

This is an interview with State Representative Bobby Hill, conducted in Savannah, Georgia on May 3, 1974 by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries. Transcribed by Sarah Geer.

Jack Bass: What's your background? Did you grow up in Savannah?

Bobby Hill: No, Athens really. Went to high school up in Athens and came down here to go to school at Savannah State and finished there and went up to Washington to Howard Law School.

J.B.: You finished law school when?

Hill: '66.

J.B.: And then came back here to practice?

Hill: Yeah.

J.B.: And when did you run for the legislature?

Hill: Practiced law in New York for a year with the Legal Defense Fund, so it was '67. Ran in '68.

J.B.: And got elected that year? So you served three terms?

Hill: Yeah.

J.B.: And. . . . Were you involved in civil rights activity before you went to Howard?

Hill: Yes, I was the Youth Field Secretary, or director or whatever they called it, at the time, for the Legal. . . for the NAACP in seven states, seven, southern region, was included [as] far as North Carolina.

J.B.: What were the seven states?

Hill: Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama. . . what's that?

J.B.: Would you evaluate, you know, just your own view on the strength of the NAACP in those seven states?

Hill: See, it was at that time. . . . We also had Tennessee, yeah. It was the only firmly organized group with a structure, with a serious filtering in process for information, at that time. And the strength of the various chapters from city to city varied. Go up to Durham you found a strong chapter. You go to Dyersburg you'd find a weak chapter. You go to. . . . Savannah had a strong chapter, Atlanta had a strong chapter.

J.B.: How about statewide? In those states?

Hill: The statewide organization was very loosely knit. It had a state conference of branches.

J.B.: Right.

Hill: And there's no authority that much vested in the president of the state conference except to be a sort of a conduit for information coming from the various branches up to the national office. It was no strength in that regard. I think it depended almost on every chapter, and it was. . . . Also, each chapter had its own way of going and I think what we learned was that there was a structure to respond, of course, to a given crisis. For example, in Monroe, Covington, Social Circle area, there was a very weak branch, but it worked when a crisis came. They had curfews enacted by the mayor and council. . . .

J.B.: What state was this?

Hill: This was in Georgia. Covington, Monroe, that area. Walton County.

There was the NAACP and then people gravitated to the NAACP because the structure existed, although it was very weak. And it was an excellent way to respond to the crisis when it developed. That is sort of my analysis of it in terms of its strength, but it varied from city to city and from crisis to crisis. But it was always there to respond to the civil rights interests of the people who were in the communities.

J.B.: I thought in South Carolina they were just by far. . . well, they were the single statewide black organization.

Hill: Right, right.

J.B.: And were very strong politically in South Carolina even if. . . the same people at least. I mean, they would switch caps and adjourn an NAACP meeting and convene the Clarendon County Citizen's Committee on whatever it might be for the legal purposes.

Hill: I worked extensively over there in South Carolina. My experience there was that at least one example. South Carolina and Florida had the best, probably, statewide organization, and that was personality oriented, because I. D. Quincey Newman and Mat Perry held together a sort of a statewide organization. And Newman, of course, was the state field director and was doing an excellent job with the state organization, that it made sense. That did not exist in Tennessee. Tennessee's was centered around Memphis because the strong people were in Memphis. So that it was a good deal of difference, in those two states.

J.B.: How about in Florida?

Hill: Florida, as I suggested, also had a good strong statewide organization, primarily because Father Gibson - again, personalities was the

whole thing - was such a dominant figure and had time to travel throughout the state. And that sort of made the difference in keeping it together as a state organization.

J.B.: Who is he?

Hill: Father Gibson.

J.B.: Is he still active?

Hill: I don't know if he is or not. He had a big falling-out with the NAACP on at least one occasion and they. . . . The branches. . . two branches in Dade. . . over in Jacksonville and the branch in Miami are very strong. And they rose to sort of a statewide eminence and they sort of. . . . The presidents in those two cities purported to speak for the entire state, and it gave some semblance of a strong statewide organization. In fact, it worked out that way. I mean, when they had problems in Live Oak, Lake City, areas like that, the president from Jacksonville, of the branch, and the president from Miami felt an obligation and did, in fact, go to those places to aid the tobacco pullers and so forth. So they did have sort of a tightly knit. . . .

J.B.: When did you decide to run for the legislature?

