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Interviewee: Calhoun, John H.

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RONALD BAYOR: [00:00] Two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10. And what I was interested in, really, is two aspects, of your past: one, your work with the Atlanta Negro Voters League and the Georgia Voters League. And then I want -- curious also about some work you did with the Empire Real Estate Board. That's two areas.

JOHN CALHOUN: I don't know much about the Board.

BAYOR: Well, let me just -- maybe you, if I ask the questions.

CALHOUN: If there's some questions.

BAYOR: OK, in regard to the Atlanta Negro Voters League, I was curious, at what point did white politicians take notice of growing black political strength?

CALHOUN: I think the first one to take notice of that was Mayor Hartsfield, white politician. And he took notice of us after we organized to defeat him. [01:00]

BAYOR: To defeat him.

CALHOUN: Yeah. The time he ran against -- first time he ran against -- the first, I think, it was probably Charlie

Brown. But the first time he ran, he won. But he recognized the potential of the leadership that was in the Atlanta Negro Voters League, as well as the showing we made. Because, you see, black voters were the minority at the time, something like 45%, I guess. And he was impressed by that. And so the next time he ran for reelection, then he got [religion?]. I don't remember how it started, but he gave us the money to organize it. I think it was something, like, \$1,600.

BAYOR: Organize the Negro Voters League, or --

CALHOUN: Yeah, (inaudible) to organize the headquarters and [02:00] and all that kind of stuff.

BAYOR: That's interesting. I didn't know that.

CALHOUN: And we helped him to get elected. And then, from '40- - I think that was in '46, '48, '52, '56, then it came down to '62, he recommended we support Ivan Allen. And Ivan Allen was for -- the time he ran his reelection, he did the same thing.

BAYOR: And in terms of seeking black support?

CALHOUN: Yeah, yeah. And then it seems certain other people came in to help (inaudible) --

BAYOR: (inaudible)?

CALHOUN: Yeah, (inaudible). [Dan Who?], who was formerly assistant solicitor -- the solicitor, [03:00] attorney

general. He helped us fight [the plan?], and that put him -- but then by the time we organized the Negro Voters League, he was very much interested. Then you had a man like -- it was one of the county commissioners, a white county commissioner. He -- and all these people said if we can get enough Negroes registered, then we can work with him.

BAYOR: So at the very beginning, then, I'd say before the Demo-- the white primary was done away with, Hartsfield didn't care [about it?].

CALHOUN: No, but -- well, I don't know what Hartsfield's position was on that. I don't think that he was. The whole day had to be segregation. In fact, in those days, until 1940-- the white primary was abolished in 1944, '46, that is. [04:00] And then, Negroes get out to register to vote. That's where we started, getting Negroes registered to vote. And that's where I came to (inaudible) to register. And Jesse Hill came in, he was chairman of the [All City?] Registration Committee. And then we organized -- after we got the -- had success with Hartsfield, the Atlanta Negro Voters League, Mr. Dobbs and Mr. [Lowe?] organized the Georgia Voters League. And Mr. Dobbs had an [influence?] on that because he was the (inaudible) head of the Prince Hall Masons in the state. They had lodges all

over the state. But when he organized it, he called me and -- where's the (inaudible), I just need their (inaudible). And he was -- his man -- he just notified his men. By that time, he built a building down there, had redeemed the [05:00] Masonic order in the state, Prince Hall Masons. And he got very comfortable.

BAYOR: That was the nucleus of his --

CALHOUN: Yeah, Georgia (inaudible) all of them worked together, just like they were doing in Atlanta.

BAYOR: And let's see, so I guess, then when Hartsfield first became mayor, he wasn't particularly a supporter of any kind of black rights or anything?

CALHOUN: Well, it was politically expedient for him.

BAYOR: OK, so it became politically expedient.

CALHOUN: I remember John Wright -- I was having to be in City Hall on the day after the election, in that first election. And [John White?], who later became (inaudible) -- a friend of ours, he was in Oregon at the time. And he was (inaudible) by the fact that [Dan beat us?]. So I just happened to see him. And I think I had two months left on the water bill or something like that. I was in the real estate business. And I remember Mr. White just laughing and talking about the fact that they [06:00] had won -- Hartsfield had won.

BAYOR: So when you organized by 1948, I think, you did, the Negro Voters League. What that organized, then, to defeat Hartsfield in the next election?

