

FB 49A

SUB: Bobbie Hunter

INT: "Button Project"

PLACE: Eatonville

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JF

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B: The first group of questions here are asked to find out how well the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has helped blacks take part in Florida politics. What year did you first register to vote in?

H: Oh hell, it's been such a long time, I think it was '60, probably around '60 anyway, here in Florida.

B: Okay, what year were you first eligible to vote?

H: Eighteen, at the age of (18), so that'll be er, that'll be '52.

B: Okay, how long have you lived in Eatonville?

H: I've lived in Eatonville approximately (13) years.

B: Where'd you live before that?

H: I was in the military, Air Force.

B: Okay, did local registrars ever turn you down when you applied to register?

H: No.

B: Have voter registration drives been held in Eatonville?

H: Yes.

B: When were these drives in?

H: Well, we have a group here now that's not only for the municipality of Eatonville, but getting peoples out who are registered to vote throughout the uh, president's election, and to register to vote. And I think it's been real helpful, and we've had a lot of people to turn out to vote. And we got a lot of 'em registered that normally wasn't, I'll say at least (25) per cent of the people now in

H: Eatonville that were not registered, ~~and~~ voter, has ~~to~~ register.
and this,

B: Okay, *and this,* this is in the last year?

H: I'll say within the last four years.

B: Last four years. were there any drives before that?

H: I'm quite sure there were. I ~~wouldn't~~ *wouldn't* *uh, not* right in Eatonville in that particular time because I was in the military, and I came back here in ~~19~~72. So I'm quite sure there were, now how effective they was I don't know.

B: Alright, were there any uh major, organizations involved in these drives?

H: No, just the citizens themselves.

B: Okay, any local groups?

H: We have one of the local groups we call the Citizens for Better Government, which is headed by, I believe, Miss Filmore, that's one of the workers around here.

B: Are there any things which prevent blacks or, well Eatonville is all blacks, so are there, are there any things which prevent people in Eatonville from registering to vote?

H: None that I know of.

B: Okay, these are, we have a list of factors *here* that have traditionally in studies been found to prevent people from registering to vote, particularly to prevent blacks from registering to vote. Now while Eatonville doesn't have any whites in it, many people do work outside the town. Therefore, would *you* rate these factors as being very important, fairly important, or not important in preventing blacks from registering? The first being economic dependance on whites, do you think this has been important?

H: In keeping them from registering?

B: Yes.

H; No, I don't think so.

B: Okay, what about fear of physical violence from whites?

H: No, *I* don't think so.

B: What about complicated registration forms?

H: For some of the elderly citizen, I believe this would be a problem for their educational background. But uh ~~say~~ ^{it's a} complication in the form, uh here in Eatonville we do have people to assist them and to help them understand what they are doing to register, so I don't think that's a problem.

B: So you would say that that is?

H: No, I don't think it's a problem.

B: Okay, what about poor registration hours, hours that are set up so that the hours are held when people are working or something like that?

H: Well this could be ^a hampered there within itself because as you know, just like you say, the majority of the people in Eatonville are working out of town, and our I think the, well our city hall is open from eight to five. Most of the people have gone to work before, and uh before it's open, and get back home after it's closed. But I do think that, I don't know if this could be considered a major problem there, because I feel that if anyone who wanted to bad enough they could really get out and sacrifice a little time to register.

B: So you would say that this is not important, fairly important?

H: No, I would say fairly, I wouldn't solely say it's important.

B: What about registration not being held often enough?

H: I can't, I don't quite remember the dates now which the books are open, but uh this could be a problem. I, I would be, I wouldn't dare say ~~it's~~ ^{it's, it's that} ~~is fairly~~ important because I do think they have ample time to register. ~~Of course~~ ^{So,} I do think the books are open.

B: So is that fairly important or not important?

H: No, I don't think it's important.

B: Okay, what about indifference of blacks to voting? ? in other words, they have the feeling that uh what good is it going to do them to vote, what difference will it make?

H: Well you do have some that think that in this term, but I would say the majority of the registered voters doesn't feel that way, so I don't think that's important.

B: What about the people who aren't registered to vote, would they be less likely to go down and vote because of this, and if so how important would this be?

