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Interviewee: Hamilton, Grace Towns

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RONALD BAYOR: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. I wanted to ask you a few questions. First off things about politics, if that's all right.

GRACE TOWNS HAMILTON: Don't take it as gospel.

BAYOR: I was reading Harold Martin's book on Hartsfield. He said that in 1953 Helen [Bullock?] spoke to you about what the mayor could do to retain black political support. Apparently John Wesley Dobbs had threatened to take his forces out of the Atlanta Negro Voters League because of Hartsfield unwillingness to hire black policemen -- black firemen. Apparently, according to his book, he --

(break in audio)

HAMILTON: I remember that Mr. Walden, who was another very important figure in the development of Georgia political participation by Negroes had -- was the [01:00] chairman of -- and was a person whom I'd known all my life. He was an early [Atlanta?] -- the first to graduate -- was the first lawyer to practice in the courts of Georgia after he came back from Michigan.

BAYOR: A. T. Walden.

HAMILTON: Right. And he was the chairman of the league board.

I came to work with the league in 1943, and in 1946 the league -- not directly but served as a secretary for this -- for what came to be known as the All-Citizens Registration Committee. And we did this massive registration drive which in those days -- we were faced with the poll tax, with the white primary that -- all the difficulties. And the essence of our effort at that time was to really do a systematic [02:00] blocking of the areas where black residents lived. And we got -- were fortunate. It was an effort in which all the churches and the organized political groups, the Voters League and so forth, both Republican and Democrat, everybody, fraternities -- it's, in my heart, the most complete community organization job.

BAYOR: This is after the --

HAMILTON: This was in '46. It was organized in '46. And we tripled the registration on the Fulton County books in a six weeks' period. They used to close the registration books at the time they closed the tax books because you could -- anyway, that gave great impetus. And the second thing that happened in that connection, it was a special election for Congress. Who was it, Ramspeck that died,

resigned. [03:00] Anyway, Helen Douglas Mankin offered. She had been in the House. I had not known her except she'd been a person who was interested in (inaudible) the franchise. And so her definite appeal for black support (inaudible) it made the ordinary voter see that it paid to register, see, because that was the first opportunity for them to go to the polls and vote. And the results of that participation resulted in Mankin's election.

BAYOR: And she actually said she was the first white politician to actually --

HAMILTON: Well, the others had not been as overt. Now Mr. Hartsfield was a very close friend of Mr. Walden's and worked with the black leadership. And there was no -- at least I [04:00] never was aware of any question about his willingness to do what he thought was possible at a given time and place.

BAYOR: In what period, 1946?

HAMILTON: This was during the -- from -- everything -- my early (inaudible) began in '43 and '44.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: So that by -- what -- this was supposed to be about 1950 --

BAYOR: This is '53, (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Well, it would be in the same period.

BAYOR: I'm just curious, are you saying that Hartsfield began to respond to black demands before there were black votes coming in his direction?

HAMILTON: Well, before there was any -- before this. I think he -- yes. I think I would say that. Even though there were many obstacles to black participation. He was a person who demonstrated that he wished to do all that he could do in terms of increasing participation. And I don't remember. I've read [05:00] Martin's book but I didn't remember that that was -- and I don't remember what advice I gave him. But I may have --

BAYOR: That was '53.

HAMILTON: That was in '53. Maybe I may have been positioned to suggest groups that he could talk with effectively.

BAYOR: OK, I think that was (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Yeah.

BAYOR: You told him basically what he could say.

HAMILTON: Right.

BAYOR: But my feeling about Hartsfield is that he didn't really respond to the black community until after '46 when the votes began -- after the white primary was over, when there was a reason to respond to the black community. I mean I don't get any sense that Hartsfield was a humanitarian. He was a politician.

HAMILTON: He was essentially a politician but I don't think he -
- at least my appraisal of him is a person who would wish
to be for full opportunity but was practical enough to know
the limits within which he had to operate. [06:00] I may
be giving him undue credit, but that was the way I always
felt (inaudible).

BAYOR: OK. I'm curious also what sort of promises he made to
the black community for their support again after 1946
(inaudible) I guess one of them was black policemen.

HAMILTON: Well, the police issue had been an issue for a long
time. I don't remember the date when they first hired
policemen. Do you?

BAYOR: It was '48 I believe.

HAMILTON: About '48 and they hired them on a restricted basis.
But even that was a big gain. And -- an example of this
bit by bit. But --

BAYOR: Did he make any promises at all to try and keep
racists out of the city government?

HAMILTON: Oh, I don't think it would be done that directly. I
think that the -- I think leadership [07:00] by and large
community leadership. I don't know whether it's true now
or not but was true then. It was more concern about basic
intent to do what is possible (inaudible).

