relying on anyone in particular. I guess maybe somebody had written me a letter of recommendation, but I can't remember who that would have been now, unless it was Paul [D.] Coverdell [Republican state senator, 1971-1989; Georgia Senate minority leader, 1974-1989; director of the Peace Corps, 1989-1991; U.S. Senator, 1993-2000]. I did a little bit of work for him. But basically it was just interviewing for jobs up there in different agencies, and when somebody was interested in you, they would put the paperwork through, and you were approved.

TS: You would have been in Washington during the second term of the Reagan administration.

KS: That's right.

TS: Was anything exciting in civil rights happening at that time?

KS: Not really. I was there about nine months before I decided I really needed to come back to Georgia. At the time, it was a lot of hearings on civil liberties and Indian affairs and things like that.

TS: So what kind of work would you be doing for the Civil Rights Commission—research or what would you be doing?

KS: Some research; they had a quarterly magazine that I helped write and edit on civil rights issues. They held a lot of hearings, and I would go and help out with policy papers and that kind of thing.

TS: Any of those papers still in existence?

KS: Maybe in the National Archives in civil rights.

TS: It would be interesting to see what you were saying back then. When you returned to Georgia I don't quite understand why you decided to earn a M.Ed. It sounds like you were already talking to Bullock and Campbell about maybe an academic career, but M.Ed. sounds more like you were thinking about teaching high school.

KS: Right. When I came back in 1988, I had wanted to get some more training, or another degree, but I was a newlywed, and so I had to get a job. So I got a job in a public relations firm in Atlanta, Cohn & Wolfe Public Relations. Again, that was through just talking to people and looking for a job, basically. I didn't have any particular training in public relations. I didn't have a degree in it. I didn't have any experience in it. They just thought, "Well, we'll give this young guy a chance," or they needed the help. So I worked there as an assistant account executive for about a year and saved up some money. Then in 1989 I went back to graduate school. It is interesting, because like you said, I didn't immediately go into a political science program. At the time, I thought, "Well, this may take some time for me to get into a graduate program." So I thought, "What I'll do in the short-term, then, is I will get a teaching degree."

I didn't have to get a whole degree. I just had to get a certificate. So I went first to Georgia State, and then I transferred those hours over to University of Georgia College of Education and got a teaching certificate, with the idea being that, "Okay, I will teach high school for a few years, and I'll work on a masters in political science, or PhD in political science." That was the plan. So that is why I went for an M.Ed. But while I was working on the M.Ed. at Georgia, I took a few graduate political science classes as electives. I had the opportunity to re-engage with people like Jim Campbell and Loch Johnson, and I told them my plan. I said, "I'm going to teach, and then go to school at night and work on a graduate degree." They said, "Well, I don't know if that is the best idea." They said, "That is going to take you a while, and you are not going to get a PhD for years, and at the end of that time, you still may not get what you want." So basically what they told me was, "Bite the bullet. Go back and get your graduate degree in political science now, because that will get you a lot closer to what you want to do." So I thought about that, and I said, "They are probably right." But I still had to make some kind of a living.

TS: Yes, you had a wife to support.

KS: Yes, I had a wife to support, although she had a job, but we weren't making very much money. So I asked around. I went to the graduate office at UGA and the University of Alabama, but Georgia State University said, "You can earn a PhD here, and we'll pay you to teach." I said, "That sounds like a pretty good deal." Of course it was just a teaching assistantship, so it wasn't a whole lot of money. I think it was probably not even \$10,000 a year, but it helped pay the rent. So I went to Georgia State and started my PhD program in the fall of 1990.

TS: At Georgia State, were you teaching American Government introductory courses?

KS: Yes, that's right.

- TS: And getting some good practical experience.
- KS: That was a lot of fun. That was great. That was a great formative experience.
- TS: At least graduate assistantships were a little better by then than when I went through. I think I got \$2,400 for a year to be a TA.
- KS: Well, that was a great experience for me. My mentor there in that program was [William R.] Bill Thomas. He is retired now, but he was the graduate director at the time. Great, great professor, great person, and just had a lot of influence on me personally. I'm still in contact with him.
- TS: Elaborate a little bit about how he influenced you.
- KS: Just a really helpful person. He was like a coach. In fact, part of his job was to help the graduate teaching assistants, and I was his assistant under him for about a year. I learned how to teach in a college classroom. He was just very encouraging and very friendly, and just very helpful.
- TS: In 1992 you got a job at Kennesaw as an instructor. How did that come about?
- KS: Well, I had spent those two years working on course work for my PhD, and I had pretty much finished with my course work. I taught a part-time class out here at Kennesaw State College, winter quarter, 1992. I was teaching a class here, I was teaching a class at Georgia State as a graduate assistant, and then I taught another class here in the spring quarter of 1992. I believe I was finished with my course work that spring, and I went to the department chair of Political Science here, who was Willoughby [G.] Jarrell, and I said, "Dr. Jarrell, I am finished with my course work. I have taught a couple of classes here. I have good evaluations. I would love to be able to teach here while I work on my dissertation." And she said, "We'll see." I gave her my vita, which was about half a page long probably at the time. Then she called me sometime early that summer and said, "Kerwin, we have an opening here for this fall for a temporary full-time instructor. Are you interested?" I said, "Yes, I would be very interested in that! Full-time? Absolutely." So that's how I got here. She offered me a full-time temporary job teaching Introduction to American Government. I thought, "That's perfect because I can earn some money, get teaching experience, and work on my dissertation." So that is how I got here.
- TS: So you didn't have to go through a national search to be an instructor?
- KS: No.
- TS: Dr. George [H.] Beggs was still the dean, I guess.
- KS: I'm looking at his portrait right now in this room. He is the guy who hired me because everybody at that time had to interview with the dean. I met George Beggs, and we

talked for probably an hour and a half. He told me all about the advent of Kennesaw State and all that. So I would like to say George Beggs is the guy who hired me.

TS: Well you had short hair, no beard, a tie and a coat. Those were essential to impress George Beggs, I think.

KS: That's right, yes.

TS: Well, great. Was Ed Rugg or anybody higher up involved? I guess Beggs made the final decision.

KS: He made the decision, and I think everybody else just signed off on it.

TS: So you were through your course work, working on a dissertation, and teaching full-time at Kennesaw for the next three years while you were finishing up your doctorate.

KS: Right.

TS: Let's talk about the doctorate. How did you get interested in negative campaigning? I know the title of your dissertation is "The Art of Negative Campaigning in American Elections." How did you get interested in that topic?

KS: Well, in the PhD course work I took a lot of campaign and electoral process courses. A guy named [Michael B.] Mike Binford was their electoral politics guy. I took several classes from him. My main concentration was campaigns and elections. I started talking to him about, "What should I write my dissertation about?" We had just talked about dirty politics, dirty campaigning, and I thought, "Wouldn't it be interesting, wouldn't it be a lot of fun, to do a dissertation on attack campaigning?" If you are going to do a dissertation, it is going to be years of your life, and it should be something you're interested in. I thought it was fascinating. So my dissertation was an analysis of how professional consultants go negative. I did a nationwide survey of political consultants. I got the mailing list from the American Association of Political Consultants. I had a pretty long questionnaire, although it couldn't be too long, or they wouldn't go to the trouble of responding.

TS: Did you have to go through IRBs [Institutional Review Boards] back then?

KS: I did not. Thank God. I did not. The survey asked them all kinds of questions about how they decided to go negative, what were the decision points, what were the pros and cons, how did they go negative, what form did it take, and what media would they use in certain situations. There were other factors, too, that I can't recall now. But it was a pretty detailed analysis of how professional consultants go negative. I did sort of a factor analysis.

TS: So a lot of statistics?

KS: A little bit of statistics, yes.

TS: Not a lot?

KS: Not a lot. There was a little bit of quantitative analysis in it, but that is what I did. And I finished it in 1995.

TS: What did you find out?

KS: Some of the lessons were that it depended on how much money they had and how big the budget was. It depended on how credible the information was because they didn't want to use things that could be easily knocked down or proven false. It depended, somewhat, on who the opposition was. Are they vulnerable or are they not? You don't want to try to attack some Teflon Don. It is just going to bounce off of them. I think one of the things, too, was what if your opponent is a woman? At the time, I was interested in, does that make a difference?

TS: And there probably weren't that many women candidates in the early 1990s.

KS: Well, it didn't make a difference. They said, "No, they would just as soon attack a woman as not." Yes. Well, you know, these are professional consultants, and they are pretty bloodthirsty. I remember some of the people who returned the survey, too. It was interesting at the time.

TS: What percentage responded?

KS: The return rate was, I want to say around 20 percent. Which *ain't* too bad for something like that.

TS: Did some people think you weren't important enough to fill it out?

KS: I got one back from Roger [E.] Ailes. I got one back from [C.] James Carville [Jr.]

TS: Okay! They appear as subjects in your books later on.