H: Well in talking ~~with~~^{to} some of the people that are not registered that I have talked to during the past two years I believe, there have been some that would, has a negative attitude towards ~~say~~^{that}, "my vote is not going to count." So I try to tell 'em you know, well maybe that one vote that you do cast ~~it'd~~ be the deciding factor. ~~but nevertheless~~[≡], some do have a negative attitude, and they just won't vote, won't register rather, because ~~they's~~^{there's, ya know}, they say well I've gone this far, or this long without registering, why do it now? Some do have that attitude.

B: How often ~~is~~^{is} reregistration required?

H: I'm pretty sure ~~my~~^{sir}, well, my understanding is that so long as you vote in a major election, ~~your~~^{that} voting registration stays active.

B: Does dis-, oh we don't have to worry about that here. ~~were~~[≡] you able to campaign freely, that is, during ~~the~~^{your} campaign, were you threatened in any way?

H: No.

B: How many times did you run?

H: Once.

B: Once, and you are now serving?

H: Yes.

B: Okay. Um were you handicapped by a lack of campaign money?

H: Well this is a small neighborhood here, and ~~for the~~^{as far as the} city of Eatonville is concerned, and everyone just about know each other, so as far as campaign money is concerned, this is, wasn't an _____ at all.

B: Okay, ~~how~~² how much did you spend in your campaign?

H: Really, to tell you the truth, I didn't spend anything. I did have some friends that we all chipped in and had a party or celebration after ~~myself~~, but as far as uh, well

H: let me take that back, I think it was ^{twelve dollars} ~~was~~ to have some brochures printed, uh flyers. I believe that's what they spent on it.

B: Why did you decide to run for office?

H: Well I had a lot of my uh friends and neighbors wanted me to run, because of the, our government was almost in chaos. We did have a little conflict here with the uh, between the mayor and some of the city officials, and most of the citizens felt that the bickering that was going on would not help the town, ~~and~~ ⁱⁿ which it did not help the town. The, they never could get anything really done or passed because of uh, there were certain people that had the majority votes on there, and they was pretty close together, And they was after one man in particular the mayor. So the people just had got tired of this type of uh bickering among the city council.

B: Okay. Which political party do you belong to?

H: Democrat.

B: What were, when you ran, what were the two or three most important issues that you stressed in your campaign?

H: One was the uh. . . issue was on our sanitation department. We, we did not have, the people were not getting what they really was paying for in sanitation-wise, picking up their garbage, trash etc. This was one of the big issues there. And of course, just like you say, this is a small town and everyone knew the bickering that was going on so that didn't need to stressed there at all. And better government for the people, in Deciding what was right for them and to help Eatonville to move along economy-wise.

B: Do you think these issues were the biggest problems facing the people in Eatonville?

H: Yes.

B: Okay, ^{you're} ~~you were~~ elected at large, right?

H: Yes.

B: How many people are in Eatonville? ~~?~~

H: I would say ~~22,000~~ ^{twenty-two, twenty-two thousand.} No, no I'm sorry. ~~(talking together)~~ ^{B: Not-- twenty-two hundred, yeah.}

~~I'm sorry~~ H: Yeah, twenty-two hundred, I'm sorry.

B: What percentage of the people of voting age in Eatonville are registered to vote?

H: I would say pretty close to (75) percent of them.

B: And what percentage of those who are registered to vote do you estimate actually voted when you were elected?

H: I would say (50) per cent.

B: Okay, um, in your, in the election, in the campaign, how many opponents did you have?

H: One.

B: What percentage of the total vote did you get?

H: I would say (98) per cent.

B: That's quite a percentage. What ways do you think that you have been able to help the people in Eatonville by holding office, what sort of things have you been able to do?

