Interview number A-0080 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at The Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

Jack Bass: If twenty years ago, somebody would have told you that in 1974 you'd be introduced by a Senator from Mississippi as a Congressman from Georgia at a presidential prayer breakfast, what would you have said?

Andrew Young: I would have said they were crazy. I mean, that would have been 1954. That was before the Supreme Court decision. And we couldn't even vote very well in the South. It was not long after that that my younger brother came back from the Navy, where he'd been a lieutenant. He's a graduate of Harvard University's dental school. He passed the state dental examination, and went around the corner in the courthouse to register to vote, and they told him he flunked the literacy test. So, I mean, that's what it was like in the South.

J.B.: Where?

Young: This was in New Orleans.

J.B.: The progressive city of New Orleans.

Young: Yeah. Now, Atlanta was a little better than that. But in '55 I went to Thomasville, Georgia, and one of the first things I did there as the pastor of a little church was try to organize a voter registration drive. And I guess it was just about '48, in that town, a black man had tried to register. And he was lassoed on the courthouse steps, and tied to the back of a pickup truck, and dragged around the black community until he was dead. And then he was cut loose again in front of a jail where he was left to die . . . well, he was dead by

that time. In '55, when I tried to run a voter registration drive, the community. . . . Thomasville had a lot of northern presence, in big plantations. Eisenhower used to come down there to shoot quail. Secretary Treasurer Humphries had a plantation. The northern influence kind of quieted down that sort of overt violence, and they would let us register. But there was a big Klan rally the night before we were supposed to have the beginning of our voter registration drive. Interestingly enough, the man I asked to come down and speak for that voter registration drive was Manley Jackson's grandfather, John Wesley Dobbs, who was instrumental in filing the suits--the Primus King case--that put an end to the Democratic white primary in Georgia. And led to, amongst other things, the beginnings of voter registration in the big cities of Georgia, through the Masonic lodges. That also was a period in which Ellis Arnold was governor, and we got the eighteen year old vote. And that moved Georgia ahead. I think that's one of the reasons that we are now a little ahead of the rest of the deep South. See, North Carolina was the liberal state then. But folks never got around to organizing politically in North Carolina. Georgia was the headquarters of lynching, and blacks knew they had to turn to politics to survive. And it was a life . . . voting was understood very early in Georgia as a life and death issue. Whereas in more liberal to moderate North Carolina and Virginia, that wasn't perceived, back in the early fifties, nearly so well. They are just beginning . . . in fact, North Carolina blacks are just now beginning to wake up politically, you almost think. I have a tendency to feel that they are behind Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. That's in spite of the fact that they've elected Mayor Lightner. I think every other state has had a long history

of statewide political organization. And I don't know about any in North Carolina.

J.B.: There is none.

Young: I suspect one of the reasons is that there were always some white liberals you could trust. And, in the long run, that proved to be a detrimental factor. Because there was always, you know, Frank Graham or Sanford--a long stream of guys that. . . . I mean, whereas we were dealing with an early Gene Talmadge, who was really horrible, and Marvin Griffin, and Lester Maddox. Well, that was a long way to answer that question. This is a subject you've got to turn me off on, because that's all I've done in the last. . . . Well, I started in southern politics just about that time, 1955.

Walter De Vries: Well, that's the basic question we ask everybody. What was the major change in the last twenty-five years. And essentially what comes down, unless you're talking to Republicans, is the removal, in some sense, of the race issue. The change, I mean, in the issue.

Young: You've got to give Republicans some credit, though. You've got to give the Eisenhower administration some credit for the justices in the South. Because they appointed . . . the Republicans in the Eisenhower administration tended to be the liberal southerners. And they were not tied to the old Democratic machine. So you really got the best trained, brightest lawyers in the South, quite often, moving into judgeships. For instance, in Atlanta, you had blacks on the Republican state committee that were approving and recommending the judges. And there was a strong Republican party in Atlanta, that carried Atlanta for Nixon in 1960, in spite of the fact that Martin Luther King was a resident of Atlanta. And that King incident, you

know, tended to swing the big cities of the north. But they appointed judges that were not a part of the old southern oligarchy. And so when we came along in the sixties, there really was a progressive and independent judiciary.