KS: They do, they do, yes. But I was interested to note that they took the time to fill out a survey from some doctoral student they didn't even know. There were some others, too. I can't recall now, but there were some notable names in the consulting business that returned it.

TS: Nice! That's good. What did you conclude about them? I mean, it has to be depressing that they would go negative, don't you think?

KS: Well, they looked at it as a pure calculation. They didn't really consider the moral aspect.

TS: So that's the Machiavellian approach?

KS: Yes. They were paid to do a job. Now, they said, "There is a difference between going negative and doing something that is unethical." Unethical would be ...

TS: Whether it is true or not?

KS: Outright lying about somebody. They said that that would be unethical to tell something you know is not true. And they said, "I would never do that." And the other part of it was...

TS: A fine line sometimes, don't you think?

KS: Yes, and I also think that it depends on what a lie is, right?

TS: And how much you take something out of context.

KS: Yes, or manipulation of information.

TS: Okay, so you did that, and you got your dissertation completed and got your degree. Did Kennesaw immediately make you an assistant professor and put you on a tenure track?

KS: No, no. I graduated with my PhD in 1995, and then that next winter of 1996, they decided to fill a tenure track line in electoral politics that was vacant at the time. The professor who held that position left, and so it was a vacant line. If memory serves, there were two or three vacant lines. I can't remember exactly. But they decided to fill that vacant line, and so I applied for it.

TS: And so a national search this time.

KS: National search, that's right. They brought in two other candidates. I was one of the three finalists, and they hired me to do it. I got the job.

TS: At least they knew you.

KS: Yes. I was the internal candidate. I started the tenure track job in the fall of 1996.

TS: I want to ask you a little bit about campus culture at that time, but before we get away from it, I've read at least parts of all your books except the first one: *Political Consultants and Negative Campaigning: The Secrets of the Pros* [(Lanham: University Press of America, 1998)]. It sounds to me like it is just a little further research and basically a revision of your dissertation. Would that be correct?

KS: That's basically it, yes. It was based on my dissertation, but I filled it out with some [more] explanation and some storytelling about the individual campaigns. I had examples in there, basically, case studies.

TS: So you had a book from University Press of America before you had to go up for tenure and promotion. That is a pretty good thing to have. Would it be fair to say that the kind of research you have done since the dissertation is applied research?

KS: Yes.

TS: Why don't you elaborate on why you have taken that avenue? Who is your audience when you write your books? Beyond the dissertation, it doesn't look like academics are necessarily your audience.

KS: They weren't. You're right. I write more like a journalist than an academic. I've always had an interest in telling stories, and I've always had an interest in characters. So my writing has always been more directed towards a popular audience than an academic one. I have written a few articles for academic journals, but it is not my strength, and it is not my main area of interest. I guess I was fortunate because at that time, [your publications] didn't have to be [written for a few experts in the field]. If I was a newly hired assistant professor now, I don't think I would have that luxury. At the time, this was primarily a teaching institution. They wanted you to do research, but you were less constrained then. So I felt a certain comfort level in saying, "You know what? I'm just going to do the kind of research and writing that interests me." So that is what I did, and I was able to do it. I did a lot of service, too, and so my teaching and my service were, I think, primarily what I was evaluated on in those years.

TS: So when you got the job, I gather that they didn't say, "We expect you to have a book written or 'x' number of peer-reviewed articles before you come up for tenure and promotion."

KS: They didn't, no.

TS: What did they say about research?

KS: Well, like I said, they wanted everybody to do research. If you had a tenure-track job, you were responsible for teaching, research, and service. It was always that expectation. But like I said, it wasn't really tightly defined what kind of research they expected you to do. Like you mentioned, the fact that I had already had a book published early on—I think they were like, "Wow, that's pretty good!"

TS: There weren't too many people in political science that were publishing books at Kennesaw at that time.

KS: Right. I guess that encouraged me also to continue writing for a popular audience. I had found some success doing it. I enjoyed the heck out of it, and so I continue to do that.

TS: Well, that has been my experience with my oral history project. Everything that I've ever written has been for a public audience instead of academics. We used to be able to do

that here, but you are suggesting that we've reached a point now where the Kerwin Swint of 1995 wouldn't fit so well into Kennesaw 2018?

KS: That could be. That could be. Or Kerwin Swint would have had to conform and just do the strict kind of quantitative analysis.

TS: Which sounds a lot more boring than what you did. You talked about service. Was your service to the campus community, or to the profession, or out consulting on political campaigns? What kind of service were you doing?

KS: Well, it was all those things. Obviously, institutional service, serving on committees, and that sort of thing, was expected. And I did get into political campaigns in the late 1990s when I was a young professor here. I included that as professional service.

TS: Any particular campaigns at that time?

KS: Well, in 1998, I formed a company with a KSU student, actually. We called this company Southeast Political Group.

TS: Who was the student?

KS: The student's name is Robert Trim. We went into business together, but we went into business under the tutelage of a well-known Georgia consultant named Tom Perdue. I had met him a few times, just in politics. He was actually here at Kennesaw State once or twice, speaking to classes. So I told him, "I'm interested in doing some political campaign consulting for state legislative candidates and county candidates." He didn't do that. He did statewide and U.S. Senate campaigns. He was above that. I said, "This very bright student and I want to go into business and do consulting at the local level. Would you be interested in affiliating with us?" The idea was that we would go into business under his umbrella, and he would help us recruit candidates. He would be a sounding board and advisor for us. That worked pretty well. We did that for a couple of years, starting in 1998.

Our first client was [Dr. John Phillip] Phil Gingrey. At the time, he was on the Marietta City School Board, and he was running for state senate. It was the senate seat vacated by [Charles C.] Chuck Clay. So Tom Perdue introduced us to Phil Gingrey. He agreed to let us run his campaign, and we did. It was a great experience for me, personally. I had never been a political consultant before. It was also a good opportunity for me, as an academic, to get my hands dirty and actually get out there in the field and do some real politics. From that standpoint, it was really valuable, and I was always able to bring experiences like that back into the classroom, which I thought made me a better teacher. In the Campaigns and Elections class, I would bring in real budgets. I would bring in real advertising materials. I would bring in real surveys from the field. And I would say, "This is how it is done." I thought that was great.

TS: Yes. Obviously, you were not going to make a living doing that on a local level.

KS: Well, at the time, I might have thought, “Maybe I’ll do this.” In 1998 we also ran, completely or partially, about eight different campaigns.

TS: Oh, really?

KS: That year. We had several state senate candidates. Phil Gingery was the best known of them. We had a few state house candidates. So we did really well that year, in 1998, working with Tom Perdue.

TS: So they trusted you because of Perdue?

KS: That’s right. That’s right.

TS: Well, did you do any negative campaigning?

KS: Not in Gingrey’s race because we didn’t really have to. The general election was a cakewalk, so there was really no need to. There were a couple of state house races that we did get a little aggressive. Do you remember [Kennesaw alumnus] Randy Krise?

TS: Yes, absolutely.

KS: Okay, well we ran his campaign against Bobby Franklin. Franklin was the incumbent. That was a very aggressive campaign. But that’s the only one I remember.

TS: Well, Randy Krise lost that campaign.

KS: He did, yes. After 1998 and 1999, I mostly did polling. Robert Trim and I went our separate ways.

TS: By the way, was he a traditional or non-traditional student, Robert Trim?

KS: He was a little bit older. I want to say he was in his late 20s.

TS: Why did you team up with him?

KS: He took a couple of my classes, and he had some certain talents and abilities that I did not have, like knowing what vendors to go to for certain printed materials, and how to do certain things at the grassroots level because he had been doing it as a volunteer. So our skill sets sort of meshed.

TS: The Internet was brand new at that time. Were you doing a website for the candidates?

KS: No, not at that time. Too early, yes.

TS: So you were making a little money and learning practical information. What classes were you teaching at that time?

KS: Campaigns and Elections, the American Government class, Mass Media and Politics, and State and Local Government were my main classes.

TS: What was your impression of Kennesaw students at that time?

KS: At that time they were older. It was very much a non-traditional college student body at the time. They were older and tended to be married. A lot of them worked full time. Not all of them, of course, but it tended to be the case. So we had a lot of classes taught at night. One of the expectations was that we had to teach at least one class at night each quarter or semester. So it was a different kind of place. There were some traditional college-age students, but not nearly as many as there are now.

TS: How would they compare to the students at Georgia State, or the students that you attended school with at Georgia?

KS: Well, they were older, and they could . . .

TS: Even compared to Georgia State? They were older?

KS: They were, yes. Of course, as a teaching assistant at Georgia State, I taught daytime classes. So it may have just been the circumstances.

TS: What was your impression of the faculty at that time?

KS: It was good. There were some good teachers here at the time, good professionals that had a big influence on me.

TS: Well, I brought my copy of *Mudslingers* with me today [Kerwin C. Swint, *Mudslingers: The Top 25 Negative Political Campaigns of All Time* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005)].

KS: Well, bless your heart [laughs].