H: Well I've uh, like I stated in my campaign speech, was to get them better service in the sanitation department, and there's been uh things that were. . . ^{passed,} ~~past~~ were supposed to be passed, that we had issue ~~on~~ ^{as} on and ^{as} far as the city government was concerned ^{of} getting money into the community, getting grants, etcetera, we had a staff, we formed a staff to do that and also with the recreation department. There were a good tennis program in recreation, and we established the summer food program, that the uh, we had aid from the uh, ~~the~~ CETA--not CETA, the people ^{working} ~~work on~~ out of CETA and some of the other organization there. And we had, we are now upgrading our water system in Eatonville, 'cause the sewer system was in before ^{And uh....} I took office. ^ Oh one thing that I did do was uh, whether it helped them or not, it did cut down down on our, on our expenditures was going to curbside pickup for the garbage department.

B: What, if anything, has prevented you from doing a better job?

H: The only thing that has prevented us from doing a better job is the lack of revenue, ^{here in Eatonville.}

B: We have a list of factors here which have in the past prevented elected officials from doing a better job. And I'd like you to rate these each as to whether or not it's very important, fairly important, or not important in preventing you from doing your job. The first factor is that the office has no real authority, in other words that you're just a figurehead and it looks good but you really can't do anything.

H: That's not important.

B: Okay, what about, you said not enough revenue available was important, would you say it's very important, or fairly important?

H: Very important.

B: Was being unfamiliar with your administrative duties important in this?

H: Uh, would you, uh. . .

B: Important in preventing, in preventing you from doing your job?

H: I would say uh, I would have to rate that with this, in the, oh in between there as fairly important.

B: What about lack of cooperation from whites in the area, in the towns surrounding yours, something of that nature?

H: No, I don't think that's important.

B: Lack of cooperation from the people here in Eatonville, has this been a . . . ?

H: This is very important. We don't have the cooperation that we really need as far as the citizen's participation is concerned, if that's what you mean.

B: Um hum.

H: So I would say that's very important.

B: And what about lack of cooperation from state officials?

H: I'll rate that fairly important.

B: And finally, lack of cooperation from federal officials?

H: I would say fairly important on that because, the reason why I'm saying fairly

H: important, because uh there are some grants and some other things that we could get here that we are not, don't have the personnel right now to seek these things out for us. I think that as far as the federal is concerned, because we do get information, but uh they should, I do believe that they should make known all the grants or loans or whatever that can be helpful to Eatonville. I think that's what we are lacking there, ~~communication~~ ^{wise}.

B: You mentioned that lack of support from the citizens has hindered you a little bit in holding office. Can you give us some specific examples of how this criticism has prevented you from doing a better job, or how this lack of support is. . . ?

H: I wouldn't say it prevented me from doing a better job, It sure would help the ~~community~~ ^{community-wise as far as} if we had more citizens participating in our council meeting, come up and let us know what they want. We'll make a decision here, and they'll only be five or six people out there. And instead of them coming forward and letting us know, even though that the decision rests upon our judgement, but we would like to know that this is what they want.

B: When you go to conferences or when you apply for grants, or have dealings with white officials, do you think that they treat you differently from other officials because you are black? Do they see you as a spokesman for blacks ~~and~~ ^{of} racial issues?

H: Well that'd be very hard for me to kind of answer that because there have been very few meetings ~~that~~ I've been to, been able to attend, because as you know this is not a full time job here, and I do have a job with the state, and so this has hindered me a lot from going to ~~the~~ a lot of even the local meetings that they have here.

B: What services, you mentioned ^{several} already, but what services have you provided the people in Eatonville that they didn't have before you took office?

H: There isn't any, I can't think of any right now that they didn't have. Maybe it's been improved, but the service was already here, that we got so far.

B: Which ones were you particularly . . . ?

H: I'm speaking of the uh, well I spoke of recreation; It was here but we have improved that. I spoke of upgrading our water system. We are now in the progress, in phases of doing that, and for the garbage, refuse disposal; that was here, but it has been uh, I think the people now are getting what they are paying for. And also ^{as far as} ~~for~~ the reading of ^{the} water meters and things, I think they're, you're going to get people griping regardless, You're not going to be able to please everyone, but I think they're more satisfied now to know that the meters have, the meters that was broken has been fixed, and they're not getting flat-rated, most of the people are not getting flat-rated now.

B: Okay, could you please rate how effective you think you've been in each of the following service areas; very effective, somewhat effective, or not effective. The first area is police protection.

H: I think we've been very effective.

B: What specifically have you been able to do?