J.B.: Who were the judges that stand out in your mind?

Young: Oh, Judge Tuttle, of course. Judge Wisdom in New Orleans. Judge Frank Johnson in Alabama. Who was the judge in Saint Augustine? Jacksonville? He's still there. Can't think of it offhand. Simpson, Bryan Simpson, I think his name is. And those are the ones that immediately come to mind. And that's the basis of the Fifth Circuit. And I would imagine the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals is the most liberal wing of the judiciary in America. For two reasons. One, you've got some of the brightest, independent jurists that were available. But second, they were constantly under pressure to make decisions on human rights cases. And they were almost the victims of their own precedents and their own principles. And one thing led to the next and to the next and to the next, and you could always count on justice in southern courts, where you couldn't count on justice even in the federal courts of Illinois. Because they were interlocked with the Daley machine. I would suspect the same thing would have been true in Washington. Although, who was the judge-- Skelly Wright, from New Orleans, who came to Washington--brought that same kind of liberal spirit to the Court of Appeals here in Washington.

W.D.V.: If Jack had asked you that first question ten years ago, what would you reply?

Young: Same thing.

J.B.: So then what is the period where it has changed in that last twenty-five years? The past ten years?

Young: 1967. I would say the Voting Rights Act was it, more than anything. I mean, the bus boycott, you'd have to say was an awakening of the black community. And it built up a series of social changes that led right up to the passage . . . the legalization of those social changes in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But that '64 Civil Rights Act, while it changed traditions and customs, didn't do anything to challenge the power relationships in the South. And in a sense it was far less consequential than the passage of the '65 act, which began to give blacks access to political power.

J.B.: What made it move so fast? When you think back to 1967, that's seven years, six or seven years ago.

Young: Well, it was ready, you see. What you had is, you had a steady buildup of a black middle class. I go all the way back to the founding of these predominantly black colleges across the South. In Atlanta, you had six of them that were about a hundred years old. You had produced a Nobel Peace Prize winner out of Atlanta, before you produced a mayor or a congressman. I mean, the political lid was on, but the talent was emerging. You produced scholars like W. E. B. DuBois, and John Hope Franklin. And Horace Mann Bond, Julian's father. I mean, the level of intellectual achievement in the South had been constantly rising, and it had expressed itself. I mean, you had a half dozen black millionaires in Atlanta in 1954. And you had a black bank, four black insurance companies, black savings and loans. You had a well-developed community that was denied a political opportunity. And once the law changed with the '65 Civil Rights Act, and the masses of blacks began voting, that leadership just began to express itself politically. And that was, it seems to me, the reason for the tremendous change in

such a hurry.

J.B.: Yet you had the same type of situation, up to a point, say in Durham. Smaller community, but still, relatively speaking, you had the large insurance company, you had the bank, you had the colleges, you've got a solid middle class. And you did have active political participation in Durham, but it didn't spread out. Was it because of the success of the blacks in Durham?

Young: Well, I think you were not surrounded by the hostile environment. I mean, the Klan was at our doorstep in Georgia. I mean, it was right there in Stone Mountain every Saturday night. Whereas the Klan was pretty far removed in North Carolina until just recently. I mean, you never heard much about the Klan until the late sixties in North Carolina. Whereas in the forties and fifties in Georgia, the Klan was rampant. And they would drive down the middle of the streets in the black community, shooting and stuff. That was as late as '44, '45.

J.B.: Is that all that explains such a rapid amount of change, social change, that occurs. If you come from the north, if you go down and look at it, it's really astounding that. . . .

