

SUB: Claude Brooks

INT: Button Project

PLACE: Crystal River

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jf

I: This is July 30, Wednesday. This interview will be conducted in Crystal River. I am with Claude Brooks, councilman of Crystal River. Thank you.

I: Good morning Mr. Brooks. The following questions are asked, to find out how well the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has helped blacks take part in Florida politics. My first question: What year did you first register to vote?

B: Oh now that would be way back. I was ^{one} the first ones, well I, as far as I can remember, when I came home I reregistered to vote in 1945.

I: About 1945. Was that the first year that you were eligible to vote also?

B: Oh no, no. I was old enough and eligible to vote but I don't remember voting, registering to vote.

I: Right, okay. How were you registered, ^{were you,} did you just go into register, or was it through local registration board?

B: No, I just went in and registered Democrat.

I: Right. You-- right. ^{You} we didn't need any federal examiners at that time. Did the local registrations ever turn you down when you applied to register?

B: No.

I: Have you, have voter registration drives been held in the district in which you hold office? Did they ever use the drive to get the black people to get out there and vote?

B: Yes. Some time ago, about . . .
^{was that sixties}

I: ~~A~~ Late ~~1960s~~ possibly?

B: Somehow like that. We had a drive and was trying to get people down to the polls

B: to ~~vote~~, register to vote

I: Yeah, we're talking now primarily black people.

B: That's who I'm talking about. It wasn't a problem that they couldn't vote or register, it was a matter of just getting them interested enough to go to the polls and register to vote.

I: Right, ^{I see.} Now how successful were these voter drives?

B: I think they were very successful, successful, because we, we got a lot of people to go to the polls to register.

I: Now this was before '60 or let's say '60 to '64?

B: This would have been in the ^{sixties.} '60s. I can't pinpoint quite what.

I: All right, around the sixties then, okay. Are there any things which prevent blacks from registering in your district?

B: No.

I: No, I don't think so. How would you rate the importance of the following items in preventing blacks from registering. But I don't think there's anything that really prevents them, except possibly indifference. *What do you think?*

B: It doesn't ^{prevent} blacks and chicanos as far as registering that I know and can think about it.

I: Well right, but if they have no interest.

B: Well, this, this is own personal feelings.

I: Right, right. How about poor registration hours? how do you . . .

B: You can register anytime, because they keep the books open everyday at the county seat all the time. Now there are certain days right ^{here} in the city that you have the books open. I don't remember just offhand what days it is.

I: All right section B. I'm going to turn it off for a second to make sure I have everything on here.

(Pause in tape)

I: Continuing ^{with} our interview, section B. The following questions are asked to gather

- I: information on the election campaigns of black elected officials in Florida. Were you able to campaign freely, that is, were you threatened in any way in your campaign?
- B: No I wasn't threatened in any way.
- I: You ~~have~~^{know}, some of these questions you know, they all, all of them are going to be answered throughout the whole state. So where we may not have any problems in Citrus, some of the parts of the state are going to have problems. Were you handicapped by a lack of campaign money or not?
- B: No.
- I: No, you had enough money?
- B: I furnished my campaign money myself.
- I: Why did you decide to run for office?
- B: First of all, it was the challenge, and I was interested because I believe a black man on the city council, and any other voter as far as that is concerned in Citrus County, is helpful to black as well as white and whatever. I just think a black person in office is good for the community.
- I: Then it was your own decision?
- B: Right.
- I: Were you selected by a political party at all?
- B: No. No.
- I: No. And was it . . .
- B: I was on my own all the way.
- I: On your own all the way. To which political organization do you belong?
- B: Democrat.
- I: What were the two or three most important issues? well, I think you just answered that question very well. Do you think ~~there~~^{there are} issues, these issues were main problems facing blacks in your community? Well, I think you answered that more or less too. Okay, well section C. These questions are asked to determine some of the conditions

I: which have enabled blacks to win office in Florida. How were you elected, were you elected at large or by district?

B: When I first ^{was running} ~~run~~ for city council, there were three seats available, and they ran on the highest, the first three ~~highest votes~~ with the highest votes will be elected. And I come in second with the highest amount of votes. Now since that time we've changed and ~~they run at the seats,~~ ^{their running for seats.}

I: All right. So now, the seats that you're referring to ^{are what} ~~you,~~ we refer to as districts. In other words, you could have somebody come in, but as long as they live in your district, run against you.

B: Well, ^{now,} Crystal River is not set up on districts. Yet, the council is set up on seats, seats one through five.