TS: By 2005, I guess you were an associate professor, tenured and all.

KS: Right, yes.

TS: How did *Mudslingers* come about? In some ways it is an extension of what you had been doing, but it is more historical for one thing.

KS: Well, I ran my last political campaign in 2004. I went out on a high note. I helped Dorothy [A.] Robinson [Cobb County State Court judge, 1972-81, Superior Court judge, 1981-2012] get re-elected to Cobb Superior Court. She had a tough opponent that year, and the district attorney was trying to get her beat.

TS: I always liked Dorothy Robinson.

KS: Yes, she was something. She really was. So I decided to hang it up. For one thing, the political campaigning was getting in the way of my day job. It was a significant amount of time, and I said, "I need to cut this loose." So I said, "I'm just going to re-focus my energies on campus." I did, and so it was then that I decided, "I want to write another book. I want to get back into research and writing." I like to tell people that I got the idea for *Mudslingers* while I was sitting on my back porch one evening. It occurred to me that no one had ever written a book that ranked the worst campaigns of all time. I said, "That's a great idea for a book!" So I started thinking about the kinds of campaigns that would be in a book like that. I said, "You know what? I am going to do a countdown of the most negative campaigns of all time." That was the idea for the book.

TS: And you made it state races as well as national.

KS: Yes, I finished with twenty-five campaigns. Fourteen of those were presidential. The rest were races for Congress, governor, or mayor.

TS: Oh, that's right. There was a chapter on Mayor [Harold] Washington in Chicago ["Bye-Bye Blackbird: Harold Washington v. Bernard Epton, Mayor, Chicago, 1983"], among others.

KS: That's right, yes.

TS: And the one that you thought was the worst was George Wallace in 1970 ["George Wallace and the 'Negro Bloc Vote': George Wallace v. Albert Brewer, Democratic Primary, Governor, Alabama, 1970."] How did you make that decision?

KS: Well, being a Southerner, I knew some of the history of George Wallace and segregation and all that. I started researching that particular campaign of 1970, and I just thought it was the most recent example of some of the most hideous, dirty campaigning that I had ever seen, dirty tricks, lying, racism. I thought, "My goodness." In the book, I think I quote someone else saying that this was the last openly racist campaign for major office, in America.

TS: That is the same year that Jimmy Carter was elected governor of Georgia, in 1970. There are a lot of questions about negative campaigning and racism by the Carter campaign, at least some racist things that staff members did on Carter's behalf. But then he comes out in his inaugural address and says, "The time for racial discrimination is over." And suddenly the national media see him as a moderate voice from the South.

KS: That's what he's known for.

TS: I guess for Carter, it was nice to have a racist governor like George Wallace to be compared to.

KS: Or Lester Maddox [governor of Georgia, 1967-1971].

- TS: Yes, Lester Maddox, that's exactly right. And then Wallace's opponent, Albert Brewer, was a gentleman and didn't respond in kind.
- KS: Yes, Brewer said, "If this is what I have to do to be elected governor, I'll just let it go." So he rose above it.
- TS: Good for him, even though he didn't win.
- KS: Yes, right, right. But that was just a vicious campaign. I was trying to decide between that one, and then the 1824 and 1828 campaigns between Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams, which were equally as brutal. Those campaigns were just in the distant past. So I was like, "This is more recent." That is why I made the Wallace campaign number one.
- TS: Just looking at your footnotes, you used things like *Newsweek*, and especially Dan T. Carter's *The Politics of Rage: [George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics]* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995)]. So in essence you were using secondary sources other than *Newsweek*. You also used Phillip Crass, *The Wallace Factor* [(New York: Mason Charter, 1976)]. So you have a couple of secondary sources, but, again, you were not really delving into archives and pulling out correspondence from the campaign and that kind of primary source. Of course, you can't do that much archival research and cover twenty-five different campaigns in one book. So, again, to me, that is the applied research model.
- KS: That's right, yes.
- TS: And academics may raise questions about that, but that's not your audience.
- KS: That's right. This is a popular book.
- TS: Did you have trouble getting a publisher for a popular book like this?
- KS: No, not really. Surprisingly, I guess.
- TS: Did you have an agent?
- KS: No. I sent the prospectus to a bunch of publishers, and I got a call back from an editor who thought it was really interesting. She thought the examples in there were just really great case studies, and they were interested in putting it out.
- TS: Well, fantastic. I was shocked by some of your negative campaigns. I didn't remember George W. Bush being negative at all, but after reading the first chapter in the book ["From Vietnam to Iraq: George W. Bush v. John Kerry, President, 2004"], I think you make a good case that it was think. And also George Herbert Walker Bush's campaign ["America, Meet Willie Horton: George H. W. Bush v. Michael Dukakis, President, 1988."]

KS: Well that was the Willie Horton advertisement [about a convicted murderer who committed armed robbery, assault, and rape while out of prison on a Massachusetts weekend furlough program during the gubernatorial administration of Michael Dukakis].

TS: Somehow or other, I never blamed George Herbert Walker Bush for it, but maybe I should have.

KS: Well, he let it happen.

TS: It wouldn't have happened without him, would it?

KS: That's right. He rose above it, or he tried to, but he was very well aware of what was going on.

TS: Well, it sounds like a fun project.

KS: It was.

TS: And, again, the kind of thing you could do while teaching a full load.

KS: Right, right. It still took me about a year to research it and write it, working full-time and everything.

TS: What kind of reviews did you get? Did the academic presses review the book, or was it popular media.

KS: The best review I got was in *The Wall Street Journal* by John [H.] Fund ["When Elections Were Really Dirty," February 16, 2006]. He is still a pretty well known columnist. He thought it was as interesting as I did [laughs]. So it got a lot of press because of that review. I went on NPR [National Public Radio] and was interviewed by Diane Rehm. I got a call from them after the *Wall Street Journal* article ran, and they invited me up to D.C. We did an hour on NPR on *Mudslingers*. So it got a lot of popular press, which is what it was intended to do. That was the audience, and, like I said, it was just such a novel idea that got people's attention.

TS: Did any of the academic presses review it?

KS: You know, I don't remember. If they did, I don't remember.

TS: Of course, you were through working in campaigns by this time, but to what degree had your consultant work in campaigns stereotyped you? Dorothy Robinson was obviously a lot more liberal than, say, a Phil Gingrey, but I would guess you were doing more campaigns for Republicans than Democrats with your connections with Tom Perdue.

KS: I was, yes.

TS: “Stereotype” is not really the word I want, but did that typecast you in any way?

KS: You know, it really didn’t; I had a really good relationship with other faculty here in the department, and in the college, at the time. It really didn’t. I just think I got along with people. I was a good teacher, I did my job well, and people respected my professionalism. Helen [S.] Ridley [former department chair and dean], for example, was one of my mentors. We had a great relationship. We thought the world of each other. But I remember her once saying to me that, “I don’t know how someone so smart can be so dumb.”

TS: Why did she say that?

KS: Because of what you are saying, the working for Republicans, and sort of having this Republican mentality. She thought, “I don’t know how anybody so smart can be so dumb.” But it never adversely affected me. Maybe that is because I got out of it fairly early on. If I had continued down that road, it might have caused problems. I don’t know. But, mercifully, it didn’t.

TS: Well, I really don’t know what Helen’s politics were.

KS: Oh, she was a liberal Democrat.

TS: Was she?

KS: Absolutely, and that is what she meant. She and I disagreed, politically, but we respected each other in personal terms and professional terms.

TS: You know, every time you pick up a newspaper, somebody is bashing the academic world for its alleged left-wing bias.

KS: Yes.

TS: What about back then at Kennesaw? It sounds, from you are saying, that nobody really cared that much whether you were to the left or right or in between.

KS: You know, I don’t think they did as much. I guess maybe that is a sign of the times, where it wasn’t necessarily a condemnation or anything twenty or twenty-five years ago. But, of course, I think it also depends on the person and what your approach is.

TS: What do you think about the campus now, and criticisms of left-leaning faculty and what have you? Apparently, some critics think that we are indoctrinating students. Do you see that in the faculty, or what do you think?

KS: No, I never have. I mean, the journalists and the commentators paint us all with the same broad brush, but, in reality, they are not seeing the day-to-day professors in the classroom

who are trying to get their students to think, and talk, and write. Now, there would be a few examples of indoctrination, but by and large, no. I don't see it.

TS: I don't either. I think we probably need to do a better job of defending ourselves sometimes.

KS: Well, I think we do. In today's climate, of course, like you are saying, it is a different ballpark.

TS: When did you achieve full professor?

KS: Well let's see, that would have been 2006.

TS: So that was right after *Mudslingers*?

KS: It helped me get to full professor. That's right.

TS: There weren't too many faculty members that had two books in print, particularly among young faculty—or old faculty, for that matter, at Kennesaw at that time.

KS: Right.

TS: Which is just twelve years ago, actually. It is hard to believe that we have changed that much in twelve years.