BAYOR: And he listened to your problems.

HAMILTON: And -- yes. He would listen and would wish to be helpful. Now sometimes he could and sometimes he couldn't be. But --

BAYOR: I guess then -- I guess when Dobbs began to try and increase voter registration, I guess he had in mind eventually influencing politicians.

HAMILTON: Dobbs was a politician himself and was a part of the organized political group. He was -- he had organized the Voters League which was essentially -- well, it was not -- as I remember Dobbs was the head of the Republican voters' organization and then -- I may be not exactly clear on the year. But following [08:00] the '46 efforts and the election that occurred then, the nonpartisan Voters League I think came -- was really to unite the Democrat organization, which at that time was under Mr. Walden's leadership, and that was before the blacks were recognized and welcomed in the Democratic Party. And -- but that was the statewide mechanism. What was known as the Association of Negro Democratic Clubs. And that was the vehicle to use the registered electorate to influence the Democratic Party particularly.

BAYOR: Right. In terms of Hartsfield then again he seemed to have been responding to black issues and black demands

after the Atlanta Negro Voters League was organized. Did that seem to be the catalyst, do you think?

HAMILTON: It's hard for me to [09:00] put a time and date on.

BAYOR: Curious about whether you saw a change of heart after 1946, after 1948. At what point did he really begin to respond? Because he certainly didn't earlier (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Well, I would guess that's as good a point to place on it as any. When it was clearly in terms of his own political interest and the political interest of the city. And of course --

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Hartsfield was -- had no life beyond the city (inaudible).

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: So that was all in character. But if it had been a part of the electorate that couldn't do anything about it anyway, once it was possible, once they -- once he saw that they should be -- and I -- he may or may not have had any strong feelings about what should be. But suddenly he was a [10:00] person who did what he could.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Right.

BAYOR: I was curious also whether, as he began to reach out to the black community, whether that issue was used against him in his campaign.

HAMILTON: I don't recall whether...

BAYOR: I was also curious about the work you did with the opening up of the Hughes Spalding Pavilion (inaudible) also.

HAMILTON: Well, that was a part that the league when I was -- when I first came to the league -- and this has something to do with the -- what I believe about the nature of community leadership. The league had an inactive board of directors. And one of the first things that I felt was necessary, and with great support of people like Forrester Washington who at that time was leading the school of social work in Atlanta and had been active in the Detroit Urban League. And [11:00] he was a member of our board. But we worked together to try to get a representative board, representative in terms of the -- both a representative and a participating board. And so that's the kind of board organization that we had. And we used as the, quote, "slogan" of the agency that we were engaged in preventive social work. That is we would try to work on the social situations which -- preventive way as well as cure. And the first big project we had was related to the

-- in quality of public education facilities. And pretty much our staff philosophy that we always had one big project on the front of the stove and something else boiling. So we did a [12:00] factual study on school (inaudible) and organized a citizens' committee for the improvement of public education, heading at a bond issue which had already been announced. Is this repeating what you know already?

BAYOR: Well, I'm familiar with that, but one of the questions I had really was how (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Well, I'm coming to the Spalding business, about that. But after the school study was so -- it was the efforts at -- we organized the citizens' committee on public education heading toward -- in demonstrating to the whole public the great inequalities within the Negro public school system.

BAYOR: And this was a black group (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Hmm?

BAYOR: This was a black group through the Urban League that was organized?

HAMILTON: This was the league. But the citizens' committee was a representative committee. And --

BAYOR: Any whites on it?

HAMILTON: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And we did -- the director, the person who headed the research happened to be a member of

the [13:00] faculty at Atlanta University. We had a research committee. And the report itself was published. And then we'd organized, with Helen's help and a lot of other people's help, a broad-spread campaign of public education. Lots of little leaflets (inaudible). I was fortunate enough to have a personal friend, who was J. Walter Thompson in New York, and he was awfully interested in that and was very helpful in helping to get the design of these things that we -- and we set a time limit on it. We said, "We will spend a year," prior to the time this bond issue was going to be voted on, because the board of education had announced a \$10 million issue out of which they proposed to spend \$1 million on black schools. See, that was what got people, after the war -- and the victory was evident because by the time (inaudible) public education had [14:00] gone on for a year or two. And then the board of education announced that they had completed their plans for the bond issue. They proposed a \$9 million issue. And I think \$7 million of the \$9 million was devoted to black school improvement.

BAYOR: And that was because of your threats not to vote for the bond?

HAMILTON: Well, I mean that was -- we never threatened that, but because the public was more informed about what was to be

done, or what should be done with the money, and following that bond issue, there were black schools built.