CALHOUN: Black organizers, we didn't do it. Well, that came about another way, (inaudible). When John Wesley Dobbs was -- before he retired from the (inaudible), he was the officer in charge -- clerk in charge for (inaudible). I think he's running from here to Mobile, Alabama. And he used to come into our office -- my office -- I was working in the office there, my father-in-law's office, but he had passed in 1935. And I was in the office, and he used to come in to pay his rent. He had trouble with his finances and he was paying rent on the house. He was trying to redeem the house, [07:00] and -- but he used to come in and (inaudible) -- and he knew of my civic interest -- my interest in the Voters League, and the Community Chest, and things like that. And he used to tell me there were two things he was going to do. One to redeem the Masonic order, because he had been elected head of it, succeeding [Dr. Butler?] -- a Dr. Henry Butler. And said, I'll get out -- I'm going to (inaudible), and then I'm going to get my people organized and registered to vote." OK. Well, he did that. He went to work and by -- got the (inaudible) lodge to reduce their claim they had. And he was able to

redeem that and get that building back. And then he started out getting people registered. [08:00] He talked about it and I think, at that time, there was a lot more (inaudible) 40,000 (inaudible) who weren't registered to vote. Well, they had the a white primary. There wasn't a use of being registered. The white primary would (inaudible) off the election. And until the white primary was abolished, they -- not only was it -- got the city against the white primaries, but, I mean, the (inaudible) system. So the governor helped with that a whole lot. Like [Paul?] said, there were (inaudible) -- he got that done. And then --

BAYOR: [Talmadge?]?

CALHOUN: Huh?

BAYOR: Talmadge?

CALHOUN: No, no. No, not Talmadge. The man Talmadge had to fight with.

BAYOR: Oh, the one who got rid of the (inaudible)?

CALHOUN: Yeah, yeah.

BAYOR: [Sanders?] fumbled, didn't he?

CALHOUN: That was a [poor thing?]. (inaudible) -- let him [09:00] get away from him. But anyway. This came about the (inaudible) action of that time. And so this Dobbs was talking about it all over the state, because he was driving

around and so forth. And he -- one day, he was down, I think it was probably 1,000 or so that he registered in the state. And they could only vote as they were ready to go to work. (inaudible) because whites aren't (inaudible), there's no way to do anything. Anyway, he -- so one day, he was down at the courthouse to make his tax return. And a man named Mr. Johnson was in the registrar's office, in the county registration office. And he had segregation -- he had his desk out in the hall. Oh, I remember that. He didn't go to the -- go to the window, like everybody -- like all the whites do, did you. He had a desk, so he -- so he was a fine fellow. [10:00] He said, "John Wesley?" He said, "You're talking Negroes getting registered?" [And what is the?] trouble with the poll tax. Because it was [a cumulative tax?]. And I said it was due 30 years ago. And you want to register. You had to pay the tax -- accumulated tax -- taxes to -- might be -- the poll tax would be \$2 or \$3. But you'd have to multiply it by the number of years since 21. So that was a bar to people registering. So he said --

BAYOR: I guess the whites, [too, actually?].

CALHOUN: Yeah, the whites didn't pay. They didn't -- it didn't make any difference to them. Because they wanted -- they were registered, the ones who were voting, they didn't

bother -- they were always registered; they registered when they were 21.

BAYOR: That's true, yeah.

CALHOUN: (laughter) But Negroes, whether you [sell bread?] or whether you were registering to vote [11:00], your votes didn't count for anything. That's why I was saying (inaudible) he said, now there's 10,000 names (inaudible). If you would send somebody down here to copy those names, you could copy those names and then you could contact those people. Well, Mr. Dobbs hired two lawyers, one named S. S. [Rollins?] and the other one named E. E. [Moore?]. No black lawyers. Both of them are dead. No, I think Moore went to California, [but Rollins is dead?]. But anyway, they went down and copied those names of the book. And then we organized it. I had this job that I'd been working and what had happened is that he had organized the Atlanta -- let me see -- Atlanta Civic and Community League. It was a -- supposed to be a bipartisan organization for -- all of them were in there; Dobbs is in there, Scott -- [12:00] [C. A. Scott?] is in there, (inaudible), Grace Hamilton, (inaudible). I mean, (inaudible) represented him. They were all for [evolution?], they were in the Urban League, and they were all interested in this. And there Dr. Baker, at Atlanta University was -- he was -- the

