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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short. This is Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by the University of Georgia and Young Harris College. Our guest is state representative and Civil Rights activist Tyrone Brooks. Welcome, Representative Brooks.

TYRONE BROOKS: Thank you very much.

SHORT: Your parents and grandparents have deep roots in Georgia history.

BROOKS: Oh yes.

SHORT: Tell us about them.

BROOKS: Oh, Lord. My daddy and my grand daddy and my paternal grandmother come out of Hancock County, Georgia – Sparta. And my mother – on the mother's side, my maternal side of the family, they come out of Warren County. So my roots are deep in middle Georgia, Hancock and Warren, several generations back. And I'm often in my hometown Warrenton. I visit my daddy's hometown Sparta quite often. My father, his daddy, and his mother are buried behind the New Beulah Baptist Church in Sparta on the Crawfordsville Highway. My mother, who passed away on June 27th of this year, 2009, she's buried in Warrenton, my home town – not far from my maternal grandmother, Ada Myrie [ph].

But I was born in Washington, Georgia, Wilkes County. My mother gave birth to me by a midwife. A midwife delivered me on the way to the hospital in Washington, Georgia. There was no hospital near Warrenton when I was born. There is one in Thompson, Georgia now 11 miles away. But when I was born there was no hospital in Thompson. There's still not one in

Warrenton. So the nearest hospital was Washington-Wilkes County. And my mother told me the story. She said her water broke, had a midwife in the car, and I came out in the backseat. And they took me to the hospital in Washington-Wilkes and after examining me the doctor said, "This baby is sick. This baby has double pneumonia. Call your preacher and your undertaker; there's no hope." Within 24 hours we're quite certain this baby will be dead. My mother refused to accept that. And my grandmamma, Ada, with some other ministers, followed the car on up to the hospital and they came into the room and my mother said the doctor said well, might as well call the preacher and undertaker, there's no hope for this child. And my grandmamma Ada was, we call it sanctified in the holy ghost in the country, and she was a strong believer and she said the doctors don't really know, they're guessing. Let's just pray over this baby. They prayed over me all night long. The next morning the doctors came around on their little rounds, you know, checking on all the children in the room and they heard me crying real loud. I guess I wanted some milk. And they peeped in the door and they said whose baby is this? And my mother said this is my baby. This is the one that you all examined yesterday and you said the baby wouldn't survive 24 hours. And the doctors picked me up and took me down the hall and examined me again. There was no sign of pneumonia. And they came back into the room and they said, "This is a miracle; we don't believe this. We didn't give this child any medicine because we were quite certain he would be dead today." And they said, "There is no sign of pneumonia."

So my grandmamma stood up and they said, "Well who are you?" My grandmamma was very fair. Her father happened to be a white man and she looked totally different from my mother.

They said, "Why are you in here with this colored woman?" She said, "This is my daughter, that's my grandbaby." And she said, "Let me tell you all one thing," she said, "y'all may be smart, you got those degrees, you been to all the medical schools, the Emory, the MCGs, Harvard, Yale." She said, "One thing about it, even though you all are educated, you ain't God. And God was not ready for my grandbaby to leave here." And I never been sick since I was born. I had a kidney stone about nine years ago and I thought I was going to die. (Laughter) Because I never had one before and I didn't know what it was. But my doctor examined me and he said oh, it's just a little kidney stone, a little old stone on your kidney. They took that off. That's the only time I've ever been ill in my life since I was born. So knock on wood, Bob, in good health according to my doctors, but I'm the miracle child in the family. I'm not supposed to be here.

SHORT: Your daddy was a railroader.

BROOKS: That's right. He's a railroad man. My daddy worked on the old Georgia Railroad line from Augusta all the way to Macon. And my daddy had an incident in Warren County. My daddy used to lay the crossties to put the rails on the tracks. My daddy was a very proud black man from Sparta and my daddy was a very industrious frugal man. He had saved up enough money to buy him a brand new car. He wanted a Chevrolet. And he went to Wiley's Chevrolet Company in downtown Warrenton to buy him a car. And now I didn't know this until my son Tyrone Junior who is now in law school started researching his granddaddy's history. Because

he wanted to know why was granddaddy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and grandmamma in Warrenton? Couldn't figure that connection out. So he finally figured it out. He started investigating it by talking to relatives and old timer and he discovered – because my mother had never told me this story. My daddy went to buy a Chevrolet and he walked into the dealership and a young white guy walked up to him and said, "Boy, what can I do for you?" And my daddy said – he used profanity according to my mother. He said, "You don't see no blank, blank boy," and there was some words and there was fight in the showroom. My daddy wanted to fight. And the manager came out to apologize but my daddy knew he had to get out of there. And his cousins from Sparta came and picked him up and drove him over to Augusta. Some relatives from South Carolina picked him up, took him to Charleston, and he went on up to Philadelphia cause he knew he was going to be killed. You couldn't fight a white man during that era and survive. The Klan would come get you if the law enforcement didn't. Well he was not arrested but the Klan probably was going to kill him or burn down his house. So he went up to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and in a weeks time he was working for Penn Central. And when he got to Penn Central he became a sleeping car porter. He started working on the inside of the cars rather than on the outside. He joined the A. Philip Randolph Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union and was a card carrying member. He always had two cards with him. He had the A. Philip Randolph card and he had a NAACP card in his pocket at all times. My daddy died on December 7th, 1987 at the age of 77, and we funeralized him in Sparta. That's where he's resting. But he was a very proud black man and his legacy is primarily railroad work. That's all he did.