Washington High School that had -- it was built to house about 1,200 and housed about 3,600.

BAYOR: That was back in the 1920s (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Oh, this was in the '40s. But I don't remember the date the schools opened. But it had no substantial increase or improvement.

BAYOR: So in other words, educating the public was one of the things.

HAMILTON: Was a way of getting understanding of the social needs. And then [15:00] following the schools thing we were very much aware of the limitations in medical care for the non-indigent population, and secondly for the absolute lack of continued training opportunities for black professionals. And that meant opening up Grady for learning opportunities, see. And so then we did another basic study on the health and hospital care needs of the Negro population. And we didn't do as -- it was widely distributed and was done with competent people on the research staff. And we didn't do as extensive what I call mass education as we had done with the school things. But still got the needs into the public domain.

BAYOR: Into the entire public.

HAMILTON: Into the entire public.

BAYOR: Politicians became aware of this?

HAMILTON: Well, the people who were responsible for [16:00]

health care did. The hospital authority and to some degree I imagine the Fulton County Health Department. The chairman of the hospital authority at that time was Mr. Spalding. And he was very responsive and very helpful in helping to move the groups along that he worked with. And of course it involved a mixed -- there's a funny story about that. I don't think I've told many people. I don't know that it ought to be repeated. But Mr. Spalding invited a group of people concerned with health care. There was chairman of the DeKalb commission I think, and the hospital authority people, and president of Atlanta University, president of Morehouse and so on and so on. We had the meeting out at Morehouse. And Mr. Spalding said -- he had written letters prior to this saying that this was an important matter which needed the [17:00] whole community's attention and he wanted to know what their opinion was. And he brought the letters and the replies in this folder. He was telling the group about it. And he said, "I sent this to," -- it was one of the Candler's -- and he started reading the letter. He said, "Just build the niggers a hospital. Build the niggers a hospital."

And Mr. Spalding was so embarrassed he said, "And so-and-so said so-and-so," but that shows the way in which the slow learning occurred.

BAYOR: My feeling is that most whites probably didn't care at all what was happening to the blacks. Why the sudden interest in building a hospital?

HAMILTON: Well, they didn't know anything about the hospital need. So the need -- I guess they didn't -- I guess they both didn't know and didn't -- and therefore didn't care. I mean that's part of it. I think people --

BAYOR: Then why did they care all of a sudden (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Well, I think [18:00] if you can point to the need. And that's what we did. The relation of the condition, the social conditions of any substantial segment of the population to the welfare of the whole. You get response.

BAYOR: Well, do you think it was a matter of self-interest? Were whites afraid of disease spreading out of the black community?

HAMILTON: Well, I don't think it was that, because (inaudible) never had bothered.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: They weren't affected. They -- the white population had access to both public and private hospitals. And

(inaudible) needs of all segments. They knew that Grady was there for the indigent and so --

BAYOR: The black population was so much out of mind (inaudible).

HAMILTON: That I think was pretty much the state of affairs.

BAYOR: State of affairs.

HAMILTON: Yeah, not really incredible.

BAYOR: Well, given the history it's not. But --

HAMILTON: Yeah, but that was the background. I don't think Atlanta is any different from -- well, I don't think it's really any different from any big urban center.

BAYOR: Probably not.

HAMILTON: Where there's a [19:00] considerable -- I think in some ways there was more over the years, and certainly at this period, there was more recognition among the political leadership of the needs of the black community than was true in a city like New York.

BAYOR: Well, that's probably true.

HAMILTON: Of course the difference might have been that New York started -- or the big Northern urban centers started off with a theory of equality. But as needs changed I don't think there was any -- there was the -- that's my -- that's my -- that's my impression. There was not always the recognition that it was important to pick up a lag.

BAYOR: Did -- when did this happen? When was Spalding Pavilion opened up?

HAMILTON: I think Spalding Pavilion opened in about '50 -- I can't remember.

BAYOR: In the '50s I take it.

HAMILTON: It was in the '50s.

BAYOR: Do you think this concern about [20:00] black health demands, needs, was that at all related to growing black political power?

HAMILTON: Oh, I don't know that it was.

BAYOR: (inaudible), as you go through the '20s and '30s and '40s, that nobody thinks about the black population at all. And all of a sudden when political power comes along (inaudible) there's suddenly an awakening.