Hill: Oh, let me see. I was up in New York in '67 and the local NAACP chapter realized that it was about time to. . . that the votes were getting ripe to elect blacks to the state legislature and as county commissioner. And they were looking for. . . on a candidate search, sort of. I was one of the persons called from. And [they] sort of put the names [Forward and] needed somebody that was qualified and had identities with the civil rights movement and who had been. . .

who likewise had appeal, because the districts were going to come out black, maybe 60 per cent black and 40 per cent white at the time, so you had to have a candidate search. You almost had to package a candidate. And I came down. I was already intending to come back here and practice law, and they knew that. So I came down and I was sort of their choice of that group, that time.

J.B.: It was basically the local NAACP group?

Hill: Well, it's a two-hat thing again. It was the NAACP Political Advisory Council, which is a separate organization. But, again, it's a sort of a two-hat thing. The NAACP had to avoid politics, as it were, for tax purposes, so you had another organization heading by an attorney, Gasden, Eugene Gasden, who is still, in fact, head of it. That's sort of the way it was done.

J.B.: And what did you. . . . Had you been interested before that in running for office? I mean, was that any sort of [long range] goal?

Hill: In the recesses, yeah. In the recesses of my mind, I had always been interested in politics, had always run for almost everything in school and so forth. You know how that is. And so, as to identifying the particular office, no.

J.B.: When you came back to Savannah, was that the time when the Republicans were really moving in strong in the area and winning offices statewide?

Hill: I think that's right, yeah.

J.B.: Well, what sort of Democratic party is there now in Chatham County?

Hill: The. . . . Well, the party is a non-party. It's a party in name. It has no function whatsoever except to qualify the candidates.

A lot of people who purport to be Democrats are very chagrined that. . . and are searching for something. I've had several people call me and say, "Why don't we firmly organize the party?" But the. . . "I want to be a Georgia Democrat" syndrome split the party up so bad that nobody wanted to be clearly identified with the party. You remember that, don't you? Some of that's still around, that they were really not knowing where they wanted to gravitate. Whether they wanted to go to Republican or. . . . Had a lot of switch overs and so forth, so rather than be firmly identified with the party, that great majority of the people say, "I'm a Georgia Democrat" and so it sort of washed out the possibility of firm organization along Democratic party lines.

J.B.: Well, is that changing?

Hill: I don't think so. I think that the unpopularity of the Republican party on the national level probably is changing that some, or at least will. There is no firm evidence of it here now in terms of organization. It may be the mental attitude of a lot of people in the. . . who are Democrats to be a little more forthright in saying that they are Democrats,. . . to assure that they are not known as Republicans. But other than that, I don't think there's anything going on.

J.B.: What sort of coalition is there here? Political coalition among Democrats?

Hill: I don't understand.

J.B.: Well, all right. You had a. . . there was a Republican congressman here, right? A few years ago?

Hill: No, we had a Republican mayor.

J.B.: I thought it was a Republican congressman.

Hill: No. No, we had Eliot Hagan for six years down here.

J.B.: Okay, I'm sorry. I was under. . . I don't know why I was under that impression that there was a Republican congressman.

Hill: No, we had a Republican mayor that made a lot of splash. First time in maybe a hundred years, something like that.

J.B.: Is there any sort of. . . your district is what per cent black?

Hill: 99 per cent, now. It started off, I guess, 60-40 black it vastly drifted to. . . .

J.B.: Have the boundaries changed or has the population shifted?

Hill: Population shift, a recent boundary change, probably put some more whites. . . . The recent re-apportionment bill we just had approved probably put a couple thousand whites in it. We represent. . . well, we have in each district some 25,000 people. I think that's about right. And I don't know, I guess we put, in the last re-apportionment we took in some parts of Garden City, which is pretty white. I don't know what the count is.

J.B.: Do you see any change. . . or what changes do you see in the way white politicians in Georgia are relating to blacks?

Hill: Oh, there's a fantastic change since the time I was first elected. They are aware that blacks are registering and voting and that blacks almost uniformly vote the same way. Now, that's not altogether true, and I think that won't prove true in the governor's race. But at least whites think that blacks vote a solid block. In view of that thought, they seek out the black vote and respond to it. Sam Nunn, who ran as a. . . ran a racist campaign, has got blacks on his staff, sought out advice from black communities. Congressman Ginn, who's got a

district that's 39 - 36 to 39 per cent black, the First Congressional District out here, has blacks on his staff, seeks out advice, talks to black groups often.