Alpha fraternity had set up a plan for -- they called it a citizenship plan. And (inaudible) registration. And so Grace Hamilton had a friend, Mr. (inaudible), they named him -- they appointed him head of this committee. And I remember Mr. Dobbs, he had organized the Civic and Political League to do this thing. And here, they were talking about setting up something else to do it. And then that Democrat and Republican business getting involved in that, see. Dobbs was a Republican, and they were Democrats. Because what had happened was [13:00] -- Dan Duke, as I said, had done this thing, and he was a Democrat. And Walden, being a lawyer, too, they would -- they knew each other [through?] the law. That's what I was trying to say. The law had (inaudible), see. He had to do [it during?] the white primary and all that. So there were the long ago, and Dobbs -- I mean, so Duke was running for political -- for the (inaudible). And [Carl Webb?] was running. Those folks, they were all Democrats. But this was a -- this seemed to me as city elections -- see, city elections -- just like it is now, see, city elections, they're not partisan. So this was the same thing. They'd only got different laws on it now, but it was the same thing. So Dobbs and (inaudible) -- Dobbs for some reason, I don't know why -- I think because [14:00] Carl Webb was a

preacher, and he was against Duke, because Duke and them were Republicans, and I was a Republican -- I mean, Democrat. So, let me see -- the leaders I'm remembering now are Ben J. -- B. J. Davis, Benjamin J. Davis. (inaudible) he was the last black [national political?] for the Republican Party. And [C. A. Scott?] was in there. C. A. Scott was still a Democrat then. And I was in there. But a man named [Cecil Harper?], he was -- had [followed them?], but he was the first principal of Washington High School, and he was also head of the NAACP. And so we organized this (inaudible) and I remember that Hartsfield was running this -- he was [making?] this race. [15:00] And they had a meeting over at this big [Gothic?] church. And I remember that night that Dobbs was [that tall?]. First thing is -- I get these things mixed up. (inaudible). Yeah. We're [here?], now I've got it. Well, before we got to that, Mr. Davis, Mr. Dobbs, and Mr. Walden, and all got into all -- got into office, and decided what we were going to do with our pool of registered voters. And so -- and because that's when Hartsfield was running. So we got in the car and drove around the neighborhood a while and talked (inaudible), had come back. And so in that talk, they decided [16:00] that we wouldn't announce who we would support that night.

(inaudible) we would hold off until the next night. This was Monday night, and the election was Wednesday. So we went back into the church, and Dobbs made one of his [all fired?] speeches. Dobbs did. Boy, he was the longest speaker. He could talk two hours (laughter); I think he could talk two hours at a time. People sat on the edge of their seat. He had such a good memory, that's how much his -- I saw one night at the (inaudible) Hotel, [in that Herndon?] building, he was -- one night he got up there and spoke. There were 300 people to this -- they had a consistory meeting there of -- all of men from all over the country. There were 300 people in that meeting that night. He had to deal with every one of those [people?] [17:00] (inaudible). Just think about that. Tremendous memory, but anyway. He made one of his speeches that night and I know [Reverend Babcock?], who was the pastor of the church at the time. Some man, though, picked up the gavel. And Dobbs knew about that gavel. Dobbs -- see, Dobbs said -- Babcock said, "This is -- that's [Big Dobbs's?] church. You can't talk in here like that." He was talking his [Hartsfield?]. And so Dobbs slapped the thing away from him. (laughter) Anyway, they said -- well, we had decided we won't be -- now, I'll tell you, the key to the decision was, we had this executive committee. I never will forget

this man, a man who was head of the building and loan association, he was a member of the executive committee. And we met at the Masonic Temple. And they were [18:00] trying to decide whether we would go with Hartsfield or to go with [Bridges?]. Now Bridges was the alderman for the First Ward. And the issue was police brutality. All that police brutality at the time. I remember I came up here one time and to give you an idea of what a mess it was, I came one time, well, I think right after I got married, on May 20th, and my father-in-law was the committee's (inaudible), and they still had an officer, and my daughter was head of it, (inaudible). He let his son -- his youngest son -- to take me down to buy a pair of Florsheim shoes for Mrs. (inaudible). That store is still there. And the man I met -- I know the man because I've seen the man lately who was running. (laughter) And so I bought those shoes and we [19:00] started back. And coming down Marietta Street -- going east on Marietta Street into Five Points. You know, Auburn Avenue, we were forced there, Auburn (inaudible), and Auburn has to go sideways, see. So -- but you're supposed to -- don't make no turns. You go straight down Edgewood, see. And what he did, my nephew -- what my brother-in-law did, he went up on Auburn Avenue. Lord, when they got up there -- when he up got up there