HAMILTON: Well, you ought to read a study that was done -- the state of Georgia in 19 -- think this was done in the early '40s. I don't even remember who paid for it. But there were two people. Jamie Mackay, who was once a congressman, and Calvin Kytle who was a newspaperperson. Anyway, the group that sponsored the study -- and it may have had some connection with the Southern Regional Council which was one of the early groups that you know about. But they sent -- they went into every county and talked to the -- and to [21:00] really get the picture of how political decisions

were made. And the one published part of that study was (inaudible) it appeared in *Harper's* called "A Long Dark Night in Georgia" and just showed the -- and so Atlanta was no different than -- in fact it was ahead, I guess, because -- but it had to overcome the same areas of ignorance.

BAYOR: Yeah, that's for sure. Was there any opposition to building Spalding or to integrating Grady?

HAMILTON: Well, it was step by step. The way the integration of Grady staff occurred, Spalding became the way into the -- you see in a way that was the hidden agenda. The -- I mean access. The [22:00] out in front agenda was the need for hospital facilities serving the non-indigent population of Atlanta. And that's when we -- the hospital authority brought in a very able surgeon who at that -- it was Dr. Yancey -- as the -- well, I guess he was -- when he came to Atlanta he was the medical director of Spalding and chief of surgery. But then he was asked to provide the liaison with [Emory-Grady?]. And then the doors began to open. And just a footnote. Grady Hospital now has -- Asa told me this last year. He made some inquiry of all the big training hospitals across the country and other parts where you'd expect that this would not have occurred. And Grady had the highest percentage of [23:00] black graduate staff

of any in the country. It's a very desirable training place, see, which has been the exclusive province of --

BAYOR: I guess (inaudible) my question, I guess I'm a little cynical about why all this happened. I'm looking for the tradeoff. What were whites looking for --

HAMILTON: Well, you'll have to answer that. I don't think life is --

BAYOR: Well, you would know better what happened in that --

HAMILTON: Well, I don't think ever -- tradeoffs are ever that clear. I mean in terms of the mass population or even in terms of leadership. I think there may be some rare instances when it's more obvious. But I think it's generally people coming to understand that the total welfare is inextricably bound up together.

BAYOR: Did newspapers pick up the story at all (inaudible).

HAMILTON: No I don't think they -- yeah, they picked up positive -- it's a [24:00] fine thing that this has come to pass.

BAYOR: It was basically the report that you were issuing.

HAMILTON: What?

BAYOR: It was basically the report that you were issuing.

HAMILTON: Well, it was based on shared information of the need that was now being met I guess.

BAYOR: Oh I guess maybe there was a more enlightened white leadership here that was able to --

HAMILTON: Well, I think there are always more -- there are enlightened citizens who are glad of an -- are glad to be asked to share something that is (inaudible) total good.

BAYOR: In regards to the schools what I've read so far is that when the black community got the schools like Washington High School it was really as a result of threatening not to vote for certain bond -- school bond issues.

HAMILTON: I don't remember that very well. But I remember the occasion because I was a little girl then.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: But there had been just [25:00] nothing done about black schools. And it was a very racist paper. I don't even remember the title. I remember hearing my parents talk about it in the community. And there was a boycott of the paper. Everybody was to drop the *Atlanta Georgian*. And I guess it was because there was no willingness on the part of the school people to consider the Negro and the paper was picking up (inaudible) and there was a threat that the bond issue would be defeated. That was not the '46 bond issue. That was earlier. But the -- and that threat was evidently what turned the tide in this early effort to --

BAYOR: I guess that's what I was thinking about what happened later on. No concern among whites back then about black school system, and then you get some concern in the 1940s about the hospital.

HAMILTON: Well, a lot of things had happened since then.

BAYOR: Well, except for the ending of the [26:00] white primary really what had happened?

HAMILTON: Oh, there was a great many things that happened then.

BAYOR: Well, OK, in terms of race relations.

HAMILTON: Well, I think -- well, in terms of labor -- and terms of human relations. As the -- as you get a more -- as you get a broader educated electorate and more ways to get intimate knowledge -- not intimate knowledge. But more knowledge than you had had before of the needs. Then it begins to dawn on the political leaders that the welfare of the whole, even down to the dollar and cents level, you see, I mean that's -- it's not simple but it's -- but that's the -- that seems to me the process by which communities learn.

BAYOR: Was there any sense at all that [27:00] segregation hurt white schools as much as it did black schools by --

HAMILTON: I think this was a late development.

BAYOR: What, 1940s, '50s (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Yeah (inaudible).

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Leading up to the '54 school decisions.

BAYOR: (inaudible) they were duplicating their efforts, that they were wasting money (inaudible).

HAMILTON: (inaudible) wasting money but I think that that began to form later on. And even then it wasn't a telling argument.

BAYOR: Well (inaudible).