KS: Yes.

TS: So full prof in 2006, and you didn't slow down any after that. Maybe before we get to your next book on Roger Ailes, you might talk about your service, after you stopped doing the political consulting.

KS: Well, it would have been things like college curriculum committee, serving on the Senate, and advising the political science club.

TS: So it was mainly on-campus activities?

KS: Yes, mainly on campus. I had divorced myself from the partisanship at that time, and so I wasn't really doing anything with the Republican Party or anything like that.

TS: When did you start becoming an expert on television and radio with the talk shows?

KS: It's weird, but it started back in 1996. I remember doing my first TV interview with John McKnight at Channel 46. Remember him? He was the anchor at Channel 46 [from 1994 to 1999]. He came out here and did an interview with me. I want to say it was about Newt Gingrich. Then one of the producers back at Channel 46 gave me a call, and he said, "We do a Saturday morning news analysis. Would you want to come on and do

some political talk with us?” I said, “Sure.” I was 34 years old at the time, and I had just been hired tenure-track, and I guess I thought I was hot stuff or something because I said, “Sure, I would love to come on there!”

TS: I think it is fabulous that you were doing that that early.

KS: I was so young. Now I can say that. But I kept up with things, and I knew politics pretty well. I went on there, I remember, with Alan [I.] Abramowitz from Emory University. I remember saying to myself, “I’m sitting here with Alan Abramowitz from Emory University. Do they know what they are doing?” Because Alan was a big, nationally known political scientist. But the fact is that I was better on TV than he was. That is to no one’s credit; that’s just TV.

TS: What does it take to be a good interviewee for TV?

KS: Just be personable and give not one-liners, but short, pithy statements. Of course, in a thirty-minute interview show, it is a little more dialogue than that.

TS: But you seem to be good in all your books at coming up with short, pithy statements, the kinds of things that make your writing interesting.

KS: Well TV journalists have always liked me a lot because they can come and get a lot out of me in a little bit of time. So they keep coming back.

TS: Just the way you start a book, the first line of the “Prologue” in *Mudslingers*: “Don’t let them fool you—people love negative campaigns.” That catches people’s attention. That’s a pretty provocative statement to begin with.

KS: And it’s true [laughs].

TS: But still, I can see why that would appeal to the TV talk show hosts.

KS: Well, that got me started, and I’ve done a ton of TV interviews over the years, a lot of radio interviews, and I haven’t minded doing it. I’ve considered that service.

TS: I would think so. I was going to ask, though, do you list those whenever you do your annual review?

KS: Well, I think what I would put is something like, “Commentator, interviewed for TV and radio.” I think I would just do a one-line thing like that because there would be multiple interviews.

TS: Did you list how many you did?

KS: I don’t think I did, no.

TS: How did that go over on campus with department chairs and deans and so on?

KS: They thought it was great! I don't ever remember anyone saying, "Don't do that," or, "Watch what you say." I guess I lived in fear, in a way, that somebody was going to say, "Hey, don't do that," or, "Stop doing that," but they never did. In fact, I think they appreciated it.

TS: When you were on with somebody like Abramowitz, was he supposed to be the liberal and you the conservative?

KS: No, no. It was just analysis, just, "What do you think?" "Why are they doing this?" That sort of thing.

TS: And so your work on negative campaigning and consultants and that sort of thing comes into play, with your knowledge of how campaigns work.

KS: Right, right.

TS: How long did it take before you were doing national interviews? You mentioned public radio earlier.

KS: Yes, I did NPR in 2006. That was national. It had to do, really, with the Roger Ailes book, which came out in 2008.

TS: I thought it was pretty neat when we would see you during a presidential election, being there as the expert on something or other.

KS: I did go on CNN in 2004 for the Bush/Kerry race in September or October of 2004, doing just presidential campaign analysis on CNN. I did that a few times.

TS: Of course, that was your first chapter in *Mudslingers* as the twenty-fifty dirtiest campaign—the mildest of your first twenty-five.

KS: That's right, yes. So I did a little bit of CNN and radio. My next big national TV appearance was 2008 when I went on *The View* with Whoopi Goldberg, Joy Behar, and that whole group.

TS: I wouldn't envy you doing that.

KS: Well, it was the *Mudslingers* book that got their attention. Now, I had come out with the Roger Ailes book that year, *Dark Genius: [The Influential Career of Legendary Political Operative and Fox News Founder Roger Ailes (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 2008)]*. But it was the *Mudslingers* book they were most interested in. I remember getting a phone call in my office, and it was a producer. She said, "I'm with *The View*. Have you ever heard of that?" I said, "Well, yes, it is that TV show on ABC with Whoopi Goldberg." She said, "Yes. We are doing a segment on mudslinging and

negative campaigning. Would you like to come on and talk about your book?" I said, "Yes!" So they flew me up to New York, and we did the program, and it was a thrill. I was on cloud nine the whole time. They treated me very well.

TS: Were you?

KS: I was, oh, yes. Absolutely. They were very nice.

TS: Did they throw you softball questions, or were they tough?

KS: We did a practice run-through that morning. It wasn't Whoopi Goldberg and Joy Behar. It was producers and stage people, saying, "These are the kinds of questions they are probably going to ask you." So I knew vaguely what to expect. But it was typical interview-type questions of, you know, "Why did they do this attack?" And, "What do you think was negative about this?" That kind of stuff.

TS: Okay, so you were just doing a scholarly analysis.

KS: Sort of, yes. They were surprised. That was during the Obama/McCain race, and they wanted to know why the Obama/McCain race didn't qualify for my *Mudslingers* list.

TS: And why didn't it?

KS: Well, I said, "It doesn't come close to this kind of stuff."

TS: You had two very decent people running for president.

KS: Comparatively, yes. Absolutely.

TS: Well, we've gone an hour. Let's stop for the day at this point.

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
KSU Oral History Series, No. 151
Interview with Kerwin C. Swint
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Location: Dean's Conference Room, College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Kennesaw Campus, Kennesaw State University

Part 2 – Monday, November 12, 2018

- TS: We talked quite a bit last time about *Mudslingers* and made a few quick references to *Dark Genius*, your next book, on Roger Ailes, that came out in 2008. After reading it, I was wondering why the Johnson v. Goldwater campaign of 1964 was only the twenty-second dirtiest. I vividly remember the girl out in the daisy field as the missile launch countdown begins. It was amazing how you connect the negative campaign advertisements of that campaign to lessons learned by Roger Ailes and how at the tender age of 27 he helped Richard Nixon use television effectively in 1968. So, I guess my question is, why didn't you place the Daisy Girl campaign higher than twenty-second?
- KS: It was pretty rough. I don't know. That one seemed to be a gateway, I think, because people always refer back to the Daisy Girl ad as the first televised example of a really negative campaign. But it only ran one time, and the reaction to it was so strong they didn't run it anymore. It really got people riled up.
- TS: I guess I remember it because there was so much discussion about it, and the news programs must have kept running it over and over as they discussed it, because I vividly remember seeing it in 1964. That was the first election in which I got to vote.
- KS: Was it really?
- TS: Yes, my first vote ever, rightly or wrongly, was for Lyndon Johnson in 1964.
- KS: You know, I talk about this memory I think I have, but some people don't believe me; my wife doesn't believe me. I think one of my very first memories, may even my first memory, was walking out of a building with my parents. They both had me by the hand, and I said, "Who did we vote for?" And they said, "Goldwater."
- TS: How about that! Well, Goldwater carried Georgia.
- KS: I swear, Tom, that was one of my first memories, unless I am just imagining the whole thing.
- TS: So you would have been how old?
- KS: I was two.

- TS: It's possible, but that would be very surprising for a two-year-old to ask his parents who did we vote for. But then you were a future political scientist. Goldwater, of course, got clobbered nationwide.
- KS: Yes, my father was a Nixon supporter. He liked Nixon, well, until Watergate.
- TS: That was a disappointment for a lot of people, I think, when that broke. When Richard Nixon spoke in Atlanta during the 1960 campaign, James V. Carmichael of Cobb County introduced him. I think Nixon was the first Republican presidential candidate to come to Georgia to campaign. Carmichael was not a Republican and didn't specifically endorse Nixon, but he made it clear he liked what Nixon had to say. It was difficult for anybody who was part of the political establishment in Georgia in 1960 to openly be a Republican, but Carmichael very much thought that we needed a two-party system. At any rate, you did *Mudslingers*, and then how did you get on to *Dark Genius*? What was the connection that led you to want to write a book about Roger Ailes?
- KS: I had done a lot of reading about him, and I was thinking about writing a book about very influential people in politics. I had acquired a literary agent by then. The *Mudslingers* book helped me identify some people that could help me, so I was hooked up with an agent by then. We were talking. I was going over some ideas with him about what might make interesting books. I said, there is something about Roger Ailes, that he is just an evil genius.
- TS: That's what you said?
- KS: That's what I said to him. We were talking on the phone. He said, "Evil genius? There is something there. There is definitely something there about that." I said, "If you look at his career, he has had such a long career, first in TV, and then in politics, and then back to TV and broadcasting, and Fox News and everything." I was like, "He has had an amazing career for a long time, and has been there at a lot of key points."
- TS: Yes, I was surprised in your book, about his going back to the 1960s and *The Mike Douglas Show* and all that, and the Nixon campaign, and how he met Nixon. Do you want to talk about that a little?
- KS: Yes, well, right out of college, Roger Ailes was hired [in 1962] as a production assistant on *The Mike Douglas Show*, which was local at the time in Cleveland. Within a few years, the corporate sponsor Westinghouse had moved the show to Philadelphia, and that is where Ailes met Nixon. Nixon was a guest [in 1967] on *The Mike Douglas Show*, and Nixon was talking about how it was awful that politicians have to resort to television to try to communicate. Nixon said something like, it is a bad joke and a shame that politicians had to use gimmicks like television to get elected. Roger Ailes said that it was no joke, that television was the future, and if you don't learn how to use it, then you're not going to get anywhere. Nixon was so impressed with Ailes that I guess they had an extended conversation about it. He hired him pretty soon thereafter, to be his media [advisor].