(inaudible), police is blowing whistles at him, going like nobody's business. So he stopped, right at the corner, there was Stein Clothing Store, right at that corner, Auburn and Peachtree. He stopped right there, (inaudible) turned off. The police came around on his side of that car and, boy, he let out such a stream of vile language I'd never heard. I said, "Mister, can't you talk any -- treat us any better than that?" [20:00] What did I say that for? He came around the car to my side. He said, "Open that door!" He said, "Get out of this car, nigger!" And so I got out. And I had on a pair of [knickers?]. When he saw those knickers it infuriated him. He snatched me by my belt, and carried me to a pole (inaudible), and hit me on the jaw. It was right there. Well, by the time the [Mariah?] -- [that Black Mariah?] we called it -- got there and carried me to the jail, Cornelius, my brother-in-law, had gone home and told his father about it. His father had called a man named [Jared Palmer?], who was a head of the Urban League, at the time, and he met me at the jail. And then they -- and I'm OK, (inaudible). (laughter)

BAYOR: Right. They just wanted to beat up on somebody.

CALHOUN: Yeah, that's when the highest is nothing. You had to get [yourself?] -- but I had to not [curse?]. (laughter)
But anyway, that's the kind of (inaudible) and that's what

we were getting. Now, [21:00] that just -- that didn't just happen once. But they were beating up white people the same way. It didn't make any difference, it was [anyone?] the police didn't like.

BAYOR: This is what --

CALHOUN: I saw a police drive up there, get in a car, you see what the difference is now. He (inaudible) with a white policeman and drove me up, (inaudible) down here to my (inaudible). But that's because of the relationship you establish, but anyway, that was [it?]. So --

BAYOR: Now, this was about 1945, you think?

CALHOUN: Yeah. Forty-four or forty-- well, it was after the white primary -- after the -- 1946. Yeah, I think it was '46. And so Hartsfield -- we decided we weren't going to announce that night. Dobbs said, "We come back tomorrow night." And the church was packed. And did you know, the next night they filled that church again? And (inaudible) [Baptist?] Church at that time would hold maybe 2,000 people. And so (inaudible) [22:00]. But what had happened was that in that meeting where we were going around -- and I didn't want to talk in the meeting -- but the man named Mr. Frank Wilson was an alderman, and he was Hartsfield's campaign manager. And I was very good in real estate and (inaudible) up there, and Mr. Wilson called me and said,

"John, let me tell you. Don't y'all endorse--" he knew we were going to endorse that night -- Friday night. "Don't y'all endorse anybody tonight. Don't y'all endorse anybody," he said. "Because if you endorse Hartsfield, the *Constitution* will (inaudible). If you endorse [Bridges?], the *Journal* (inaudible). Don't y'all endorse anybody." So I told him that. And that's why we were riding around (inaudible) and told them to come back the next night. And they came back the next night and filled the church. So they announced it. [23:00] We had (inaudible) nearly 40 -- about 60 ballots. But nobody knew -- I didn't know what -- what the result of the thing was.

BAYOR: So you endorsed Hartsfield, then?

CALHOUN: That's right.

BAYOR: That was Hartsfield.

CALHOUN: Wait a minute. We endorsed Bridges.

BAYOR: Oh, you endorsed Bridges? All right.

CALHOUN: Because Hartsfield couldn't get rid of his bad police chief, see. (inaudible) who that was chief was. Beavers. He was the chief then. So now that Hartsfield has got (inaudible), Beavers was gone. And Beavers was chief when I got arrested that time. But the man that succeeded Beavers was the chief.

BAYOR: It wasn't Jenkins yet, was it?