HAMILTON: You know, the (inaudible) -- the resistance to school integration.

BAYOR: (inaudible) that the Atlanta Board of Education built new schools (inaudible) in all-white and all-black neighborhoods and allowed schools in transitional areas to decline thereby trying to help the whites from transitional areas to move out.

HAMILTON: Well, I don't think there's any question about the fact that following the '54 decision when the next rash of school building occurred -- this was not the '54 [28:00] bond issue -- I mean the '46 bond issue. But there was a rash of building in black neighborhoods or neighborhoods that were in transition. And that's why we have the great many central city schools now underused. I wasn't on the board of education but it was perfectly clear that there was just a mad rush, new schools here, there, and yonder.

BAYOR: (inaudible) what were they trying to do?

HAMILTON: Well, I guess it was trying to prevent them from wishing to go to better facilities.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: And to slow down the voluntary transfer program because they -- they agreed to it (inaudible) negotiations that followed the '54 school -- but I don't think much of the white leadership welcomed it. Now that's not to say that there were none who did.

BAYOR: Well, it occurred to me that what they were really trying to do was keep the (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Yeah, that's right.

BAYOR: [29:00] Even in the neighborhoods that were transitional neighborhoods there seemed to be --

HAMILTON: Well, that's reflected in the fact that now, when it seems to some of us more and more obvious that a more effective school system in Atlanta and Fulton County would be to have one school system. As it would be to have one Fulton Atlanta government really. Less wasteful, less -- and better for everybody. But when you get people even working on the -- really concerned about the working on a better relationship between the city and the county, so many of the people surprise me. People who say, "Oh, well that's fine, but the one thing that'll block it is that

people will object to merging the school systems." And what we have in Fulton County now is a North Fulton County system and a South Fulton County system and Atlanta in between. And the black system -- the South system is getting more and more -- there are [30:00] more and more black students there. But the money to support an adequate system of education is not increasing that fast.

BAYOR: And then you have (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Well, that would be -- of course there would be the usual negotiation on what to do with the money. But I personally think that that's going to be the force that makes people face reality sooner or later.

BAYOR: But basically you think it's a racial factor that --

HAMILTON: Oh, I'm sure it's a racial factor.

BAYOR: Keeping school systems apart, particularly from getting regional government.

HAMILTON: Well, I think it's a factor that slows down the consolidation of Atlanta Fulton. Now I'm not thinking about a metro thing (inaudible).

BAYOR: (inaudible) getting back (inaudible) a little bit. Your election to the Georgia House in '66. I'm curious what was different in '66 that would allow a black person to be [31:00] elected to the Georgia House.

HAMILTON: Well, you see, the -- Georgia faced a court action.

They had had a prior court action which required the Senate to be reapportioned. And so there'd been black senators. One. There'd been one. And then in '65 there was a court order requiring a reapportionment of the Georgia House. And Fulton County had had five representatives up to that time. And the one man vote decision came. And so the Fulton delegation jumped from five members to 28. And so all the community leadership was concerned about finding people who were one, willing and able, and who were [32:00] thought to be good public servants to offer for this great number of new House seats in predominantly black districts. Now the district in which I was elected was -- the lines have changed many times since then. But it was a central city district which included Georgia Tech and not even very far west. And that year I think there were either six or seven black representatives chosen from Atlanta. I think (inaudible) about four people white and black in the delegation who were elected in that particular --

BAYOR: So because of the reapportionment then you're saying -

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HAMILTON: It was because of the realignment of districts.

BAYOR: You were [33:00] then able to be elected by a pretty much all-black district?

HAMILTON: No. It was not all black at that time. My district that -- is predominantly black now. But for the first two elections I don't know what the proportion was. But I would think at least a third. In fact the first two times I ran, I had white opposition. I had a white student from Tech the first time and a white man the second time. I don't even remember who he was. But increasingly the lines have been modified so that my district is now more almost completely black if not completely.

BAYOR: Was there much of a racial factor to that (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Not that I knew of.

(break in audio)

BAYOR: (inaudible) OK. There was no --

HAMILTON: I don't recall any racial factor in --

BAYOR: But did [34:00] whites help you (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Yeah, at least, I guess they did. We had this guy that ran the place [down?], as I remember, that got a very small part of the vote.

BAYOR: (inaudible) '66 where there was a feeling that whites would support a black leader (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Well, I don't know that it was that sophisticated. There was recognition that -- I think there was more recognition then than there is now that there should be some evidence of community leadership in the people chosen

to serve in the legislature. That's a generalization which I couldn't prove, but that's my general impression.