- TS: And Ailes would be like 27 at that time.
- KS: Yes, mid-20s, and so Nixon launched Ailes into the political stratosphere. Of course, the Nixon campaign, in 1968, had this amazing series of television programs that Ailes produced. And Roger Ailes was given a lot of credit for teaching Richard Nixon how to use television, as he taught a lot of people how to use television. So I just thought he was a fascinating character.
- TS: Yes, and so after he helps Nixon, I guess that puts him in the big time. But through *The Mike Douglas Show* he met a lot of people too, important people.
- KS: He did, he met a lot of journalists, and writers, and that kind of thing.
- TS: I mentioned, after we finished the interview last time, that I thought you were very critical of Roger Ailes in your book, and I was surprised that they would invite you on Fox News. What was your assessment of Ailes?
- KS: Well, just think about the title of the book, "Dark Genius." What I was trying to get across is that this is a very, very impressive intellectual. Maybe intellectual is not the right word, but very impressive person, who figured a lot of things out about communication, about mass media, and about political communication in particular. He had all these impressive campaigns and then consultancies later on, but at the same time, especially in politics, he used his abilities and talents in negative, nefarious ways, to trash people, to attack people, to drag them through the mud, if it meant winning. So he is, in that way, a dark genius.
- TS: You said he may not be an intellectual. Is he the kind of person who could read an argument and be persuaded to another point of view? He strikes me as someone who was stuck pretty much in his own point of view.
- KS: No, that is why I backtracked on the word intellectual. That's not quite accurate.
- TS: Is he well read?
- KS: He is well read, and he is very, very smart, very, very intelligent, very, very driven. I guess what I was trying to impart was how sophisticated he was, and how smart he was, but the word intellectual is not the right way to characterize it. He was an ideologue. From an early age, he was a right-winger, and that's the path he took always.
- TS: You mentioned in the book that he grew up in a working-class family that taught traditional, small-town values, and that he has always wanted to preserve the old-time values, I guess?
- KS: Yes, that sort of 1950s mindset on what America is and what it should be, a very conservative upbringing.

TS: Where did the slogan, “Make America Great Again,” come from? Was that from Fox News and Ailes?

KS: The Trump slogan, “Make America Great Again?” Well, it is a similar kind of appeal, I think. Yes.

TS: The book came out ten years ago. Did you get any support from KSU, release time, travel grants, anything to help put together that book?

KS: No, because at the time, I was just a faculty member on a full teaching load.

TS: But you had already published two books, and you had another one in the works. There weren't any kinds of sabbaticals or anything?

KS: No, no. I mean, the only kind of break I had, and it was not even really a break, was having two classes at one time. This would be a double session, so, functionally I would have two classes to teach that way.

TS: Did you have to do any travel to write the book, go to libraries or archives?

KS: Went to libraries. I went to the Emory University library quite a bit. I had planned to go to New York City to interview Roger Ailes, but he wouldn't agree to an interview. He didn't want to see me.

TS: Well, maybe he had a pretty good idea of what the book was going to say.

KS: Yes, maybe, and I don't think he trusted academics at all, especially ones he didn't know.

TS: You couldn't get Tom Perdue to send a letter of recommendation for you?

KS: Not by that time, no [laughs]; we weren't speaking by then.

TS: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

KS: Well, we don't have any ill will or anything. We just had parted ways.

TS: Okay, well great. So you did that book. As you do books like this, I'm really interested in the reaction to the Roger Ailes book on campus?

KS: It was a good reaction. I did some readings, and I did a couple of seminars in the College [of Humanities and Social Sciences] where faculty would present their research. Of course, I did some media interviews too when the book came out. It was a good response. There was an article in the student newspaper, and I think it was on our website for a few weeks.

TS: Well, it has obviously helped your career in terms of annual reviews and all that.

- KS: Well, all of those books counted as scholarship, and so they were great fun to do, and I learned a lot doing them. I used them in my classes too. That's another good thing. I would bring them back into, like, for example, the Mass Media and Politics class. I would talk a lot about Roger Ailes and other stalwarts.
- TS: I guess maybe a question lurking behind the question is whether there is a liberal bias on our campus, do you think?
- KS: You know, I haven't really noticed a liberal bias that much. I think that—and this is just my point of view—most academics tend to be left of center, just like most journalists tend to be left of center. But my experience at Kennesaw State has been that, if you work hard, if you have good relationships with people, none of that really matters that much. It is more about the work product and your progress; at least, that has been my experience.
- TS: Good. Well, it didn't take long to come out with *The King Whisperers: [Power Behind the Throne, from Rasputin to Rove]* (New York: Publishing Company, 2011), just three years after *Dark Genius*. That's pretty fast to write a book, I think. Some of it grew out of your earlier books, but a lot of it is new and different. Why don't you talk about *The King Whisperers* and why that subject? What attracted you to write a book about the powers behind the throne?
- KS: After the Roger Ailes book came out, I went back to the idea of who were some other evil geniuses through history. Roger Ailes is a great case study. In fact, I used him again in *The King Whisperers*. There is a chapter on American political consultants [Chapter 9, "The Fixers"]. Of course, he is in there. But I thought, "I'm a closet historian, like most political scientist are."
- TS: It's more than a closet historian, I think.
- KS: I've always loved history. I thought it was fascinating to think about people through history who had been close to leaders or helped cultivate leaders and pushed them in certain directions, or manipulated them to do certain things. A lot of them were very, very smart people—very talented people who in different situations weren't out in front; they were behind the scenes.
- TS: How did you decide which ones you were going to write about? There is a diverse collection of "king whisperers." You have Bernard of Clairvaux [in a chapter on "Empire Builders,"] and Saladin fits in one of the chapters [on "The Generals"].
- KS: Well, I broke it down into categories. I thought, "You can't write about everybody. I'm going to have to make some choices about whom to include, unless I want to make it a ten-volume series." So I thought about categories. I thought about "Silver-Tongued Devils," for example, so I had Talleyrand in there. [Other chapters were on "The Generals" and "The Rebels." I thought about the [different] kinds of king whisperers. What kind of "power behind the throne" were they? What was their individual context?

So I came up with these categories and who would be good examples of that. And I frankly just did a lot of reading, Tom. I read a lot of books.

TS: That's obvious.

KS: And I came across different characters, like you mentioned Bernard of Clairvaux, people that were extremely influential in a political sense and that really influenced leaders at the time and political movements at the time.

TS: And one biblical character [from the book of Esther], Haman [in Chapter 10, "Schemers."]

KS: Yes, and we're not even sure if he was real or not.

TS: Well, he was a power behind the throne that probably wished that he wasn't in the end.

KS: Certainly, yes.

TS: Let me ask you, too, how did this book relate to your practical experience by that time, as a consultant and media commentator and all that? Did that influence why you wrote this book, or how you wrote it?

KS: Well, it was an extension of my other interests, I think, in subjects to write on, like *Mudslingers* and Roger Ailes. I can't say my experience as a commentator really influenced it at all that much. It was just really my interests. I just thought it was interesting and fun.

TS: Remind me, when did you start appearing on the national media on a regular basis, with Fox and CNN and all of that?

KS: I guess probably around 2004 or 2006, but when we were talking last time, I forgot one [appearance]. You asked me what was the first time I was every on a national broadcast, and I forgot my first one.

TS: When was that? How did you forget that?

KS: Do you remember Christina [F.] Jeffrey [former KSU associate professor of political science and public administration]?

TS: Oh, absolutely. I got an email from her just the other day.

KS: Did you? Yes, I'm still in touch with her online, LinkedIn. But you remember when she was appointed house historian after Newt Gingrich [became Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives]. In early 1995 she was having all these controversies up there as House historian. So she became a household name for a few days in a national political dialogue. Well, CBS News came to Kennesaw State. Kennesaw State was in the news.