CALHOUN: No, it -- not Jenkins. Oh, no. Jenkins changed [that thing?] around when he got in there. But this was another, Sturdivant, Chief Sturdivant, that's who was chief. And he wouldn't commit himself to do anything -- well, he had just gotten into office, because Beavers had been there for four -- been in there. And then that's -- that's who -- that police department [24:00] [almost ran?] this city. You've got the FOP, now, ain't nothing for what the police department (inaudible). And of course, the police department -- matter of fact, (inaudible) about the Atlanta Police Department. It's gone through a revolution. See, you take when the 1906 riots. Boy, those guys had a problem. You know, the (inaudible) -- I hate to keep jumping off, but these things come into my mind. You know, the 1906 riot was similar to that (inaudible). When you look at the records you'll find that a Negro who had had such trouble with a white policeman was (inaudible). And man, he was an expert with a Winchester rifle. That guy was -- anytime a policeman would show his face, he'd shoot him. Got two or three of them. [25:00] And we had gone [not two years along?], then he got one of -- one of the Negroes who were in there coming up with him got scared and came out, and agreed to throw up his hands. "I surrender." So the minute this Negro agreed to go back in there and

start a fire, and they burned up that man with his rifle
and everything else. And their children. (laughter)

BAYOR: Crazy.

CALHOUN: But I don't need to tell you that. You've got a book.
Get this -- get a copy of this book, here. All that tells
this (inaudible) you're interested in the Atlanta Police
Department, you ought to get this. It's got some big
(inaudible), and just [to get?]. See that black thing
there?

BAYOR: Yeah.

CALHOUN: See. That's -- you know, and guess who did it? Who
wrote that? [Eames?].

BAYOR: Oh, really? (laughter) That's interesting.

CALHOUN: [26:00] He wrote it on Maynard Jackson. And that's a
beautiful thing. Look at all those pictures in there.

BAYOR: (inaudible), sure.

CALHOUN: Yeah, you can get it. They'll be [along now?].

(laughter) Somebody gave me that.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

CALHOUN: Yeah, you ask the police department. You can get this
(inaudible). You ought to get it and read it, if you're
interested in the history of Atlanta. It's really -- but
anyway, we'll come back to the [thing?] --

BAYOR: So Hartsfield didn't get --

CALHOUN: No, but Hartsfield -- what happened was, Bridges didn't carry his own water. We were supposed to -- he didn't carry his own water. See? And Hartsfield won, because the next -- see, we announced that night -- through the night. The next morning, it rained. And in the morning, rained. From about noon, the sun -- the sun came out. And the *Journal* came out, too. And you know, between then and seven o'clock, (laughter) white folks (inaudible) certain Negroes in the [North threatening?], and the white folk [27:00] came out and voted for Hartsfield back into office. (laughter) So --

BAYOR: Why did Hartsfield want your support the next time around, then?

CALHOUN: Well, he saw what we had. We made such a record and he saw what we were doing (inaudible). And then (inaudible). And then -- what happened, if you want to have a really good, really helped him, then, was this fellow [Cochrane?], [Warren?] Cochrane. He was the secretary -- former secretary of the interior. He came, he got into it, he was a strong Democrat. He'd been in Democratic politics in New York. And he was -- his secretary (inaudible) -- he was a the secretary to the Democrat's secretary for the Negro Voters League. But he -- what happened really was, the next important -- and that

was in '46. In '48 -- no, somewhere in there [Calvin?] --
[28:00] got to get my history straight.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

CALHOUN: Oh, wait a minute. What happened was this matter of voter registration came up and [Faycourt?] was chairman of the committee. Well, I remember one night we had a meeting over this hotel building I was talking about, over here in this building. And I was interested in voter registration. Dobbs did not -- he was -- this was under -- still the Atlanta Citizens Political League. They hadn't organized the Voters League then. But this is under still the Atlanta Citizens Political League. So [Grace Hamilton?] had named -- the committee had named -- [Baker?] was to be the chairman. So I told Baker that night. I said, "Now look, Dobbs is going to come in --" because Dobbs was having meetings, too. But he was opposed to this [29:00] organization because it was dominated by Democrats, number one, and he was making such a great success with his Atlanta Citizens Political League, with getting those 10,000 names and increasing registration. So he didn't want them to have it. So he got up and -- to make a speech. But I told Baker all this beforehand. I said, "Look, Mr. Baker, now you let Mr. Dobbs talk, but he can't talk against you. I think you should try to do that. And

he talks, then you just say, 'Thank you, Mr. Dobbs,' and go ahead." He's, like, "No, this doesn't -- you better go ahead and make sure it's [on the agenda?]," because they had [a different agenda?]. B. J. Davis spoke against it at this [national committee meeting?]. Another guy by the name of Smith -- Roland Smith -- was (inaudible) of the Republican. I guess he came --

BAYOR: [He came?] from the Voters Leagues?