I: Right.

B: But you don't have a certain district to represent, you're still representing the entire Crystal River.

I: Oh I see, then actually anybody from let's say, from the plantation area could run for your seat.

B: Right, right.

I: Okay. Do you know how many people are in your district ^{or} ~~or~~ seat?

B: Well as I just said, we don't have any.

I: Yeah right. What percentage of the population, well it's hard to say this, what percentage of the population in your district is black, but I don't think that we're referring to that. We've, ~~we're first either~~ ^{we're first either} about what percentage, about what percentage of blacks of voting age in this area are registered to vote?

B: Oh, it would be very, very low. I 'd say five per cent of blacks, ^{are registered to vote.}

I: About what percentage of the blacks who are registered to vote, do you estimate actually vote when you are elected?

B: Well, I'd say approximately two thirds of the people, ^{voted.}

I: Two thirds. Do you think you got any votes from the whites?

B: I had to or I wouldn't have been elected anything without the white votes.

I: That's exactly the same way with the whites. In the election in which you ~~were~~^{won} ~~the~~ office, how many opponents did you have?

B: Well, the first time when I was elected about ten years ago, as I said, the first three high voters _____ was elected. Now since then, I've only had opposition once, and I've been in office now coming into ten years this December, only had opposition once.

I: Was that a black or white man?

B: White man.

I: What percentage of the total vote do you think you get? You have to get over fifty- per cent, right?

B: I have to get over fifty per cent in order to _____.

I: Now you could you make a guess, like possibly seventy-five per cent, eighty per cent?

B: Well this one time that I had an opponent, I got better than ninety per cent of the votes.

I: Section D; these questions are asked to determine how well black officials in Florida have been able to benefit those they represent. In what ways do you think you have helped blacks in your district by holding office?

B: Now I think I've helped black as well as white. My, my policy, I don't represent one people in particular. I represent all the people in Crystal River. And it doesn't matter to me whether ~~you're~~^{they're} white, black or what.

I: What, if anything, has prevented you from doing a better job, especially in regarding benefits, benefiting blacks in this area?

B: I don't think any, I don't know of anything that has hindered me from doing a better job. I've, did just about as good a job as could be done I believe, because in the black section we have good paved streets, we have street lights, and everybody's treated fairly, black and white. I'm chairman now, chairman of the city council. I've been vice-chairman for three years. I'm chairman

B: of the police department, I'm chairman of the cemetery department, and if people have problem they usually call me, it doesn't matter whether they're white or black. I usually work, I always try to work with all of 'em.

I: The next question, twenty-two, has several parts to it. Please rate how important you think the following items are in preventing you, which I don't ^{they are,} ~~figure out,~~ from doing a better job benefiting blacks. In other words does the office have, does the office have no real authority?

B: That's not important I don't think.

I: Outvoted by white officials, are you, is that important, fairly important or not important?

B: I don't think it's important.

I: Not enough, not enough revenue available? Is there enough revenue available?

B: To operate the city?

I: Well let's say for preventing you from doing a better job benefiting . . .

B: The people ?

I: Well the blacks.

B: I don't think there's ever enough money, no there's never enough money for anybody.

I: I think that question is self-explanatory. You are familiar with administrative duties?

B: Um hum.

I: Lack of coop, you have, you have the cooperation from the whites?

B: Yes, I believe so.

I: How about the lack of cooperation from state officials?

B: I do have the cooperation.

I: Do have it. How about lack of cooperation from federal officials?

B: ^{We} I do have that also.

I: ^{You} ~~do~~ have that also. Has criticism or lack of support from the black community

I: hindered you in holding office, [?] that is, do some blacks not cooperate with you because they believe you're only a token in government and have no real authority?

B: I don't have any problem.

I: Do you feel that white officials treat you differently from other officials or not, [?] that is, do they consider you the spokesman for the blacks, and are you able to raise only certain issues?

B: I raise any issue that comes before me. There's no limitation on me because I am black.

I: What services have you provided blacks in your district, in your area, [?] I keep, the, the questions they have district but I'll just cross them out and put area there because we're not concerned with the districts as much as the whole area right now. So what services have you provided blacks in your area that they did not have before you took office? Could you please give some examples?

B: The one person that has been _____ we do have a black patrolman, and we have had one, just come about since I've been on the city council.

I: Right.

B: We have a black man heading up the maintenance department, but this was going on before I took office. We do have a black man that heads up the sanitary department, but he was working before I become ^{the} city councilman.