CBS Evening News with Dan Rather came to Kennesaw State. They interviewed several people, and they interviewed me. I was just a full-time temporary instructor. I was not on tenure track yet.

TS: Oh, and that's the year you finished your doctorate.

KS: Just before. Later in 1995 I did finish my doctorate. But my office was right across from Dr. Jeffrey's, so I knew her really well. So in early 1995, I was on the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather.

TS: How about that?

KS: I know. I was like, "Wow, that's incredible." I can't believe I forgot it, the first time we were talking to each other. I still have that old grainy video somewhere. I was wearing a horrible cranberry colored shirt and a big tie.

TS: What did he ask you?

KS: Well, it wasn't Dan Rather. It was his producer that conducted the interview. They were asking me what I thought about the situation Christina was in, and what it meant for national politics, and all that. I think my take on it was that she was being used by both sides. She was a victim. I think it is true.

TS: She became very alienated from Newt Gingrich as a result of his lack of support.

KS: The first time I remember appearing on CNN was 2004. I was on there several times that year, the Bush/Kerr [presidential election] year. Then in 2006 I was on Fox News a couple of times, and CNN once I think. So they have called on and off over the years.

TS: How far back does Fox News go?

KS: Well, it came online in 1996.

TS: So they were asking you to be an expert analyst of how the election was going in Georgia, or what did they want you to talk about?

KS: Usually it was about Georgia. For the Bush/Kerry campaign year, for example, they were talking about general presidential campaign strategy. I don't know that it was related to Georgia all that much. But some of the other times it has been, like during the primary season. The Georgia primary might have been coming up, or it could be Super Tuesday type questions, that kind of thing.

TS: I remember seeing you on television a few times, and that was really, really neat to see a Kennesaw faculty member being interviewed.

KS: Yes, everybody has always been really complimentary of that. People say, “Ah, I saw you on TV!” Or, “I heard you on the radio.”

TS: And not to mention that you were being interviewed all the time by newspapers, locally and nationally. In terms of promotion and, tenure or annual reviews, would you list these things in your annual reviews, or were they the kinds of things that would be rewarded by a department chair?

KS: Well, people certainly knew they were occurring, and so it was common knowledge. On my annual reviews, I seem to remember just writing a couple of lines about appearing as a political commentator on local TV or national TV.

TS: Yes, I think you said that in the first interview.

KS: I would just have like a summary statement about it.

TS: I’m surprised. I think I would list every one that I was on, if I appeared on CNN or Fox.

KS: Well for one thing, Tom, I’m a very modest fellow [laughs].

TS: Well, great, and, of course, *The View*. We talked about that last time.

KS: Yes, that was an amazing experience.

TS: Maybe, unless there is anything else you want to say about your books, we might switch away to some other topics.

KS: Yes.

TS: In 2013 you became chair of the Department of Political Science and International Affairs. Why the move into administration? How did that come about?

KS: Well, it was really accidental, happenstance. When Dr. [Chien-Pin] Li completed his term about 2011, we did a search for chair. I remember people asking me at the time, and Chien-Pin asked me at the time, “Kerwin, are you interested in being chair?”

TS: He couldn’t be chair anymore?

KS: Well, he had served two five-year terms.

TS: Do you think term limits are a good idea [for department chairs]?

KS: You know, I don’t know. We are the only college at KSU that has that. That was a [former dean] Rich Vengroff innovation. There are pros and cons, I think. On one hand, you can’t imagine anyone wanting to be chair for more than ten years.

TS: Ann [W.] Pullen served seventeen years as chair of the history department, and we were very happy with her for all seventeen years.

KS: It is like the term limits thing in politics. You can make an argument in both directions. So I don't know. I really don't know how I feel about it. But, yes, he was term limited. So he asked me, and a couple of people asked me, if I was interested in being chair. I said, "No, I really don't think so. I'm not interested in doing that." So we hired a chair, and he was only here a couple of years. And so, when he was leaving in winter or spring of 2013, suddenly there was a vacancy there again. We were going to be faced with another national search for a chair. So some of my colleagues said, "Why don't you look into being an interim chair?"

I had been a tenured, full professor for a while, and I wasn't involved in a book project at the time. I thought, "Well, why not? I'll give it a whirl. I'll serve the department, and I'll see what [happens]." So I agreed to be interim chair, beginning that summer, starting in July. At the time, I didn't know if it was something I was going to be interested in, but I started doing the job. Between the summer and that Thanksgiving and Christmas season, I found I enjoyed being chair. I think the reason for that is because it was so different from being a regular professor. You get involved in a lot of different kinds of things that you weren't involved in before. It was project based. There would be different projects with which you got involved. You work with other people in different departments. I found it to be a real pleasure to be able to get things done and to help people. I know that this sounds trite, but there was nothing better or more satisfying than helping somebody accomplish something. There was a lot of satisfaction in that, and so I decided I would apply to be chair. We had a national search, and I was selected.

TS: They must have wanted you.

KS: Yes.

TS: Were you teaching any courses while you were interim chair?

KS: I taught one class a semester.

TS: Then after you became permanent chair?

KS: Same thing, one a semester.

TS: You were chair for about five years before you become interim dean. So you went through one five-year term. I know that during that time, one of the things on which you worked was raising money for student scholarships—developing a student scholarship fund. Can you talk about how that came about and who was involved?

KS: Yes, one of the things we had been talking about even before I was chair was having an advisory board of people in the community. One of my initiatives when I became chair was to actually form an advisory board because I know that it can be really helpful to a

program. So, [Andrew L.] Andy Pieper [associate professor of political science] and I worked on that as a project. Andy was the director of the political science degree program. We made a list of people, some of them alums, some government officials, some people in the community, who would make good advisory board members. I think we had our first advisory board come together in 2015.

TS: Do you remember any of those that were on it?

KS: Yes. Well, let's see, Tricia Pridemore [KSU alum and Georgia Public Service Commissioner since 2018] was one of the notable people on it. She took a real leadership position. She is one of our well-known alums. There was [Stephen R.] Steve Butler, another alum of ours. He is a lobbyist. Another board member was Shawn Davis, Angie [T.] Davis's husband. I don't know if you know Angie. She is clerk of Cobb County State Court. She's an alum of ours [master's in Public Administration 1996]. And we had a few state legislators. Lindsey Tippins is on it [Georgia State Senate, 37th district]. John Carson is on it [Georgia House of Representatives, 46th district].

TS: Lindsey Tippins' son Nathan was a student here.

KS: That's right, yes. We have about twenty or twenty-five people on the board. They don't all come to the meetings. Usually there are only about ten or twelve people at the meetings. We were talking about, "Okay, what is this board going to do? What is it supposed to accomplish?" Other than informed members of the community advising us on curriculum and program, one of my ideas was that this should be about the students. How can we benefit our students? One way is that we can raise money for scholarships for political science students. Everybody liked that idea, and so that is one of the things we did. We started, I guess, a campaign, for lack of a better word, to raise money. All of the members of the advisory board donated money. I think they all donated \$100 or \$200, and so we were able to raise enough money to give two \$1,000 scholarships every semester. That is one of the things I am most proud of, really, is we started a scholarship program. It has now donated over \$10,000 to students in political science.

TS: Are you trying to build an endowment, or just spend the money each year that you raise?

KS: Well, both really. In my position as interim dean now, I'm working on some endowments, and trying to get some endowments going, but at the same time keeping the advisory board functioning like it is now.

TS: Great. I wanted to ask you too about something that I don't quite understand. I know you were involved with the internship program for students in this college. You worked with the KSU Foundation and the president to do something about Washington, D.C.-based federal internships. I guess the part I don't understand is what that means.

KS: Well, we have a program called the D.C. Owls, and it is a Washington, D.C.-based internship program. You remember Amanda [D.] Seals. She was the government affairs coordinator [associate vice president for government relations]; and Fatimot Ladipo

[executive director of government relations]. In January of 2017, I think, we were at the Eggs and Issues Breakfast that the Georgia Chamber [of Commerce] does at the beginning of a legislative session. [KSU President Samuel S.] Sam Olens was there. We were talking about a D.C.-based internship program with him. I thought it was a great idea. Amanda thought it was a great idea. Fatimot thought it was a great idea. Sam was president, and he said, “That is an awesome idea. We should look at that.” So Amanda and I asked him about it a month or two later, and Sam went to the foundation and got them to commit \$75,000 a year to this scholarship fund for our college’s students.

TS: That’s a lot. That’s good.

KS: Yes, I thought it was a great initiative. It gives students an opportunity to go to Washington for an internship there. It is good for the institution. It helps build relationships with the congressional centered offices.

TS: So that’s what they are doing—internships with congressional and senatorial offices?