J.B.: How about his voting record?

Hill: Voting record is responsive in many, many ways to the needs of blacks. He voted, for example, for the minimum wage bill. He voted for the amendment to include the domestic workers in it. I think that. . . . He told me very recently in a letter that he was voting to extend the OEO program. So I think that that's really. . . . The thing we just said about him, it's probably a profile of all of these congressional representatives in Georgia now who've got some blacks in their districts.

J.B.: Is that including Nunn? Is Nunn voting along those same lines?

Hill: No. Nunn is going to have a peculiar record. Again, because he's running statewide it's a little different. Blacks don't want to coalesce around him as fast. Also, he's trying to keep a. . . . It's obvious what kind of image he's trying to portray. He's trying to, not to part company too far from the kind of campaign he ran, which was extremely racist. But I have a different kind of insight. I served with him for four years on the Judiciary Committee up in the house. And I know him personally and I know him to. . . not to be what his public image would reflect. I'll put it that way. Not that that means anything when you go to the polls affecting people, but I think when the chips are down on an issue, I think we can count on him.

J.B.: How do you feel about, you know, a candidate like Nunn. I assume

on the basis of what you've said that he uses race as a political issue because he feels it's necessary. Is that correct?

Hill: Yeah.

J.B.: What's you. . . . How do you feel about that?

Hill: Well, that makes for a hypocrite and it also makes for a hypocritical kind of analysis, which you have to give. And if you know the guy personally, you know that you've had unstrained relationships with him. And I know that when we close the door and get in a smoke-filled room that we can count on him. I know that for a fact. And I also know that he's got to win for us to. . . . And so I understand that.

J.B.: How about on an issue like the Voting Rights Act, when it comes up for renewal next year? What do you think Georgia congressmen are going to do on that?

Hill: I think that if we take Beau Ginn's record, I think that the reasonable indication is that he'll go with us. When you take Sam, I'm sure he will equivocate. I think that we can expect his vote in the last analysis. I think he'll probably beat his gums about it, try to explain it away, but I think he'll vote.

J.B.: Who's the congressman from the Augusta area?

Hill: I don't know. I don't know go in that direction.

J.B.: That would be from Athens to.

Hill: Would it? Just goes to show you how detached I am from an old home town. I don't know. I don't know. (Interruption in recording.)

J.B.: the congressmen in that district get a lot of mail from the black elected officials in that district. He's on the house Education

Committee, subcommittee. I think it's the bill to extend OEO.

Hill: Right.

J.B.: And he wrote back a letter saying he was working to get it out of committee and support it overwhelmingly, and this is a guy who in the past has sort of been a traditional conservative. Do you see black elected officials on the state level, in effect, serving a broker role between their black constituency and the congressional delegation?

Hill: Oh, no question about it. There is a structure to achieve that. . .

J.B.: The Georgia BEO?

Hill: That, and the Black Caucus works very closely out of Washington. The congressional Black Caucus, with our legislative Black Caucus in the state house.

J.B.: What sort of connection, relationship, is it? I mean, how is it established?

Hill: It is established in that we have notified the congressional caucus that we exist as a caucus of fourteen members of the house and that we welcome exchanging information as well as serving in that sort of. . . as you put it, a brokerage function. If you've got something up there on the hill where we can get the ball rolling on the grassroots level, then we'll do it. Typical is the thing you're talking about. In fact, what we did on this end, right from here, again, was to. . . I first wrote him a letter rather definitively setting forth what I thought (Interruption in conversation.) . . . what I thought he ought to vote to extend OEO through '77 under Augustus Hawkins' resolution. And I also wrote the other black elected official.

as well as people I thought were influential, and asked them to write him. So. . . but the emphasis for that came from the Black Caucus.

I had correspondence with Walt ~~Fenroy~~ ^{Fauntroy} and we work that way.

J.B.: So is there. . . . Does the Black Elected Officials Association also have this relationship with the congressional Black Caucus. . . .

Hill: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

J.B.: But the legislative Black Caucus, which serve as, in effect, serve as liaison between the Black Elected Officials Association and the congressional Black Caucus. . .

Hill: Right, right.

J.B.: Does that in fact do that?

Hill: Right.

J.B.: The impression I have from talking to several people is that the Black Elected Officials Association, the Association of Black Elected Officials, is fairly effective.