CALHOUN: Well, not the voting leagues. Voting leagues hadn't come up, now. [Luther?] had set up this All Citizens Registration Committee, [30:00] see. And so Baker was smart, then. He's chairman of it. So (inaudible) leading this organization and so forth (inaudible) Democrats and Republicans. That's what it was. Because -- so when Dobbs told -- Dobbs made a fiery speech. When he got through, Baker said, "Thank you, Mr. Dobbs. Now, ladies and gentlemen, (inaudible)" -- Dobbs left the meeting. But he was smart. He came back and contributed \$50. That was the thing they were organizing for, to get some money. Well, then it came up a case of -- and this other thing came up with [Webb?]. And also, there was something about Herman Talmadge. And Dobbs did -- [Walden?] was just embarrassed now, to go to Talmadge (inaudible). So [31:00] Bridges (inaudible) [Rawlins, Haughton, Greg Townsend?], and

another fellow named J. R. -- Jacob Jamison. And they were all Democrat. And we said, "We can't have this. We've got to work together." So then they decided -- I wasn't in that meeting. But they called a meeting in which they agreed to set up this Atlanta Negro Voting League. Then Walden was the chairman, was a Democrat -- co-chairman. Dobbs, the chairman, was a Republican. C. H. Scott for chairman -- vice-chairman for the Democrats, and he's a Republican now. And a guy named [Holloway?], he was a church man. He was one of Mr. Dobbs's Masons, was chairman for (inaudible). But the secretary for the Democrats was [32:00] Cochrane, secretary (inaudible), and he kept all the records. Of course, he had the (inaudible), excludes [Mr. North?], and so forth. And Bill [Shaw?], William Shaw, who was a secretary for Ben Davis, was a Republican secretary. I was assistant secretary and, Leroy [Jobs?], who became [secretary?] -- and I was (inaudible) to the secretary for the Republicans, Leroy Jobs was secretary -- (inaudible) that was before he ran for the Senate. Well, since (inaudible) a Democrat.

BAYOR: (inaudible) let me get this straight.

CALHOUN: -- [if I had a co-chair?], all the way down.

BAYOR: You first thought of the civic and political [elite?]

--

CALHOUN: That's right.

BAYOR: -- and you supported Bridges?

CALHOUN: Right.

BAYOR: And then you began to organize the All Citizens
Registration Committee --

CALHOUN: That's right.

BAYOR: -- and then they elected (inaudible).

CALHOUN: Yes, sir. Yeah.

BAYOR: OK, then seeing that you didn't support Hartsfield in
1946, at what point did he start to solicit your support?

CALHOUN: In '48.

BAYOR: Forty-eight?

CALHOUN: Yeah.

BAYOR: In the next election, coming around [33:00] he was --

CALHOUN: (inaudible)

BAYOR: -- a little worried about where the black vote would
go?

CALHOUN: That's right. That's right. And we voted for him,
and he got elected.

BAYOR: What did he promise if he got elected?

CALHOUN: Well, he made all kinds of promises about (inaudible)
particularly in the black community, the schools weren't
integrated, and he was going to make things better, but not
going to do -- not going to do away with segregation. But

he was going to listen to the complaints of Negroes, do away with police brutality and all of that.

BAYOR: So things about improving your neighborhoods, and...?

CALHOUN: Yeah. And he got around. Because (inaudible).

BAYOR: OK, so this matter of hiring police -- black police?

CALHOUN: Yeah. Well, yeah, that was in there, too. We had a long time getting to it, but he did.

BAYOR: And I guess just listening more to the black leaders.

CALHOUN: That's right, that's right. And we had entrée to him, if we had any kind of problem. Most of the problems we had now were mostly [little?] problems, like neighborhoods, you know, people getting arrested, being discriminated against, [34:00] police brutality, and social (inaudible).

BAYOR: And he wasn't willing to listen to this before you began to gather some votes?

CALHOUN: Well, the next part of this -- well, (inaudible), he had to listen to the folks who were giving him the votes. (laughter)

BAYOR: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

CALHOUN: That was organized (inaudible), and this thing was so well organized, that Dobbs and Walden used to preside at a table there, and both of them, (inaudible) that's how they got along. It was a different kind of thing. And that thing continues up until around 1962. I think Ivan Allen's

second (inaudible), he had trouble holding them together. There was a -- well, the Democrats was right. They were getting strong in the Democratic Party now, and so they didn't want no Republicans telling them what to do.