Young: Another thing happened. I think you had genuine racists in Atlanta, who were nevertheless intelligent people, making no pretense of liberalism. And they knew they had a problem to deal with. In Ivan Allen's book, Notes on the Sixties, he tells a story which is extremely significant to me for that whole community. He says that when his father, who had established this big business, office supply company, and who had been president of the Chamber and everything, when Ivan Allen, Jr. took over as president of the Chamber of Commerce, part of his father's marching orders were, "Look, we've done a good job in

our generation. There's one problem we've ignored, though. And I suspect your generation will have to face that. That's the race problem." And he says it, you know, we've been side by side with blacks, yet we've acted like they didn't exist. We've never treated them right, you know. And I place a great stock in the kind of, say, the legacy one receives from his ancestors. And I think that Ivan Allen, because of that kind of charge from his father, was probably the figure in moving Atlanta's white community forward. Now, you also had another thing that Durham doesn't have, I think, and that is Coca Cola as a corporation doing business all over the world. And I've always sensed a kind of sophisticated internationalism amongst Coca Cola's executives, that you just don't find amongst the average southern businessman. They've been selling Coke all over Latin America, Africa, Asia. They've got bottling plants in Russia now. And they're extremely . . . that lent an extremely cosmopolitan power center to the Atlanta area. When Ivan Allen took his charge to the Chamber of Commerce and started talking about integrating Atlanta, you know, everybody was shocked. And he spells it out in his book. Everybody was shocked, until Mr. Woodrup of Coca Cola leaned over and whispered, "Ivan, you're right." And then it was voted unanimously, you know, just on the basis of three words from the president of Coca Cola. He had been to school with . . . I mean, he and the presidents of three of the five major banks had been high school buddies. And so when Ivan Allen and Coca Cola get together and decide that the white community needs to move, there's a personal tie with the power structure there, to make things move in the white community. At least on things like keeping schools open. In terms of facing up to integration of public accommodations. Of the acceptance

of black candidates. I mean, Ivan Allen's endorsement of my candidacy, that made it possible for me. . . . Otherwise, the business community would have been putting millions of dollars behind my opponent. They didn't really support me, but neither did they really support my opponent. They sort of played it both ways, really.

J.B.: First election, or second, or both?

Young: Almost both times. They were not against me the first time, either. I mean, I didn't think they were hostile, or really they just didn't consider me any particular threat the first time.

J.B.: That explains, perhaps the Atlanta situation. I think one thing that struck us . . . we interviewed John [Lewis] Louis the day after he came back from the Black Mayor's Conference. The question we asked him, because we wouldn't have thought five years ago (a) of a black mayor, (b) having a conference. It'd be enough to be having a conference. We raised the same question with him. How do you explain such a rapid change all over the South?

Young: Well, that's it. All of these guys, almost every one of them, is third generation middle class. Their parents and grandparents were college educated. They come from long lines of doctors and lawyers and businessmen. And they had been allowed to achieve in every other area but politics, see. And all of a sudden, the '65 Civil Rights Act broke down that political barrier. And it was like, you know, a rush of talent that had just been waiting, you know. That's the thing for young blacks to do now. Just like it was . . .

J.B.: You mean, getting active in politics?

Young: Oh, yes.

W.D.V.: Don't most of the blacks still need a significant amount of white support to get elected?

Young: Sure.

W.D.V.: Okay, how do you explain that? Where I come from, up in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, Detroit, no way could that happen.

Young: Well, that's because white people up there haven't realized they are racists. I mean, they haven't had to confront it. The white person in the South has lived with it and struggled with it all their lives, and to come to some intelligent point of view about life, they had to face up to the fact that their parents had taught them wrong, you know. The conflict, the burden of guilt, of learning something in church, of practicing another thing in your private life. In the South, people were close enough so that just about . . . well, a lot of people in leadership positions had been cared for by black women, where there was not just a servant relationship, but where it was somebody that worked with the family through long years, and they were probably more mother to the people than their own parents were. And you had a complicated set of personal relationships in the white community in the South, that made southern whites very, very guilty about the racial situation. And it seems to me that Martin Luther King's death was something of a turning point, of white people suddenly being willing to come around. I think a lot happened in white America that's never been recorded, in the wake of the death of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. It was almost as though . . . I sensed then that whites wanted to help, but didn't know how. And, of course, that was also the period when blacks began to express their hostility. And it was even more difficult. But in spite of all that, the tremendous white turnout for the Poor People's Campaign. We could not have brought poor people to Washington, had not we had help from white southerners all along the route. That mule train