Hill: Oh, no. I. . . .

J.B.: Or has the potential to be fairly effective.

Hill: It sure has.

J.B.: But the response I've gotten from people I've talked to has been generally positive, from people who are members.

Hill: Well, I just don't know. I have attended very few of the meetings because I've been busy, but I know it has the potential of being a real potent force.

J.B.: Are there any others in the South that you know of, on a statewide basis?

Hill: I don't know. You might ask Ben Brown. Of course, he told me, I

guess a couple of months ago, that there was an effort afoot to. . . to establish something along the lines of it in Mississippi and Alabama. I'm fairly sure that it's already been established in Alabama. The problem with it was, in the other states, you didn't have that many black elected officials on the state house level, where it, you know, could carry a little weight. But we did. We always had nine or ten here. So that's what made it easier.

J.B.: In most of the other states now it's growing because of the single-member districts.

Hill: Right.

J.B.: Louisiana went from one to eight, I think, in the house. And with eight you've got a nucleus there.

Hill: That's right. In fact, I was down. . . see how fast I forget. I went down to Louisiana, to New Orleans, to establish one for the crowd in Louisiana. Sure did.

J.B.: On the state level?

Hill: Yeah. Johnny Jones headed it up, I think. And a woman.

J.B.: I know who you mean, I just can't think of her name. The. . . . In Louisiana they just passed this new Constitution, you know. One of the strongest bill of rights you'll find in any state constitution in the country. A state representative from Shreveport, black state representative, was chairman of that subcommittee on the constitutional convention.

Hill: Correct.

J.B.: Alphonse Jackson. Guaranteed a right of counsel, I mean, this sort of stuff, written into the state constitution. (Interruption for

phone call.) Do you detect any problem, or how serious a problem, of apathy among blacks in terms of voter registration and turnout?

Hill: Put that ~~g~~again.

J.B.: Do you detect any problem with apathy among the blacks generally in Georgia?

Hill: No more than anybody else. There's an apathetic thread which runs through everybody, and *[it applies]* to politics probably now more than ever before. But I don't know that it is any more pronounced in the black community than anywhere else. General apathy is there.

J.B.: *[Is it]* because of Watergate.

Hill: Because of Watergate and the nonproductivity of political folk. That's it.

J.B.: This was the question. Is there any sense of apathy among people who. . . they registered and they voted and found nothing happened, and it's supposed to. . . it's sort of been a goal to get to, that once you've voted, things are supposed to change. And they just haven't felt that change in their personal lives.

Hill: I don't think that. That day is not that far around the corner. I don't think it happened yet. I think it's just that. . . a personal example is that my constituency does not expect any great, great change to be brought about because of my presence in the state legislature. Because they know I'm in a great minority up there. And so they don't expect me to turn it around overnight. And so I think if you enlarge that kind of analysis you get the result that nobody expected that it was going to be an overnight thing because they turned out to vote. Again, there were notable gains in that there was an increase in black

elected officials, and they. . . there was an increase in the attention that black people got from white politicians. So that's a gain which is noticeable. Although it may not affect one's housing conditions directly or put money in your pocket. And blacks realize that, well, the guy who's running for mayor now comes down outside of town and eats chitterlings or whatever, it'll help them be served. So that I think that the kind of thing you're suggesting in terms of apathy born out of nonproductivity I don't think has come. I think it's around the corner, though, because the next level of appreciation for politics is what am I getting out of it. You know, after you get used to the guy coming down to the community, and you get used to having black elected officials, then you've got to perform more substantive things, and that's where the disappointment will come. But it's not there yet.

J.B.: How about in terms of programmatic results in the legislature? What can you point to that's come about as a result of blacks being in the legislature? In terms of substantive legislation as opposed to symbolic. . . things of symbolic significance.