BAYOR: How about when you were already serving in the House? Did you get -- were you treated as just another --

HAMILTON: Oh, that's an inevitable question. The first year I was over there, I was one of two women in the legislature, and of course the only black woman. And [35:00] one of a group of about six blacks as I recall, six or seven in the House. And I was -- have always been treated graciously. And as I always say, I think the way you're treated stems from the way you expect to be treated. And it was a year full of tension, because that was the -- this first year was the year that Julian Bond's seat was challenged, and there was a House trial with all those -- I can't remember the debate, one -- I can't remember who the lawyer was. But he was somebody who had once been in the House. And they brought him up to do the hearing that night. Then they had the House trial (inaudible) this honorable body and place (inaudible) and called up a lot of former members who were no longer -- in place of that, I see the infamous Mr. Bond. You could read his mind, the [36:00] way he probably felt like putting it. But I think one of the good things that came from that reapportionment is that it's been clearer and clearer that people's basic nature whether

they're white or black and basic interest just come out. I mean the -- I think there's been great mutual education from both sides. But I have -- I've been very fortunate in the people I've worked with in the House. Both speakers (inaudible) were interested in my concerns and were willing to help as they could.

BAYOR: But there wasn't any kind of leftover racist prejudice against you.

HAMILTON: [37:00] Not overtly.

BAYOR: That's good. At least it wasn't overt.

HAMILTON: No, it was not (inaudible) in my experience there's been no overt racist prejudice.

BAYOR: I was also curious about the Urban League as a liaison between white and black leaders (inaudible), as apparently it was. I was curious, how much did white politicians (inaudible) Hartsfield, and [Bell?], and so on, Allen, actually seek black advice on issues? Was there an ongoing communication?

HAMILTON: Well, I don't think it was limited to the league. But I think from Hartsfield's time forward -- and I don't think it was terms of the organization, per se, but it was in terms of personalities. Staff, board members that gave access -- or they had reason to know through one reason or another. So there was discussion -- the only campaign --

I, of course was interested in Mr. Hartsfield, helping an interest in -- [38:00] primarily in increasing the participation which broadened the franchise. But the only -- the first political campaign that I worked in as a volunteer actively was Ivan Allen's first campaign. And --

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: (inaudible).

BAYOR: But they sought your advice on --

HAMILTON: Yeah.

BAYOR: How about in other things that were happening (inaudible) for example urban renewal. Was black advice sought on --

HAMILTON: Yeah, the big effort that I -- this was when I was at the league. And I don't know. I know I was concerned and the league staff was concerned that the Forward Atlanta campaign, which was the effort to broaden the boundaries. And we all did what we could as individuals. And the guy who -- I think the [39:00] staff man who did the main study was Phil Hammer who was with the -- I think he was with the (inaudible) but I can remember we were interested in sharing information and building support as best we could on that (inaudible) communication between people who were primarily interested in it.

BAYOR: How about on the issue of the placing most federal housing projects on the west side? That seemed to be a big concern.

HAMILTON: Well, the big concern of the league in terms of housing -- I guess you talked to Mr. Thompson about that --

BAYOR: Yes, I did.

HAMILTON: -- was to disperse the housing. And our concern primarily -- as I recall the emphasis at the league at that time was to make available -- we never said. We said [40:00] make accessible to Negroes who wished to enjoy suburban living tracts which could be developed for suburban living. And so that was the effort to open up the northwest and then later to open up the southwest.

BAYOR: (inaudible) northeast wasn't important back then.

HAMILTON: Hmm?

BAYOR: The northeast?

HAMILTON: Well, the northeast at that time was a very heavy black population. The Old Fourth Ward. There had been moved into the near-in west side. It started I guess in the mid '30s. And I know that there was an effort that Mr. Thompson and other people on the league's housing staff that worked with the housing authority people in dispersing. I think [41:00] many of us know that the -- it was an era in planning [high rise?] -- it was not our era.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: An era in terms of creating too large concentration of very low income people. That's the big -- Perry Homes was the first one. Then the [Archer?] Homes was the next great big one. Of course they were faced with the problem of the great displacement that occurred when they built the stadium when they felt a big turnaround -- 75 planning, and so on and so on. And (inaudible) but this is hindsight.

BAYOR: Do you think that building of the stadium and where they put the highway was an effort to push blacks out of (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Oh, I don't think so. I think it was all economic considerations. I think, in fact, that the people that were most directly affected in terms of their [42:00] residences being just destroyed and their having to relocate were black citizens in one of the oldest neighborhoods of the city.

BAYOR: I've read things about the stadium and the civic center being built as buffers and as ways of moving the black community out of the downtown, pushing them westward, pushing them southward.