H: Well uh, when you speak of police protection, we have ^{uh,} I forget how many are on our staff right now, 'cause we had to cut back ^{of} our budget, so uh, but we do have trained policeman here, which the state requires now ^{that they do uh,} ~~we~~ have went through a police academy. And uh, well we uh, ^{the} communication that we have now in a city, communication, and they have cars, which is very helpful for them, and which they can at any given time that something is probably too much for the policeman on duty, he can always get in touch with the other cities to render help. So this is very good.

B: Okay, in the area of streets and roads, how effective have you been?

H: Well that's one of our major problems. ^{We've,} I'd say (95) percent of our streets are dirt roads here in Eatonville. Of course we did start a, we did have a company that would come in and grade our streets, but ^{the} ~~to~~ lack of funds ^{had} now we ~~have~~ to cut that out, but we do have a grader now which we are hiring a man to grade

H: our streets. But like ^I say, the rainy season was in and most our streets ^{was} ~~were~~ torn up pretty bad, but I think with a little help with the grader we got now, it's going to see a big change, and put in a little bit more drainage system, we got a problem here too.

B: Okay, in the area of housing?

H: Well, as far as housing is concerned there's only a few houses been built in Eatonville recently. As you know most of our land, well ^{are new, well are} ~~is~~ owned by the school board, and this one of our reasons why we doesn't have ^{vast} ~~fast~~ growth of houses here in Eatonville.

B: Okay, in the area of welfare, social services, uh say ^{informing} ~~appointing~~ people ^{of} ~~to~~ these services or seeing to the provision of these services, how effective have you been?

H: Well I would say I haven't been effective in that at all, because the thing about it, ^{well} ~~we did~~ ^{have,} at one time we did have the Orange County was sending their bus out here, and 'course I had told a lot people that the buses were there but whether they went to sign up for these things I don't know. I didn't follow up on it.

B: Well this was a mobile welfare registration ~~unit~~?

H: Right, uh huh, ^{yes}.

B: In the area of employment, what have you been able to do, how effective?

H: I would say, . . . what was the middle one again?

B: Somewhat effective.

H: Somewhat effective in that. (talking together) We did have, well we had the ^{CETA} ~~SEPA~~ people, uh 'cause uh, and we also had uh, I believe it was (27) employees from the, here in Eatonville at that time. We got other jobs on the city, but as I say, here, lately our funds have been cut off so we did have to lay back some people. But now we are getting a little bit out of the red, and we are hiring people back now.

B: You mentioned recreational facilities earlier, how effective do you think you've been in the area of parks and recreation?

H: I would say for the plan that we got ~~off~~^{on}, for what we have planned now, I say very, very effective.

B: Very effective. In the area of health and hospitals, how effective do you think you've been in provision of say ambulance service, or medical services?

H: I haven't been effective in that at all.

B: What about in the areas of water, sewage, and garbage?

H: Very effective.

B: And in the area of education?

H: Somewhat effective.

B: What have you been able to do in that area?

H: Well ^{we uh,} we do have the uh child uh, day care down here for the ^{it,} you know, ^{the} kindergarten, and of course I ~~was~~ belong to an organization which we donated some money to that, to the kindergarten.

B: What about in the area of fire protection?

H: WE've been, when I say we, I'm speaking of the whole town, now, we've been very effective in that, as far as fire protection is concerned.

B: ~~End result?~~ And yourself?

H: Yes, I'm a volunteer fireman.

B: Have you gotten federal funds in here now besides that, you mentioned the ~~SEI~~^{CETA,} and you have revenue sharing, right?

H: Umhum.

B: How much revenue sharing do you get?

H: I don't know that figure right off hand.

B: Could you list some of the more important federal grants, and maybe some of the amounts?

H: Not right off hand I couldn't, because uh . . .

B: Okay. Have you as a elected official or ^{as} part of a local committee or anything like that, been able to bring any new business, retail outlets, or industry, or anything like that into Eatonville?

B: What is it used for?

H: Mostly it's used to uh support the town, I would say, in the employment etc. and also the upkeep of our fire station, of which we have volunteer fireman at that particular time, ^{salaries} ~~salary~~ for the employees.