leaving Mississippi had help from white southerners in just about every city we came to. And that was right straight on through Atlanta. They even went over to Savannah. The Bishop of Savannah . . . I mean the Roman Catholic Archbishop in Savannah and in Charleston provided them with food and shelter. I mean, they were not resources in the black community alone. And with the slightest invitation, the white community in the South was ready to move toward a new relationship with blacks. I sense that it could have gone either way. And the news media were not publicizing people like me. I mean, they were publicizing the folks that were saying, "Burn." You know, John Lewis was around, talking non-violence even back then, but nobody was listening to John. It was the Black Panther types, you know, the rhetorical revolutionaries, that had the mass media. And that's the impression most whites had of blacks. At the same time, the Richard Nixons and the Lester Maddoxes were playing to the fears of this same white southerner and white American. And nobody was giving them a vehicle to get out of their racist heritage. And I think when black politicians came along. . . . And one of the reasons I ran was that it seemed to me that if I could win in 1970, it would put an end to the Nixon southern strategy. Because I saw that southern strategy as really damaging everything that I had been working for. And instead of a New South, you'd get the old Dixiecrat South in Republican dress, coming back to the South.

J.B.: How do you define that southern strategy?

W.D.V.: Jack, I want to go back to a former point. He said that the in thing for young blacks now is politics?

Young: Yeah.

W.D.V.: Okay. In the north, to get elected as a black, you generally have to have a black constituency. You don't usually go much beyond that.

But what you're saying is down South it's possible to do that. Maybe this is an over-generalization, but is it more true in the South than in the north?

Young: Oh, very definitely.

W.D.V.: What does that mean for the future, then, say the next ten. . . .

Young: What it means is that the South has got a long jump ahead of the north in dealing with race.

W.D.V.: As it's manifested in politics, now?

Young: As it's manifested in every way. See, the north was separated geographically, while the South was separated legally. Now, once the legal barriers in the South came down, people were fairly comfortable together. It was amazing to me to see that happen. And we were in Saint Augustine when Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. And the very same hotel where our waitresses poured hot coffee on us, and where the manager poured acid on people trying to get in his swimming pool, and, I mean, just extremely violent reactions. Up to the thirtieth of June--the second of July Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The fifth of July we went back to that same restaurant, and those people were just wonderful. I mean, they were apologetic. They said, "We were just afraid of losing our businesses. We didn't want to be the only ones to be integrated. But if everybody's got to do it, we've been ready for it a long time ago. We're so glad the president signed this law and now we can be through with these troubles." And so you didn't have that possibility of immediate change in the north, because people are geographically separated; they don't know each other. You don't have the stable leadership patterns in the north. I mean, you had the three generations of Ivan Allens in Atlanta, and three generations of

Martin Luther Kings that have known each other. And Ivan Allen, Jr, who is the ex-mayor, is a friend of Martin Luther King, Sr. But Martin's grandfather was a Baptist preacher who was a good friend of the first Ivan Allen. And there are stable family ties. There's a stable leadership structure in the South, that moves things very rapidly, once people make up their minds. You don't have three generations of black leadership in any northern city. Well, Charley Diggs comes close, but he's second generation.

W.D.V.: Charley is a-typical.

Young: Yeah.

W.D.V.: Would you suggest in the next ten years that there are going to be more elections of blacks in the South?

Young: Yeah.

W.D.V.: Than in other regions of the country?

Young: Well, I'm not sure. I think that there will be more elections of blacks from white majorities in the South than in the north.

W.D.V.: Why?

Young: These same reasons, you know, that. . . . I mean, it's a nice symbol of freedom, to be able to go into a voting booth and vote for a black man. You know, when all your life you've been hung up on such questions as would you want your daughter to marry a Negro, or would you want your children bussed to a school across town. I mean, the whole society is burdening you with questions which, no matter how you respond to them, they can't help but have some kind of burdening effect on your own moral self-image. And one way of getting free of that is to say, "Look, here's a good guy. He's probably just as good if not better. I'm going to vote for him, and that convinces me that I'm capable of over-coming some of this racism of my past, and make me feel a little

more like the kind of person I want to be."

J.B.: You ever had anybody actually ever tell you that?

Young: No.

J.B.: You just sense it?