HAMILTON: Well, maybe that happens in -- and where the Civic Center was built was really one of the worst slum areas of Atlanta, Buttermilk Bottom. That was one of the oldest

slum areas. And the people there were displaced. They all went I guess first to the near-in public housing projects. That was even before the (inaudible).

BAYOR: Do you ever come across any highways being built as buffers, as a way of splitting two [43:00] communities up (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Well, there's the famous place of Peyton Road. You know about Peyton Road.

BAYOR: I've heard about the barricade.

HAMILTON: Mr. Hartsfield said, "Never make a mistake that they can take a picture of."

BAYOR: I spoke to --

HAMILTON: And Ivan learned very fast about that. It came down fast. It was his error. It was an effort to reduce expansion I guess into the southwest which was solidly white then.

BAYOR: Mayor Allen (inaudible). He's still apologizing for that.

HAMILTON: Well, I'll give him credit. He learned fast.

BAYOR: I guess he did.

HAMILTON: He did learn fast.

BAYOR: (inaudible) just sort of wind it up. Again, I've read a lot about a tradition and spirit of compromise and communication in Atlanta between blacks and whites. And

supposedly that helped to avoid any kind of violence in the city. Do you think there was a real sense not so much of a city too busy to hate, but a [44:00] city where there was an effort being made to open up channels of communication between communities?

HAMILTON: I'm sure that's true. I don't know that there's -- the slogan, "the city too busy to hate," was a PR line.

BAYOR: Oh, yeah (inaudible) and not very true.

HAMILTON: But without the willingness of some of the political leadership in the top levels to seek out ways -- and that was certainly true of Hartsfield (inaudible) and of Allen. And others that have followed. I don't think there's any question that Atlanta had that going for it. And it's been fortunate in the -- quality leadership that didn't -- could see that the well-being of the total community depended on working together and seeking to increase the ways in which there could be [45:00] joint consideration of what it was wise to do.

BAYOR: So the lines of communication were kept open at least beginning in Hartsfield's period.

HAMILTON: Yes. It began then. I think they've been strengthened ever since.

BAYOR: Yeah. I'm not sure how far back it goes beyond that.

HAMILTON: I can't speak to that (inaudible) I don't know.

BAYOR: Do you think that that spirit of compromise at all helped Atlanta become the civil rights center (inaudible) most of the organizations located here?

HAMILTON: Well (inaudible) Atlanta was (inaudible) gate city of the South. That was one of the reasons. I mean both white and black (inaudible) because the efforts that -- well, the so-called revolution of the '60s. It started in Alabama. They moved the headquarters to Atlanta. And I guess that was because there were the other -- [46:00] it was a center of organization as well as community leadership.

BAYOR: Well, I guess in terms of them not keeping the organization in Montgomery for example.

HAMILTON: There was a reason for that.

BAYOR: The reason for that being that Atlanta I guess is a place where there was at least some experience of dealing with black leadership.

HAMILTON: Well, because there was I would say a larger group of developed leadership. See, Atlanta was larger even then than Montgomery.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: And we did have (inaudible) and I think the presence of the black institutions of higher education has been a great influence over the years.

BAYOR: I hear that from people.

HAMILTON: I mean when you begin to look at people, that was --

BAYOR: Let me just turn this off.

(break in audio)

BAYOR: So well, what I heard from one of the other people is that there were black -- black leadership in Atlanta were people who were educated, well off, and therefore they had --

HAMILTON: [47:00] Not necessarily well off. Because they were poor, but they didn't feel poor.

BAYOR: OK. At least middle-class (inaudible).

HAMILTON: I never know what's meant by that. But --

BAYOR: But in that sense they had more of --

HAMILTON: They were informed and educated. An educated base.

BAYOR: And therefore they had more ties with the black leaders -- with the white leaders I suppose.

HAMILTON: Well, maybe so, maybe no. But as you look over the state, as -- the emergence of -- as little as I know about the individual leadership in the rural parts of the state, much of it came from people who (inaudible) education. They went into these counties as schoolteachers, as principals, as so on and so on. But that became the nucleus of political development and citizenship education.

BAYOR: How about the nonviolent tradition of the fact that things were worked out whenever possible through [48:00]

behind-the-scenes compromise and whatnot? Do you think this influenced King, Jr., at all in terms of his nonviolent approach?

HAMILTON: (inaudible).

BAYOR: I mean I don't know how well you knew him at all but -
-

HAMILTON: I knew him very well but I mean I wouldn't presume how anybody gets there.

BAYOR: Yeah (inaudible) of the Gandhi --

HAMILTON: And he said that he was influenced mostly by the Gandhi (inaudible).