B: Have there been any black protests or sit-ins, boycotts, or riots here in Eatonville in the last say ten years?

H: None that I know of.

B: Okay, the following group of questions are asked just to get a general assessment of black politics in Florida in general. What is your opinion of Gov. Askew?

H: Well, I voted for him so I do have a high ~~amount of~~ respect for him.

B: Has he done anything in particular that's impressed you?

H: Well there's numbers of things that he's done that has been impressive to me. ~~and~~ just right off the cuff right now, I can't, just ~~to~~ go back and sum 'em up.

B: Are there any other state officials, members of the state legislature or congressman that have particularly impressed you?

H: One is my very favorite which is, we're in different parties and that's uh, Congressman Frey, Lou Frey.

B: This is sort of the key question here; do you think that winning and holding office here in Eatonville has been worth the effort?

H: Yes, definitely.

B: Why do you think so?

H: Well because, for one, ~~for~~ one thing, we have improved on our staff, the council, in getting the town headed back in the right direction. What I mean by the right direction, instead of a lot of the bickering that was going on, and getting back to the city business, tending to the city business instead of just being uh, trying to more or less upseat one man. So I think by me being elected that we have, we got more peace and harmony now among the council members, and also we have more time to really ^{in, look} look at Eatonville as a whole and see what can we do to embetter it.

H: No.

B: Have there been efforts to do this?

H: Well, yes. I've uh, I didn't quite follow it up because I, the people that I talked to at that particular time said that, well the land use here is, we don't have in order to do this, and uh, I talked to one of the salesman for Mobile Gas, and At that time they ~~were~~ ^{were} not build a new stations or any stations anywhere, so I quite follow up on that one.

B: Have there been any new businesses open up?

H: Well there've been businesses open up with the existing uh, ~~what to say~~ ^{what's that} with the existing . . . buildings that were here. We have the uh, the fish hut, is a new business that opened up, ^{which} ~~they~~ sell fish, fish market. And the Johnson, well we have the laundrymat, it's a new building, another store. I would say about oh, two, oh let's just say new owners. The only new business would, I would say, would be the fish hut and the laundrymat.

B: How long ago did the fish hut open up?

H: I would say about a year, about a year or so ago.

B: Have you been able to see that the city hiring practices are fair, they're just based on qualifications and . . . ?

H: Qualifications is the major, the major issue in the cities.

B: Have you had anything with city ^{hiring} practicing practices at all, have you done anything about . . . ?

H: Well, yes, when I first was ^{in,} on the, came on the council board, and as far as the hiring of sanitation workers, and also some of the employees in the city of Eatonville. I've interviewed some, and we based it on experience, qualification.

B: How has federal revenue sharing helped you in Eatonville?

H: Well, as you know, we don't have a great deal of revenue of our own coming in, and so this has helped it tremendously.

B: These questions now are asked to compile just an overall group profile of black elected officials in Florida. No individual answers are going to be reported, we just want to have a composite. Now you're a commissioner, you're not a district or anything like that. ^{H: No. B: Or} ~~no~~ they no longer have titles like streets commissioner, ~~or~~ anything like that?

H: No.

B: Okay, you were first elected in ?

H: May of ~~no~~ ^{seventy....seventy two?} I'm sorry, May of '74, '74.

B: And you took office that month?

H: Yes. I said May, I'm sorry it's March.

B: ~~you've run~~ ^{you've run} for office one time?

H: Yes.

B: Do you mind my asking your age?

H: No, not at all, I'm (41).

B: ~~All right.~~ ^{Okay} What is your occupation before you were elected and now, what is your occupation?

H: Okay before I was elected I was in the military as an aerial photography, in the Air Force. I'm retired Air Force, (20) years. My occupation in now is the, I'm an investigator for Florida Construction Industry Licensing Board, for the state of Florida.

B: What's the level of your education?

H: I finished the eleventh grade. I have a GED.

B: A GED?

H: Yes.

B: What's, what's?

H: It's a test that is taken in the Air Force to give me a high school uh

B: Equivalent?

H: Equivalency ^{of} ~~in~~ high school education.

B: What is the salary that you get from your elected position?