Hill: In Georgia, where we've got fourteen up there out of 180 - I think that's right, or close - that's a pretty good block of votes. And the big gain we. . . great purpose we serve up there is that we're able to block legislation which negatively affects black people and poor people. Typical is the sales tax increase. Sales tax is most regressive, as you well know, more than any kind. We, in effect, almost take single-handed credit for blocking the increase in the sales tax for the state. For the last four years it's been tried and tried and tried

and they lose it time and time again by eight votes. We blocked the gasoline tax, which was a one cent tax, two cents, on gasoline, which affects people who absolutely must use the car to get back and forth to work, and that's a big bite out of a small income. We passed the - just last term - Residential Finance Agency, which is a state [housing agency], which, over the long haul, will provide a hundred million dollars worth of financing for low income families. That passed by about three or four votes. We've been able to clean up and stall, halt legislation, wild kinds of legislation, which affect the criminal laws, much of which was designed to capture poor people and black people, right in the Judiciary Committee where three of us sit out of some fourteen. We've been able in many instances to keep legislation in a committee where we are six of thirty, and we've been able to halt some of the teacher evaluation legislation which was designed to wash out black teachers after integration. Some of the silly kinds of busing legislation which has come up in the house. The castration for rape legislation, we've been able to halt. So, it's that kind of thing that I see as significant. We passed, for example, by a slim margin last term, a state OEO, vetoed by the governor, albeit. Which was extremely significant.

J.B.: Why'd he veto it?

Hill: OH, he didn't have any reason. I don't. . . .

J.B.: How do you evaluate the governor?

Hill: I think he's been a good governor overall and a poor politician in many instances, and as a result he's frustrated himself some of the things he wanted to do which I think would have been good. But he just

mishandled it.

J.B.: Can you give any, you know, specific examples of how he . . . poor politics cost him something?

Hill: He had in his mind, and had told us as much, that in his re-organization plan, for example, he wanted to overhaul the merit system to insure that more blacks were in state government. Our situation with blacks in state government is pitiful. He sincerely wanted to do something about that. He's hampered by the state merit system. In an attempt to overhaul it, he asked the wrong people to sponsor the legislation. He sent kids up from the governor's office to politic for it. Unpolitic ways of dealing with. . . .

J.B.: Does he lack an effective legislative liaison representative, from his office?

Hill: Oh, yeah. No question about it.

J.B.: Does he have somebody designated for that job?

Hill: Until this year he didn't. He found out how crucial it was. And even then it was done with a great disavowal that he was doing it. We all knew who his man was, and he denied it. Just wasn't good politics. He committed many political errors, had a kid to scribble a note from the governor's office and put it on everybody's desk. He'd sign the governor's signature to it. We all knew it wasn't his signature. Little things like that, just hurt him and hurt significant measures which I had reason to believe that he sincerely wanted passed.

J.B.: Is. . . Has that been a significant factor, just the fact that he has not had effective people as liaison between his office and the legislature?

Hill: Sure.

J.B.: How do you evaluate the role that Rita Samuels has played?

Hill: (Long pause.) What's the word? I don't think she has had. . . the word's probably not authority. I don't think that her leash has been long enough. All right? (Laughter.) I'll leave it at that.

J.B.: Okay. How significant do you rate the hanging of the Martin Luther King portrait in the capitol?

Hill: I think it's symbolic of the government's recognition of Dr. King's ideas, his cause. I don't. . . . It's that kind of thing that I don't place any great credence in personally. I understand its worth, but, you know, you're dead, you're done and I just like to see, when something substantive corresponds to that. And the fear that I have is when you do something symbolic like that that, particularly when it's that - when it's Dr. King and it's that significant in the minds of black people, that it gives room to obscure significant gains, when you make such a splash of it. But you can't oppose it. You just have to add that that's not enough for now, and that it's important for a moment and that's it.

J.B.: How much did Lester Maddox hurt or help himself politically with his attack on that?

Hill: I don't know.

J.B.: How about among blacks?

Hill: Well, I do hope he didn't have any strength among blacks at all anyway.

J.B.: Well, but that one poll taken last fall in Atlanta showed him with something like a 35 per cent approval rating among blacks.

Hill: I don't believe that for one second.

J.B.: Head to head race with Gambrell, getting about 25 per cent of the vote.

Hill: I discount it. Don't believe it. Maybe my door is closed, but I don't believe it.

J.B.: Well, the reason for whatever appeal he has ahas been explained to us in terms of some blacks perceive now that he's at least being honest in his views. Who think that most of the other whites have the same views but don't express them. And two, that during his administration, more blacks were brought into state government than ever before.