I: Yes, I noticed, ~~_____~~

B: So honestly, I don't think we have any problem. We do have ^{our} minor problems which you always will have 'em because you're the minority, but nothing that sticks out.

I: Right. Okay, question twenty-six comes in several parts. It's a general overall type question. It says please rate how you feel each of the following, how you have, please rate how effective you think you have been in each of the following service areas. I have a form here and we can rate that later.

I: Twenty-seven, have you gotten federal funds for your area?

B: Yes, we have gotten federal funds for water and sewage. Now when you say your area, I want to point out this wasn't for ~~us~~ ^{is for} the entire city of Crystal River _____.

I: Have you, as an elected official or as part of a local committee, been able to bring industry or retail stores into your area?

B: Retail stores and some industry have come in Crystal River since I've been in office. I wouldn't want to leave the Chamber of Commerce ^{out on that} because they have been just as effective on that ~~as~~ as we have.

I: Right, well this is primarily a sportsman type area anyway. Have you been able to see that blacks are hired fairly, fairly in local government?

B: This is something that I have been continually working on, and I think, according to percentage, I think it's been fair.

I: Has federal revenue sharing helped your district or area?

B: Oh definitely because the manpower, our hope was, as far as helping out with the city employment, maintenance, and police department.

I: Have there been any black protests, sit-ins, boycotts or riots in your city in the last ten years?

B: No.

I: Okay, section E, I'm gonna turn it off again just to check and see that I've been doing it right.

(Pause in tape)

I: Section E, ^{the} following questions are asked, are asked to enable the assessment of black politics in Florida in general. Briefly, briefly what is your opinion of (Gov) Reubin Askew, [?] that is, do you think he has been favorable in attitude and policy towards blacks in Florida or not, and what is your opinion of other state officials and state representatives?

B: I think Gov. Askew, Reubin Askew is a fine governor.

I: And uh, what of, what of the other, black, what of the other state officials and state representatives?

B: I think they're doing the best they can. We have some that perhaps did not come up as well as they should, but I think they're doing a fair job.

I: Do you think that winning and holding office in Florida has been worth the effort? Could you please explain your answer?

B: Now you're talking about me?

I: Yes sir.

B: Yes, I think it has been beneficial. It has been beneficial in many ways. I've been good for the city of Crystal River for black and white. One thing we have proven to the people, that a black man can work and have the ability to take care and work with problems. This is one thing that I take great pride in proving to the people, that black people do have the ability to work with people.

I: Thank you very much. The other questions in section A to E are questions which relate to you, and are similar to all the questions that are being asked by the other black officials in Florida. But section F now, will have no, no type of relationship, in other words they're just general questions that nobody will have a name to.. And these questions are asked to compile an overall group profile of black elected officials in Florida. No individual answers will be reported. Type of office held?

B: President of city council.

I: The date first elected?

B: Oh, our election is in December. I don't remember the exact date but it, it's in December, along about the first of December we hold elections.

I: What was the date that you first were elected?

B: For the city council?

I: Yes.

B: Oh this was back in '65, in December.

I: And uh, that was in December '65, and the date that you took office?

B: We take office the first of the year, like January 1, whatever time that the first council meeting comes due in the coming year.

I: I think this one's coming in better. The number of times that you've run for office?

B: We run every two years, so I have ran already four times, this coming up will be the fifth time. Now, as I said, I only had opposition once since I've been elected.

I: You are between thirty and forty-nine or fifty and above?

B: Fifty and above. (chuckle)

I: Your occupation before the election?

B: I was in the building business for myself, self-employed.

I: And your education, are you grade school, high school, or completed college?

B: High school.

I: Salaries received from your elected position?

B: Now it's three hundred dollars a month.

I: Were you active in civil rights movements of the ^{sixties} ~~sixties~~ to '66?

B: No, I've never been active in the civil rights movement.

I: Can I have the name of the church to which you belong?

B: Mount Olive Baptist Church.

I: Are you an official in your church, if so what is your position?

B: Yes I'm Chairman of the Board, and also Superintendant of Sunday school.

I: Are there other community organizations or activities that you are involved in?
If yes, please what are they?

B: Yes, I belong to the Masonics, Masons, and I am the Wishful Master
~~Master~~ and also State Deputy.

I: Aren't you also with the, associated with the retarded center?

B: I don't hold an office.

Okay.
I: ^ Do you know of any black elected officials in this area who have been in office since '74?

B: Eli White, in the county, has been in office since '74.

(End of interview)