(laughter) So they just broke it up. (laughter) But anyway, by that time, [35:00] I had -- sorry, you asked one of your questions you asked about voter registration over the state. By that time, I organized a Georgia Voter Registration Committee, see. Georgia Registration Committee. And I was the chairman of that. And the reason I was the chairman of that, because I said, after it was the NAACP and the NAACP -- finally, we got them with the first \$5,000 we got for the registration campaign, it came from the NAACP. But they finally decided that they would not sponsor registration anywhere there wasn't a chapter of the NAACP. Well, it wasn't -- back in those days, there wasn't many chapters of the NAACP all over the state. I didn't want to work with them; and I wanted to work at all of them. So the new man -- I've forgotten his name -- came, [membership?] chairman [36:00] of the SCLC voter registration. And so I got with him and he agreed. And Andy Young was a deputy director of SCLC -- he was right under Martin Luther King. And they agreed to give us the money to hold these meetings and -- you know, all over the

state. And what we needed most of the money for, we'd encouraged young people to get registered by asking the principal of the high school in those times. Somebody from there could bring a busload of people to [Macon?]. And then if they did, we (inaudible). Then we'd have another (inaudible) in the state.

BAYOR: So just try to get as many people registered as possible?

CALHOUN: Yeah.

BAYOR: Did this have any particular impact on the Republican party in Georgia? I mean, I know --

CALHOUN: You know -- you had [37:00] all these people in the Democratic Party.

BAYOR: Oh, so -- OK, that's -- so really, it didn't do much for Republicans then?

CALHOUN: No. Unh-unh, unh-unh, unh-unh. Although it was a bipartisan effort, it didn't do much for us.

BAYOR: I was also curious why there was an attempt to begin black registration efforts as early as '44, when it didn't really mean anything at that time? Why was there a push that early?

CALHOUN: Yeah.

BAYOR: Why did -- I guess it was Bob --

CALHOUN: Well, Bob -- (inaudible) started, he said that we would be less civic-minded. He said two things -- well, he said two things he was supposed to do: he wanted to restore the Republican and the Demo-- I mean, the (inaudible), and he was going to get my people registered to vote.

BAYOR: But what -- at that point, it didn't make much of a difference for him, because --

CALHOUN: Well, he started (inaudible) and he was a Republican, see. And the Democrats weren't doing anything for Negroes.

BAYOR: He just thought at some point the white primary would be out and (inaudible) --

CALHOUN: I don't know [38:00] if he even thought about that. I don't know what he thought about that. I just know what he told me. But I was just getting into it). See this is the '30s. When I came in, '34. See, he had been -- he was talking like that and I would listen to him or...

(laughter) But he did what he said he was going to do.

That's the reason I said (inaudible) because he told me once he was going to do that. And that didn't go over no -- we -- that (inaudible).

BAYOR: Well, maybe he was thinking of (inaudible) elections, maybe? That would have been -- well, that had nothing to do with the [primaries?].

CALHOUN: I don't know what he had in mind.

BAYOR: He just wanted to do it. OK.

CALHOUN: He knew the -- he knew the power of the black [ballot or vote?]. And he was interested in that [power?]. He -- well, he was preaching that to the -- look, he had a provision but in the -- in the constitution of the Masonic Order, that you couldn't belong to the Masonic Order unless you were a registered voter. So what happened? One of the times, now, one of these grand masters -- he was a grand master -- I've got to try and get that word -- he was Grand Master Mason, [39:00] Prince Hall Mason. But one of the -- the local Grand Masters called him one day and said, "Mr. Dobbs?" They said, "We're trying to -- we're having trouble with our dispensation." See, the Masons had this dispensation. That's where I joined the Masons, down in Tuskegee. And they were getting numbers in. And he said, "But you've got this problem in our constitution, you've got to be registered to vote. But these people down here [aren't?] registered to vote." And so the newspaper -- I think it was the *Constitution* -- went to Mr. Dobbs and asked him why. They was just like you. (laughter) And Dobbs ran his mouth (laughter) and told them, "Yes. Yeah, he told him that." And he criticized Randolph County. They didn't have no business keeping people from registering and voting, and the man printed it. [40:00]

One night, somebody knocked on his door. He had one of these -- he had put one of these steel doors on his house.