H: ^{A hundred dollars} ~~100~~ a month.

B: Were you active in the civil rights movement of the early sixties?

H: No. Let me ask you this, what you mean by active, did I take part in it?

B: Did you take part in any of it, did you support it, did you ever go out ~~to~~ and talk to people about it?

H: No I didn't but I fully supported it by being a member of the NAACP.

B: Are you, what church do you belong to?

H: Methodist, St. Lawrence _____ Church.

B: That's your home town right?

H: Um hum.

B: Are you an official in the church?

H: No, not now. I have been.

B: What were you?

H: I had about five or six titles. First of all I was the uh, I was on the trustee board, the secretary of trustee board, president of _____ board and the church recorder and reporter.

B: Okay, that's quite a list. Are there any other community organizations or activities that you're involved in? Are you still in the NAACP?

H: Well there's other community, if you're speaking of any other organizations, is this what you're asking me?

B: Yeah, and then also on the local level, are there any that you are . . . ?

H: Yes, well I'm a member of the uh, William Ever Lodge no. 32, which I'm the Worthy Master of, this is masonic. I'm a member of the Royal Arts, which is the, in Winter Park, ~~this~~ this is also masonic. The Shriners, the _____ ~~of~~ which is ^{the} 32nd degree mason, and uh . . .

B: You have, you're, you're a 32nd degree mason?

H: Yes. And I'm just recently joined the Toastmaster's, ^{out in uh,} ~~and~~ the Pathfinders at the Naval Base.

B: What was your father's occupation?

H: My father was the foreman of ^a ~~the~~ city ice company in Lawrence, South Carolina.

B: What effects have running for, are you married?

H: Yes, *yes*.

B: Do you have children?

H: Yes.

B: What effects have running for and holding office had on you and your family, and your family life, and your social life?

H: Well I would say that as far as the kids are concerned, it's been very inspiring ~~to~~ ^{uh} them. But ~~it~~ also has the hamper of, along with the other organizations that I'm with or in, I do be away from home quite a lot. So this do have a little effect but not that, not that much.

B: What other organization now specifically are you referring to?

H: Well my masonic . . .

B: Right. Okay, let me see, there's one more thing. What do you think is the biggest detriment to blacks gaining political power in the state of Florida? the biggest factor that would not allow them to do this?

H: I really can't think of any, not really. Because my belief ^{of this} ~~is~~ in, if he's qualified; ^{the} ~~the~~ qualification is ^{the} ~~one~~, I would say qualification. And of course at uh, well getting the blacks to support him, getting behind him and supporting him, and I believe he could run for any office in the state of Florida and become elected to that office.

B: What about detriments say to, as opposed to an individual man running, as opposed to blacks in general gaining more political power, having more clout?

H: You're not speaking, you said not individual . . .

B: ^{Just the,} Yeah, the black people in general in Florida. What do you think, do you think there are any things that tend to keep them from exerting more political power, and getting more policy favorable to their specific and special needs passed?

H: I can't think of any.

B: Okay. At the University of Florida we have a thing called the Oral History Project.

What this project does, is they take tapes of people around the state, and they transcribe them and keep them in the archives for scholars and professors to go look at ~~them that are~~ ^{when they're} doing research studies. They're not a matter of public record or anything like that. In many cases the black elected officials that we're talking to ^{in our study} are the first ones elected since reconstruction after the Civil War. In other cases they're just first ones interviewed in those areas. The Oral History Project has expressed an interest in, after we are through with the tapes, they would like to take them and transcribe them. After this, what they'll do is they'll send you a copy of the transcript, and you can edit it. ^{ya know} you can change it, you can add to it, you can take things out. And then they'd like you to release it, you can not, you can decide at that time, you can say, "no I don't want to release it." It would _____ tapes are erased and the whole thing is forgotten. You can say, "yes, I want to release it," or you can say, "I'll release part of it," to be put in the archives. Would you have any objection ~~#~~ to having a transcript made, and having it sent to you for your approval?

H: No.

B: Do you think you'd have any objection to releasing part of it or . . . ?

H: No, I don't think I ^{would} have any objections.

B: Okay, thank you very much.

H: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]