KS: Mostly, not exclusively. We had a young woman with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee this past summer. So it doesn’t have to be a legislative type internship. It is just that we have relationships with them, and they are always looking for smart people. So we started organizing it. It is housed in the School of Government and International Affairs, but it is open to any student from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. There is an application process, and the school chooses applicants based on GPA [grade point average]. There is an essay requirement and that sort of thing. If they are accepted, they get the money from the foundation, and they are off to the races. So we are proud of that. We would like to keep that going, and the foundation seems interested in keeping it going, post-Sam Olens. There was some concern that when he left the whole thing would die, but they seem committed to doing it. So I’m grateful for that.

TS: Does the new president support it?

KS: She’s very supportive, yes. We wanted a stronger presence in D.C. anyway, so that is one of the things we can do.

TS: For sure. Well, probably the biggest thing is to go from being a department to being a school, and that just happened last year. Why don’t you talk about that?

KS: Well, I was thinking about how the department functions, and I am familiar with examples from around the country of various schools of government. North Carolina, for example, is a really well known one, and the University of Texas and different places. So I started talking to Dean [Robert H.] Robin Dorff about it. He is a political scientist, and he is very, very familiar with those examples. I asked, “What do you think about making the Department of Political Science and International Affairs a School of Government and International Affairs?” So we started talking about it. Sam Olens liked the idea. Everybody liked the idea. Nobody said, “Hey, that’s a dumb idea.”

TS: We already had two schools that had just recently been created in this college.

KS: Right. The idea of a school, as opposed to a department, is that it is a little bigger of a footprint. It has a little more of a public service type function, than just teaching classes. So my idea for the school was to bring in the [A. L.] Burruss Institute [of Public Service and Research]. It is a great example of public outreach, public service, and that type of thing. The institute works with city leaders, county leaders, and nonprofits on all kinds of research projects. The innovation for this school was to bring in the Burruss Institute as a justification for calling it a school.

TS: And they were supportive of that?

KS: They were, they were. Everybody thought it made a lot of structural sense. Another benefit of it is that state support money that goes to the Burruss Institute now is coming through the College [of Humanities and Social Sciences], and so everybody liked the idea of the money flowing through an academic unit.

TS: Yes, and presumably the Burruss Institute knows something about raising funds as well.

KS: Yes.

TS: I did an interview this summer with Bill Ensign [William E, Ensign, professor of] biology, and one of the things that came up was the Burruss Institute's role in gaining funding for a Bartow County watershed assessment project that involved a number of faculty members at the start of the century.

KS: Yes, that is how the Burruss Institute made a lot of its reputation on water quality studies.

TS: Were there any roadblocks in getting the school approved, or was everybody supportive?

KS: There were very few roadblocks. There was one minor roadblock, in terms of another department in our college that didn't like the idea, but I don't want to go into it. We had a public forum on it, and that department came, so we talked it through, and their opposition wasn't really based on anything substantive. But to answer your question, there really weren't any obstacles. Like I said, everybody thought it was a good idea. There was a lot of support for it from the president, the provost, the dean, and all the other departments.

TS: I know [former dean] Robin Dorff is very proud of having accomplished that.

KS: He is, yes. I thought it was a great innovation for the faculty and the staff too.

TS: You became department chair right at the time that the announcement of the consolidation with Southern Polytechnic State University came about. I guess you had been interim chair for a few months before that announcement. I've asked everybody this question. Did you have any inkling that it was coming before it happened?

KS: No, not at all. No, it hit like a bolt out of the blue.

TS: To me, the most astounding thing is that the chancellor and Board of Regents didn't ask anybody's opinion before they did it. Everybody says that they found out the day of the announcement. They didn't even ask Dan Papp for his opinion before the announcement.

KS: Yes, shocking.

TS: How did it affect your department?

KS: Well, I mean, it was a shock at first. We didn't know what to expect, or how it was going to play out. One of the things in the beginning of consolidation that people in our college tried to do was to meet with our counterparts over at Southern Poly. We organized a meeting with the political scientists at Southern Poly. We met at Marietta Diner, got around a big table, had lunch, and talked.

TS: How many were there from Southern Poly that taught political science?

KS: Well, there were a total of four. It wasn't a big number. They all came to lunch that day. Then we started talking a little bit. They weren't an actual department of political science. They were part of the Department of Social and International Studies.

TS: We have an interview with Julie [R.] Newell [former chair of the Department of Social and International Studies].

KS: She can tell you all about it.

TS: Well, she said the Southern Poly political scientists were excited about working with people in their discipline on the Kennesaw campus, but I just wanted to hear about it from your perspective.

KS: Yes, from our perspective in political science, it was a good thing. I mean, in our case, it was never vitriolic or defensive, and part of that is the personnel involved—[Thomas E.] Tom Rotnem [current associate director of KSU's School of Government and International Affairs] and [Thomas] Tom Nisley were the two main political scientists.

TS: I do have an interview with Tom Rotnem.

KS: Just the nicest guy in the world, and so that made it easy. We just started talking, and it all just worked out. And, in fact, consolidation really helped our program, because take Tom Nisley for example. His specialty is Latin American politics. Well, it just so happens, we didn't have anybody at the time whose specialty was Latin American politics. So it was really a blessing to us. It increased our capability to serve.

TS: Tom Rotnem's specialty was Russia. I don't know if anybody else in the department could teach the kinds of courses he could in the department.

- KS: Well, [John] Jack Moran. Those two are a formidable team of Russian specialists on government and politics.
- TS: Well, I know from Southern Poly's perspective, their concern at the time was how they were going to be accepted and how they would fit in with the new department, how it was going to affect tenure and promotion, and all those things. You mentioned a couple of faculty members that were very strong in scholarship, but a lot of them weren't.
- KS: Well, I know a lot of programs faced a lot of challenges with all those questions, about how are we going to fit in, what is it going to be like, how are we going to merge different curricula, and all those things. I hate to say it, but it was pretty easy in our case. They were just folded right in, and it wasn't [difficult] in our experience. Of course, it was just a few people we are talking about. It is not like it was twenty-five people.
- TS: Did they move their offices to the Kennesaw campus?
- KS: They did, yes. They all moved over. So it was a happy sort of coincidence that it all worked out.
- TS: Are we still teaching political science courses on the Marietta campus, and is that done primarily with part-time faculty, or how is that working out?
- KS: Some courses, yes, some part-time faculty, and a couple of lecturers. We teach American government on that campus quite a bit. The main international affairs course is taught on that campus a fair amount, but the vast majority of the government and international affairs course are on the Kennesaw campus.
- TS: I know Robin Dorff was very concerned about equity issues to the time he left here. How did that affect your department? Were there any bad feelings in the department over equity issues that came out of the consolidation?
- KS: Not that came out of consolidation. Of course, there have always been bad feelings from faculty on equity issues, but it wasn't related to consolidation. Now, I know that special care was taken in a couple of cases to make sure that Southern Poly was caught up with where Kennesaw State faculty were, but I was never aware of any bad feelings about that.
- TS: Robin said that there were some major issues with people that were unhappy with equity, but you're saying not your department.
- KS: That's my experience, yes.
- TS: You became department chair in a tumultuous time.
- KS: I did.

- TS: It's remarkable, if you count the interims, how many presidents we've had in just a few years.
- KS: It's incredible.
- TS: On the Marietta campus, they have had seven presidents since 2014 between Lisa [A.] Rossbacher and Pamela [S.] Whitten. For the Kennesaw campus, there have been five in two years, with Dan Papp, and then Houston [D.] Davis, and then Sam Olens, and then [W.] Ken Harmon, and now Pam Whitten. This last year I've interviewed several deans on both campuses, and they all seem to have the same concern, that as soon as they've explained their programs to a president, a new one comes in, and they have to start all over. Maybe you alluded to that already with regard to the money for the internship program. Why don't you talk about your experience with the changes in leadership?
- KS: Well, it has been just crazy. I mean, it has been very tumultuous and controversial all at the same time. When Houston Davis was appointed as interim, I think most people just assumed, "Okay, well he is probably going to be our next president." Everybody liked him, and he had a good reputation. So most people were, "Okay, that's pretty good." Then the whole Sam Olens thing happened, which was another bolt out of the blue. It was a rumor at first. It was sort of a whispering rumor, and then it became obvious that is not just a rumor. This is real. They are really going to do this. They are going to appoint a president without having a search. And you know how well that went over on the campus. It just really was a horrible thing to do to a campus, to a faculty.
- TS: And to Sam, for that matter.
- KS: And to Sam, because I think he was a victim. I absolutely do.
- TS: Of course, you knew him already from his tenure as attorney general [of the State of Georgia], but before that as Cobb County Commission Chair.
- KS: Yes, I've known Sam since 1998, so I had known him a long time. I knew him to be a good person and a very good administrator. He did a really great job at the Cobb County Commission, or even as attorney general. So, yes, I look at him as a victim in the whole process too. What they did was just rip open something and cause incredible turmoil and ill feelings that we're still trying to get over as a community. I liked Sam, and I wanted him to be successful. I really did. But after a while it became obvious that it wasn't going to work. He came in on day one with a huge cloud over him and never had the support of the majority of the faculty. I just think that that was unfortunate.
- TS: I interviewed him last December. He had not made the announcement yet that he was going to resign, but he told me later that he had already made the decision before we did the interview. I asked him about campus politics, and he said campus politics were more vicious than what he had experienced in the public realm. He may have had a unique experience of campus politics, but from a political scientist perspective, how vicious do you think campus politics are?