Hill: I don't know that that. . . . We've got a lot of . . . you know, that's what the educational system did. Segregated educational system deprived black people of a decent education, obscured their perception. . . . Graham Jackson is meaningless to me as. . . on the Board of Corrections as a piano player from Pittypat's porch. That wasn't significant at all. Graham Jackson who and then put a cracker up there. So that's the kind of people he's drawing in, so it's insignificant that they were black to me. And it should have been to intelligent blacks. So, you know, I'm sure that they're some people. . . . He could count up his people and most of the people he brought in there were worthless in terms of being significant forces to help black folks. Now, that does not take away from the fact that we have to recognize the percentage of people who think that was worthwhile and that're going to vote for him. I think that if the story is told clearly and cleanly then those people could be

enlightened and they would back off in the support that they might have for Lester. That's what I feel. So in light of having candidates in the race who I hope will articulate that at the proper time, and I think they'll wash out any black support that he has. Because it's got to be surface support. Lester is still Lester. Lester is still ignorant. So Lester can't run state government. Lester. . . . I served in the legislature while Lester was up there, and his notions about legislation were all wet. He never got them through the legislature. We had great fun and laughed at his legislation while it went down the drain, so it wasn't helping the state. (Interruption for phone call.)

J.B.: Why is there no black candidate in the governor's race this year?

Hill: Oh, I don't know. I don't know.

J.B.: I just. . . . My question really was, was that any sort of a strategic decision or is it something that just happened? Was it ever discussed as strategy?

Hill: Well, now, no. We aren't. . . we're not. . . nobody speaks for us anymore. That was a tragedy, the only tragedy Dr. King ever committed, you know. Speaking for all black folk in America. Nobody speaks for black folk generally any more. (Interruption for phone call.) See, that. . . even when there was a black in the race for governor, that did not have the unanimous approval of all black folk, when C. B. got in, and that was. . . that was probably as fortunate
un-
in some directions as it was/fortunate in others and for

nation except that nobody has emerged who wanted to run, apparently, and nobody's running. We couldn't stop any black if he or she wanted to run, and there's no statewide organization to make those kinds of determinations.

J.B.: Do you anticipate there may develop any. . . . Am I correct there is nothing like a Democratic black caucus in Georgia?

Hill: Yeah. I don't think that there. . . I know that there is not such a thing now. I don't think that there is any serious possibility of that happening. And. . . and. . . and I say facetiously that we've arrived. What I mean is that blacks in different communities are making their own decisions about how. . . what their politics are all about, what their. . . . Savannah is Savannah and Atlanta is Atlanta. I've got some interests which differ distinctly from the blacks in Atlanta, and I push that particular cause. And if the candidate in the race is leaning toward those interests which I think affect black people and my constituency, I could give a tinker's damn what black folk in Atlanta think. I think the port is significant to the blacks down here. I turn to the candidate that's more interested in the port than a candidate that's more interested in a World Congress in Atlanta. And we got to head to head battle on that issue. So I think that that kind of fragmentation is fresh and it's round here to stay. It will only be by accident now that blacks all agree on the same candidate.

J.B.: Well, I wasn't thinking so much necessarily of agreeing on the same candidate, but just meeting on some sort of basis in general

policy matters and discussing, just discussing politics in general. Would the Black Elected Officials Association be the nearest thing to a statewide black political organization?

Hill: Yeah. Yeah. And it does that and I think that some of the discussion which is now going on speaks of at least trying to draw out what issues we can have a common bond on.

J.B.: What kind of issues are being discussed at the meetings? I talked to McIntyre and I didn't really ask him that question.

Hill: I wish Edward would have answered it because he knows far better than I what we did back over in Augusta, I believe. We tried to set up an agenda which would address itself broadly to all of those issues affecting poor black. . . poor people and black people, you know. Housing, jobs, discrimination in state government, appointments into state posts and the like. And what I think was concluded was that we wanted to know from all candidates how they felt on these issues, some significant issues. 'Cause I don't think, personally, that there is any one of the candidates who's ever going to get a lock on the black vote. 'Cause they're not saying. . . . What they're saying is just not that much different.

J.B.: Then there's no racial issue. Blacks are going to split up on other issues. Is that basically it?

Hill: Right. Right.

J.B.: They're just going to vote like anybody else is going to vote.

Hill: That's right.

J.B.: I think that's sort of a pattern. Is there any active coalition

between blacks and organized labor in the Savannah area, and statewide?