Young: Yes. That's my own . . . just like white folk have always analyzed Negroes. And I'm just taking the privilege.

W.D.V.: I think someone suggested that it goes beyond that a little bit. That by electing a black, he's going to be more responsive particularly to lower middle class and middle class kinds of needs. Human needs.

J.B.: That's part of Howard Lee's theory.

Young: Yes, I would agree with that, that the white intellectual. . . .

J.B.: He's not talking about the white intellectual.

W.D.V.: He's talking about the middle class, lower middle class.

Young: I haven't found that. . . . Well, I'm just beginning to get into that. I mean, like last week, week-end before last, there was an area that had flooded. There was a flash flood across the north side of Atlanta. They had contacted every public official, you know, every elected official in the area, from the governor on down. And when they contacted our office, you know, somebody went out there and made a study of it, and they brought me out there just to walk through the area. And people were just ecstatic. No other elected official has ever come out there to see a lot of us.

J.B.: This was what type of residential area?

Young: This was . . . actually, I guess you'd have to call that middle class.

J.B.: White?

Young: Yes. It's surrounded by upper class. I mean, it's one little

valley of 20,000, 30,000 dollar homes, that were built in the flood plain. And up on the hills around are the 100,000 dollar homes. Now, if the 100,000 dollar homes were in trouble, the officials would have been out there. Well, maybe not.

W.D.V.: Howard's hypothesis--maybe this is the wrong town to compare it with--is that if anybody understands governmental oppression, or governmental inaction or unresponsiveness, it would be blacks. And therefore this, you know, tends to be kind of a class thing.

Young: I don't sense that yet. I mean, I really wish I could. We didn't get the support from the labor unions. We got the support at the top, but we didn't . . . I'm not sure we got the actual vote from the labor unions that we should have gotten.

J.B.: Your constituency then, basically, is still the old Atlanta coalition.

Young: That's right. The difference is that instead of electing a white liberal, they elected a black.

J.B.: How is the coalition now working in Atlanta? There was sort of a thesis that it had shifted, during the mayor's race.

Young: Well, I don't think so. I think Sam was just a difficult person.

J.B.: His first campaign, I mean, not the second one.

Young: I mean, even then, he didn't get along with anybody. The business community thought that he was not getting along with them, and that he was anti-business. He appointed me chairman of the Community Relations Commission, and I think I talked to him three times in two years. And mostly at my instigation, you know. I mean, he was just a loner that didn't get along well with people. And I think it's a

mistake to make assumptions about the coalition, because of the way he responded. That coalition was his, you know, had he wanted to develop it.

J.B.: All right, how about Maynard?

Young: I think Maynard has . . . I mean, the coalition now is very much intact again.

J.B.:

Young: Yeah. There are a couple of guys, though. . . . One difference between this coalition and the old coalition is that there are now black businessmen who sit with the white businessmen before they come to the politicians. Before, it used to be the white businessmen getting together, and then they would come to a meeting with the black politicians, who were usually poor and sort of tied to them out of economic necessity. And a guy like Jesse Hill, president of Atlanta Life Insurance Company, is probably as influential in all that's happened in Atlanta as any other person, including Ivan Allen, Ralph McGill, Martin Luther King. And he's almost completely unknown, but as effective a behind the scenes operator as you'd ever meet anywhere. I mean, he did the work that John Wesley Dobbs left undone in voter registration, through the All Citizens Voter Registration Committee. He was the one that helped to get the restaurants integrated. There's just been those kind of people.

J.B.: Does the black financial community--if I may use that term--provide funds for black politicians, for voter registration, for candidates?

Young: Most of it's been done through outside foundations. And the black power structure will provide, say, like. . . . All the people who work for Atlanta Life Insurance Company, they will probably produce

fifty deputy registrars. The bank will probably produce twenty-five. The school-teaching beaurocracy will deputize certain schoolteachers in each school. So that you have a pool of people that are contributed from the black community. But the money actually comes from other sources. And truthfully, we've done probably just as well almost without money as we have with money, on short term. . . . I mean, we've done better on the kind of six-week drive, emphasizing volunteer activity, than we have on some of the long term things that have been funded.