BAYOR: This was (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

CALHOUN: This was up on [Houston?] Street. He had one of those steel doors; somebody knocked on his door. And Dobbs opened the inside door -- he didn't open that screen -- and, you know, (inaudible) and said, "Who is it?" And a man said, "I'm Sheriff so-and-so-and-so from Randolph County." Dobbs said, "What --" but he was smart. He got the representative of the police department to come. And they all knew Dobbs. He said, "That's all right, Mr. Dobbs. Let him in." So Mr. Dobbs let him in, and he served a warrant on him to report to the [grand jury?] on such-and-such a date. And from Randolph County!

BAYOR: (inaudible).

CALHOUN: Well, [41:00] these articles he wrote in the paper. I mean, that came in the paper. They were going to find out what this Negro in Atlanta was talking about. So the grand jury wanted him. So he got a man -- a white lawyer -- named Smith. And (inaudible) you know he's a very, very prominent (inaudible), he's junior. I can't think of the name of it. Anyway. Mr. Smith went down there with him. And man, he -- Mr. Dobbs said, when we were (inaudible) the meanest looking folks you had ever seen in your life,

(inaudible) when they get there. So they went in and
(inaudible) the questions, and asked him about what he had
said. He told them what he said. And they said, "What
about the NAACP?" [42:00] Dobbs said he told him, "Mr.
Chairman, every self-respecting Negro I know belongs to the
NAACP." I think that's what he said. That was the last he
heard of that. (laughter) So now you asked me about why
(inaudible). Now, how he got that way, I don't know. But
that was it. He goes -- (inaudible). (laughter)
(inaudible).

BAYOR: When you began to really begin to register a lot of
people in Atlanta, I was wondering why the Fulton County
Democratic Party took so long to give any recognition to
blacks until the sixties? Before any black --

CALHOUN: You mean the Democrats?

BAYOR: Fulton County Democrats.

CALHOUN: I have no idea.

BAYOR: OK.

CALHOUN: I went -- what happened is I went to working for
[43:00] -- I went to working for the SCLC. And one of the
particular things I remember was we wanted -- [the election
came up with a different?] (inaudible). Yeah, [a gentleman
named Sanders?]. And M. L. had been put in jail down in
Albany; the police put him in jail down there. And he and

Abernathy were both in jail. So on the... I forgot the [fellow's?] name. Prichard? Well, him -- (inaudible) that was before Andrew was named the executive secretary. The guy's in New York now; he's a the preacher. Anyway, they were interested in getting Negroes registered -- [44:00] Negroes registered in Dougherty County. They wanted -- after they'd [shoot?] the police and all that down in there. So the Rev. [Fred Minnett?] and I went down there to set up this office. We set up an office in Albany. And we got 2,600 Negroes registered. All it was -- Dougherty County was the only county in the state that (inaudible) that's surely what we were doing. I remember one night, (inaudible) now, after we'd left for Albany and stopped at -- no. [David Coolidge?] stopped -- you see, his (inaudible) a nice -- they foreclosed his license, (inaudible) he stopped. We wanted to leave and they stopped us. Because we stopped. And they came over and stopped us, [45:00] said we were speeding. I said, "Mister, we weren't speeding." But in the meantime -- there were two of (inaudible) who were going around the back and shining light in the back of the car and see this SCLC MLK material in there. Man, they [carried us?] to -- (laughter) right to the jail. (inaudible) brand new (inaudible). And this jail, the sheriff was there to -- we

went in. And I told him about (inaudible). And this sheriff, I told him we weren't guilty of anything.

(inaudible) But anyway. So he said, "Yeah, you Negroes -- you Negroes up there in [46:00] Atlanta (inaudible)." And I said, "Well, we haven't decide who we're going to vote." "Oh, yes, you have. You're going to vote for (inaudible)." (laughter) So I said, "Well, you know, let's not argue that, but we haven't done anything." We had (inaudible) in the state at the time. But so he said, "Now, what about this case here?" And I said -- he said, "You could either pay a \$50 fine or put up \$250 surety bond or --"

BAYOR: But there was nothing.

CALHOUN: -- and come back to trial. So I had somebody sign it for me. So I'd been working in Albany with a guy named (inaudible) -- this was a guy who was a tailor, actually. [47:00] "Yeah, he can't sign no bond in this [office?]." I said, "Well, I know a preacher here," I told him. "What's the preacher's name?" He got the phonebook and looked it up. I couldn't say the preacher's name to save my life. [He didn't think I was going to?]. But anyway. He said, "How am I going to find his name if you don't even remember it?" I said, "Oh, my God." Then all of a sudden it came to me. The preacher came down and signed...

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