- KS: At Kennesaw State? Well, it can be treacherous. That is certainly an example of how it was a very dark time, and people disagreed on the best way forward and what was appropriate. I think my views of the situation were colored by my relationship with Sam. Like I said, I knew him to be a good person, a good man, and a good administrator. But for a lot of people, they just were not going to accept it no matter what because of the process. And I don't blame them, really. I can understand.
- TS: Plus he had some pretty extreme views, people thought, as attorney general.
- KS: Yes, that's right, you know, same sex issues, and all that.
- TS: He had a good explanation, I thought, that he was enforcing state law, but still he had taken those positions.
- KS: Didn't help, didn't help.
- TS: Any thoughts on what went wrong for Dan Papp?
- KS: Just what I read in the *AJC*.
- TS: But you didn't see it coming?
- KS: Well, I think the world of Dan Papp. I always thought he was a terrific guy, terrific administrator, but I will say that it seemed like the last few years he was here, he turned over a lot of things to other people. He delegated out a lot of authority, especially in auxiliary services, and it just seemed like the administration was growing, new offices were being added, and not many people had a lot of input into what was going on. I didn't know that anything unethical was going on, but when all that came out, some of it made sense. Some of that was put into context. So that explains some of this. But I still think the world of Dan Papp, and I always will.
- TS: Well, Robin Dorff said that when he arrived a year before you became chair, 2012, he thought we had an administrative structure that was set up for when we were around ten thousand students, and by that time we were a pretty large university. He was shocked that things like institutional research, for instance, were such small departments.
- KS: Yes, he's right. It really wasn't an apparatus suitable for a campus this big.
- TS: One of the shockers for me is that I thought that Dan Papp was an excellent administrator up until this time. I thought we were being audited on everything under the sun. Whenever you got a little grant, you spent half your time on accounting issues. So I thought he was minding the store.
- KS: Well, he was for a while. I think just the last two or three years he was here, things sort of unraveled a little bit.

TS: Why?

KS: It seemed hard to get an explanation for things. It seemed hard to get assistance with certain things, whereas other things were booming, like the food services part over there.

TS: You think he didn't realize that things were unraveling?

KS: I think he did.

TS: Well, it's very sad, I think. Most recently you were on the presidential search committee that brought in Pamela Whitten. I know there are a lot of things you can't talk about, but any general observations about that service to the university?

KS: Well, the difficult thing was that coming on the heels of the whole Sam Olens fiasco, the first thing that the search committee decided was not to have an open search.

TS: That's one of the things I wanted to ask you about. Are we ever going to have an open search again?

KS: I don't know, but that was like ripping a Band Aid off an already raw wound. So members of the search committee were immediately on the defensive, trying to explain why.

TS: Was it a unanimous decision of the search committee?

KS: No, we talked about it, and I'll just tell you, I voted for an open search. Most of the faculty that were on the search committee voted for an open search, just because we knew how raw those wounds were. We were in the minority though. The predominant opinion on the search committee was that you get much better candidates if you have a closed search, because there are sitting presidents, sitting provosts, out there, that don't want it known they are looking for a job. So if it is an open search, then they are much less likely to apply. So that was the rationale, and that won out.

TS: Well, we got Betty Siegel through an open search.

KS: Yes. The search firm was of the opinion that, nationally, the trend is for more closed searches. The good news is that fortunately we got a very good pool of candidates.

TS: I wanted to ask you that.

KS: Yes, we had a very good pool. We weren't sure we would or not. At the time, I was like, "Who is going to want to come?" But I was pleasantly surprised at the quality and number of applicants we got. We got people applying from all over the country, who were very, very well qualified, very, very talented people. So that was good. That put our minds at ease a good bit. Then, when it came down to narrowing down the list, we met and looked at the different applicants, their strengths and weaknesses, and voted on

who were going to be the people we wanted to talk to. We narrowed it down to ten finalists. We did interviews at a local hotel at the Battery. So we interviewed those ten, and they were all great. They were all really good, and so we had to narrow the list down, and give a final three or four to the Board of Regents.

TS: You didn't get to choose the one?

KS: No. We said, "Here are the finalists we think would do the best job. It was always made clear that it is the Board of Regents that actually does the hiring. Pam Whitten was a standout. In fact, she was the very first person we interviewed, and she was just outstanding. You know, right from the beginning, I thought this was someone who has accomplished a lot, who is a real substance, and will take us in a certain direction. She just had that quality about her.

TS: Well, since July you have been interim dean, after Robin Dorff left. You said you found out that you enjoyed being department chair early on. What about being dean?

KS: Well, it is a similar situation. It's really funny, I guess, how things tend to repeat themselves. But they needed an interim dean, and again, some people encouraged me to do it. In fact, somebody nominated me to do it, and I said, "I would be willing to do it, but I'm not sure if I would be interested in being dean." But there are a lot of similarities, like I'm getting to do things now that I didn't get to do as chair, where I'm working with other deans, and I'm working with the provost's office.

TS: What about fundraising? Are you doing more of that?

KS: Well, I'm meeting with people and talking about endowed scholarships and all that. We are hiring a new VP for development, and so I will work closely with that person on development issues. Some of the same things apply in getting to help chairs accomplish things, getting to help chairs do things and be successful in their departments. So I am thinking of applying for the job permanently. It is a similar dynamic. I just found myself enjoying the job.

TS: The search process is just getting under way.

KS: Yes, early days.

TS: Well, great. Is there anything you've learned from being interim dean?

KS: Well, the old joke is that you learn things about faculty that you never wanted to know. But I have learned a lot about how the university works, about how budgets work, and about how the provost's office—academic affairs—works with the different colleges. So, yes, I have learned a lot of structural programmatic things that I didn't know before. One thing that has been pleasurable about it is working with the other deans. They are really nice people. I'm not just saying this, but we have been talking to provost

candidates, and some of the deans are saying what a good group of deans we have. So that has been really a good thing.

TS: Talking about all the turmoil, we haven't even talked about the provost turnover after Ken Harmon decided he wanted to go back to the faculty.

KS: Yes, yes.

TS: Well, are any more books in the works, or has administrations taken all your time?

KS: Yes, administration has made it very, very difficult for me to focus on doing much writing. When I was chair, I had come up with two or three ideas, and then I abandoned all of them for one reason or another. I would love to be able to write a book. What I'm doing now, as far as a creative outlet, and I don't think I mentioned this to you before, that I'm writing a monthly column for *Georgia Trend* magazine. I have the back page, and it is a column called "At Issue."

TS: That's the most important page.

KS: I think so. It's the page that the publisher had for years.

TS: I'll have to look at your columns.

KS: Well, the one this month is about [Governor] Nathan Deal [entitled "Deal Delivered."] The other night [at a reception in the Jolley Lodge on campus], I said to him, "Have you seen *Georgia Trend* [laughs]? He had not, but I told him to go look at it. I do one column a month on politics and government, and that's sort of a creative outlet for me, but I would love to get back to writing books or writing something. It is just hard to carve out the time.

TS: Yes. Maybe one last question: What has kept you at KSU for the last twenty-six years?

KS: Well, I'm a native Atlantan. I grew up in DeKalb County. I went to the University of Georgia. I'm a Georgia boy, and I always thought I was very, very lucky to be able to find a tenure track job in my home city because most people don't get to do that. Most people have to go to Montana or Vermont or wherever they can get a job, and so I just always thought I was lucky to be able to stay at home. My mom still lives in Brookhaven. My brother and sister live in the metro area. I love Georgia. I really do. So I haven't really wanted to leave. Fortunately for me, I've had a good career here. Kennesaw State has treated me very well, so why leave?

TS: How has Kennesaw changed in twenty-six years?

KS: Totally different place, totally different place, physically, but also curriculum and program-wise and student-wise. I walked into one place in 1992, and I'm sitting here with you in 2018 in a totally different place.

TS: I've experienced the same thing.

KS: I'm sure you have, and it has been a pleasure. It has been an honor being able to watch it develop like it has.

TS: I was going to ask if you were happy with the changes.

KS: Yes, I think we are going to be a special place. I really do. Linda [M.] Noble, who just served as our interim dean, said, "Kerwin, in a few years, this place is going to be really, really something." And I think she is right.

TS: Well, I'm glad you can stay here for many more years and be part of that.

KS: I would very much like to be, yes.

TS: I'm about out of questions. Is there anything you would like to add to the interview?

KS: No, just that I'm honored to be included in your oral history series. I know you have been doing this a long time. Thank you for asking. I really do, appreciate it.

TS: Great, well thank you very much.

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