BAYOR: (inaudible) I'm just curious how much he was influenced by growing up in Atlanta, which was just the --

HAMILTON: Well, I would -- I'll tell you a story that somebody told me about -- King's first pastorate was in a Baptist church in Montgomery. And that was the -- the community leadership in Montgomery was the one -- I've forgotten what they called it. Montgomery Improvement Society -- Association. I think. But they were the group that rallied behind Mrs. Parks, and this person who was a leader, the head of the group -- and I remember so well, he was [49:00] telling this story when I was at the league. He came in. He said, "We had a meeting." And he said, "Now we've got to get a figure who speaks well and who can

unify the people." King had just come to that church and said -- and, but they -- he evidently had the gift of gab. I mean talked well. He was --

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: And so they -- so he was chosen to be the leadership -
- the leader first of this Montgomery -- whatever they called it.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: Improvement Society I think. And then that -- then the Southern Christian Leadership thing came later. And came over here.

BAYOR: There's no sense of any kind of him being influenced by where he grew up?

HAMILTON: Well, you can't separate. Again he grew up under the influence of the black colleges. He went to Morehouse. And he [50:00] grew up in a community where there was, quote, "intelligent" black leadership.

BAYOR: And apparently some intelligent white leadership.

HAMILTON: And some intelligent white leadership. So it was part of his heritage (inaudible).

BAYOR: (inaudible) curious. Had he grown up in Birmingham or Little Rock whether it would have been -- whether he would have been less influenced by a nonviolent approach to issues.

HAMILTON: I don't know.

BAYOR: There's no way of finding out, of course.

Unfortunately, I can't interview -- his father is gone now, so I guess he would be the one who was probably most knowledgeable about that. I was also curious, just for the final point, the end of the Atlanta Negro Voters League. What happened to it, why did it (inaudible)?

HAMILTON: I don't really know what happened to it. I think that -- you mean as a nonpartisan political party, [51:00] I guess as there was greater access to the Democratic Party and greater response to the -- by the Democratic -- by the national Democratic Party to the basic civil rights needs of black citizens, it was -- I don't even know what -- and as the Democratic Party itself opened up its ranks to black people -- and I'm talking just about Atlanta and Fulton County because I don't (inaudible) never been an active participant in state business, but that had something to do with it.

BAYOR: The Atlanta Fulton County Democratic (inaudible) didn't open up to blacks right until the mid '60s in terms of letting blacks on their board, I believe.

HAMILTON: [52:00] I can't remember the dates, but it must have been early '60s.

BAYOR: I think it was -- well, then they closed I think they were the first to -- one of the first to get on --

HAMILTON: I think it would be on the -- on the county executive committee.

BAYOR: Executive committee. Was there any reason why it took them so long? I mean black political power had been building up for some time now. Why did they first wake up at that particular time?

HAMILTON: Well, black leadership was using tools available to them, and (inaudible) when there was more response in terms of the structure. I can't remember when it was that they instituted -- they redid the Fulton County Democratic Party's bylaws and elected the executive committee. I don't remember when that was, even though I was on it for (inaudible).

BAYOR: I think that would have been the mid '60s (inaudible).

HAMILTON: I would guess that's right. You know [Bayford's?] book.

BAYOR: Yeah. Yeah. I'm trying to get a chance to speak with him too of course.

HAMILTON: Yeah, he was [53:00] a great man, great man.

BAYOR: I met him back in '76 I think. But that was before I was (inaudible).

HAMILTON: What is your interest? Political science or history?

BAYOR: It's history (inaudible) just trying to do a study of race relations in the twentieth century and of course I'm trying to interview people who are knowledgeable about that period. I've spoken to -- let's see. Robert Thompson. Reverend [Borders?], (inaudible), Warren Cochrane I'm speaking to in a month when he gets back from New York.

HAMILTON: (inaudible).

BAYOR: And among the whites Massell and Allen and (inaudible) Alexander [spoke to me?].

HAMILTON: Oh, by all means.

BAYOR: Yeah. Well, I'm moving along. Trying to contact various people.

HAMILTON: (inaudible) I guess you've got the main ones (inaudible), you know, that had the political power.

BAYOR: Well, Jake Henderson, I think, was (inaudible).

HAMILTON: [54:00] And Jake Henderson (inaudible) he was one of the -- he was on my board at that time and was very active in the operation. And I think at that time he was also president of one of the Greek letter fraternities if I'm not mistaken.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HAMILTON: But he was a real factor in that All-Citizens Registration Committee (inaudible).

BAYOR: There's a whole list of people I still want to get in touch with (inaudible).

HAMILTON: When's your (inaudible).

END OF AUDIO FILE