W.D.V.: Can you tell me a little bit about relationships within Congress? I mean, you can't talk about a black caucus from the South, but suppose ten years from now or twenty years from now there are a significant number of black congressmen. Do you see any problems with working with any of the black congressmen from the north, or what used to be the liberal congressmen, white liberals, from the north ?

Young: No, I don't think. I think caucuses of all types are very important in this body. And I think people accept the fact that every member of the Black Caucus is also a member of his state caucus. I mean, I'm a member of the Georgia caucus, the Black Caucus, the Democratic Study Group. I go to prayer breakfasts. I mean, that's my contact with a lot of the really arch-Republican conservatives. And it's an important contact for me, to get to know those guys and know how they think, and let them get to know me. Those are the guys that swing when you need a vote or two. If you can change one of those, it means something. And you can. I mean, we've had a number of people switch on a given vote from time to time. Just out of personal friendship. When I was trying to get a thing passed on Portugal, in

relationship to Angola and foreign assistance, I mean, nobody in the liberal caucus or the black caucus could have helped me. It would have almost been the kiss of death for me to go to one of them for help. But John Buchanan, conservative Republican from Birmingham, Alabama, agreed to help. And it was because he agreed to help that we got some extra votes that got it passed. And I think that Congress will always have caucuses, but there will always be a tendency to reach out beyond those and not ever be limited. You just don't have ironclad power blocs around here.

J.B.: How important do you view renewal or extinction of the Voting Rights Act, if it comes back up in '75? How significant is that going to be?

Young: It's going to be very significant, because I'm still subject to the Georgia legislature. And it might be possible for them to . . . well, as they tried to do. See, they drew the original district line one block behind my house. And they would have put me out of Atlanta and down in the district with Noonan, Georgia and Griffin, Georgia. And I could not have. . . . Well, I maybe could win down there, but it'd be much more difficult.

J.B.: You say it went a block behind your house by coincidence or by design?

Young: Well, I mean, by drawing it that way, you cut me and Maynard and a whole category of eligible candidates out and put them in other districts. And there was no question in my mind but that it was deliberate. In fact, we made the case in court, and the federal court agreed with us. And without that review provision in the '65 Civil Rights Act, I think we'd be in trouble, in holding on to these

gains. I think you have another thing, though, in that Jimmy Carter n and the Georgia legislature are pushing postcard registration. If that passes, then there'll be a mixture of motives there. One is that blacks are voting in large numbers anyway. And so politicians are realizing that some of the difficulties just in terms of locations and the silence about politics and political choices that were used to discriminate against blacks, is now discriminating against white farmers and people. So they're trying to make it easier for whites to register too now, since they've decided that blacks are going to register anyway. I think what they're going to find--and I don't think Jimmy Carter minds this--is that the rural white voter. . . .That's where I do believe with what Howard Lee is saying, that I think in the next few years, you're going to see a lot of associations between blacks and whites at a class level. And it's going to come out of people getting the kind of service out of black politicians that they've never gotten from white politicians. I mean, the white congressmen in Georgia, in my district, have tended to serve the big business interests. Whereas we took on a case of a lady, social security, and got her $8,600 back social security. And the check was delivered the week before Christmas. And I never knew what color she was, because her address was not clearly defined, you know, in terms of one racial neighborhood or the other. And it wasn't until after it was all over that I discovered she was white. But everybody in her community knows that the black congressman delivered when nobody else had. And Maynard is going to do a good job, simply because. . . . And I think anybody elected to public office now, coming out of the rise of citizen participation and people's movements and public interest politics, is just going to be better than people were, you

know, even good people, were five years ago. I mean, the issues are raised in so many different ways, that you just have to be more responsive to the people. Because people are more demanding of their political leadership now.

W.D.V.: That's the kind of response or thesis we hear from freshmen, or congressmen just elected in the last four years. You get a completely different kind of response when you talk to somebody who's been here fifteen or twenty years.

Young: They won't be here next time around. I mean, you come back after the next election, and I'll be here. But, I mean, you look at the people who are not running again, and they are these old guys that have lived by certain privileges, and with a certain anonymity. And now the public is smoking hot.

/_End of Interview_/