Hill: Yeah. Don't hold me to this too closely. The problem is, when you asked that question, I began to look at. . . directly scale a guess to see how closely knit you really expect that. There's a traditional sort of alliance between blacks and labor. We've had, if nothing more, good rapport with labor. And labor's interests, i.e., jobs and the like, i.e. getting rid of the right to work law, has overlapped with the interests of black people. And that is also sort of accidental. Because it's an interest, well, it's going to issue over into things, so that it's not tightly knit. It's not a fixation. I mean, we don't. . . I don't think that blacks feel unalterably wedded, somehow, to labor. But that loosely knit kind of coalition is there, and we talk to each other and we discuss those things to the extent that I think when the chips are down that the votes come out about the same way. (Interruption on recording. Side two.)

J.B.: In South Carolina, the state Democratic party tried to define it, you come up with basically a coalition of blacks, organized labor (such as it is), courthouse Democrats - courthouse-City Hall Democrats, and the top level of the business and financial community. Is that basically true in Georgia? The impression I have is that it is.

Hill: That's right. I don't think you could better define it. I think that's it. I think that's it.

J.B.: Then in effect, it becomes a modernizing force.

Hill: Yeah.

J.B.: The top level of the business and financial community interested

in modernization for other reasons. I don't know how to define "modernizing," but basically economic modernization is part of it. But it encompasses much more than that. Encompasses education and encompasses transportation. Really encompasses the system of justice. Somewhere down the line it's going to have to do something on the tax structure. It may split at that point, but not necessarily.

Am I correct on that?

Hill: I think so. Yeah.

J.B.: Do you see tax reform emerging as an issue in the, say, in the next five years?

Hill: Well, it's happened. Well, it's happened. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

It's happened. In our legislature, we have parted company - I say we, I mean the blacks and some of our liberal friends - on the tax issue. We depart company when it gets to the sales tax, all right?

I think that, as I told - it's very interesting. Sales tax is the biggest money raiser. I think that although it's regressive that where I can be assured that. . . there's a bending over backward to assure me the benefits of that new revenue, that I'll vote to increase that tax although I know it's regressive. And although it strikes harder at my constituency. But where I know a corresponding benefit of that coming out. Now, I think that's the value of having the business community and the blacks, poor, all in the same organization, where we can work that out. 'Cause I could compromise that somehow. Or they could compromise it somehow. So, if you think you're right that we could not only get tax reform, but we could get some significant

compromises, even with the present kind of tax structure, by having these. . . what on the surface should be warring forces - together in the same party.

J.B.: What it evolves into eventually, is sort of a politics of consensus.

Hill: Yeah. Right. That's right.

J.B.: And I've just been struck with Georgia. . . it resembles to me very much South Carolina in that regard. How effective is the urban caucus in the legislature?

Hill: Very effective. Very effective.

J.B.: What kinds of issues do blacks and Republicans get together on?

Hill: Oh, I don't know. I haven't given it much thought. I haven't given it any thought. The Republicans are not. . . .

J.B.: Most of them are members of the urban caucus, aren't they?

How significant in whatever cooperation there is, when there is cooperation between those two groups. . . how significant is it that Mike Egan is the Republican minority leader?

Hill: I don't know. I don't agree with Mike on too many things, so I don't know. We. . . . It's significant that we are there together in the urban caucus to hammer out some things, not that. . . .

J.B.: You usually agree on re-apportionment, right?

Hill: Yeah. I guess we do. We split on the tax issue in the urban caucus. 'Cause blacks departed company with the urban caucus on the tax thing. Those urban folk were for that sales tax. Their whole thing is, "Let's get some more money." So we departed company there. I don't

know what else is different. We agreed on some notions of judicial reform, I guess.

J.B.: How about election laws?

Hill: We all agreed on some liberalization of the election laws.

Mail. . . postcard registration, keeping the polls open later.

J.B.: Postcard registration was approved this year?

Hill: No.

J.B.: But the urban coalition approved it? The Republicans went along with that?

Hill: Right. They're just like blacks. They were looking for more votes, right? (Interruption for phone call.)

J.B.: [Just a] bit more about your own background that I meant to get before. What did your parents do in Athens?

Hill: My father's a baker, and my mother's a housewife. He's always been a baker up there at Benson. Still is.

J.B.: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Hill: I have one brother and two sisters. My brother is. . . my sisters are older than I am, my brother is five years younger.

J.B.: And are you the only one who's politically active?

Hill: As far as I know. My sister's out in Seattle. I think she's pretty active, but I don't know.

J.B.: Is there anything we haven't talked about that you wanted to comment on now, just to give some insight?

(End of interview.)