SHORT: So you grew up in Georgia.

BROOKS: Yeah, Warrenton is where I grew up.

SHORT: When schools were integrated – segregated, excuse me.

BROOKS: The schools were segregated. We desegregated our school system by marching and picketing, even though the U.S. Supreme court had ruled in the Brown vs. Board of Education case, 1954, the schools in my hometown all the way up to 1970 resisted integration. We had to march and picket against the Board of Education. Many of us young children and were walking and picketing, we were banned from school property. The Board of Education actually sought an injunction to keep us off the school property because we were picketing. Now we were still students now, but they said no, you all are picketing, you're marching, you're trouble makers. You come on this property we're going to put you in jail. Some of us had to go down to Boggs Academy in Keysville, which is like 25, 30 miles away and that's how I completed my high school education by going to Boggs Academy. I didn't finish in my hometown of Warrenton. I had to go down the road to Boggs, a private preparatory school founded by the Presbyterian church. I received a scholarship because of Reverend Hosea Williams and Reverend Joe Boone. And that's how I got my high school education.

But across the South, young children were so fired up about the Civil Rights Revolution, reading about Dr. King and Abernathy and all the great leaders. We were getting it from television every

night – CBS, ABC, NBC, and we were reading the black press, the Atlanta Daily World, the Pittsburg Courier. Those papers were coming into our homes and neighborhoods and we were just taking in all of this. And so students across the South begin to rise up on their own. We were inspired by King. We had never met King but we were seeing King every night and reading about King in all the black press and some of the major media, like the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and the Augusta Chronicle. And we were just like other children. We stood up and we started our own little movement and we attracted the attention of SCLC and here comes Hosea Williams, here comes Willie Bolden, here comes Dr. Abernathy and Dr. King and one thing leads to another and then I get swept up in it as other children and –

SHORT: At age 15.

BROOKS: At age 15 I was just a little volunteer, a little old skinny kid, big afro on my head, lot of hair. A lot of times us children didn't know what we were doing. We were just out there. and we were mimicking what we were watching say from Montgomery and Selma and St. Augustine and the freedom rides, John Lewis and others on those buses being attacked. We were just inspired by all of that. So what was happening in Warrenton was spreading. Crawfordsville, Sparta, Lincolnton, all these little towns – Sandersville. Students were standing up. And you'd go into Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, the Carolinas, the same thing was happening – Tennessee. And so it was kind of an uprising by students, young people, and we began to attract the attention of the national leadership. That's how it all happened, really, across the South.

SHORT: When did you first meet Dr. King?

BROOKS: Oh I met him when I was 15. It was strange how all this happened. We had started picketing in my hometown. Hosea Williams had been coming in and out, because at that time Hosea was teaching school in Conyers. When Hosea left Morris Brown with a degree in Chemistry, he applied for a job as a research chemist at the Department of Agriculture in Savannah. So he was waiting to get that job. But in the meantime, he taught school in Conyers and he taught school in Douglas, Coffee County. Those are the two school systems he taught in the public system. So while he was teaching in Conyers, Hosea would come down to my uncle's farm, my mother's oldest brother, Roanie Cody [ph]. He had a large farm in Warren County. And Hosea would come down – Hosea was a very outgoing person. He was a great man, but Hosea was a very outgoing, affable guy. He would come down to my hometown, he would speak, he would challenge black educators to fight segregation, he would try to motivate the youth to join the movement. And Hosea knew that Dr. King and Abernathy had to go to Charleston to visit with Ms. Septima Clark. At that time, Interstate 20 was not completed all the way over to Augusta or into South Carolina. They had to come through my hometown on Highway 278. So Hosea made it happen where when Dr. King and Abernathy were going to pass through my little hometown, we had a little Civil Rights movement going on. Hosea made it happen wherein the car that was bringing Dr. King and Abernathy would stop – make a brief stop.

So Hosea told us, stand on this highway in this little park under the trees, have some lemonade and some cookies. As Dr. King and Abernathy pass through they're going to make a brief stop, about ten minutes, they don't have much time. And we did that; we followed Hosea's instructions. So we stood out there under this little shady park area on the highway, coming into Warrenton, we saw this black Cadillac coming down the highway with the lights on, pretty shiny black car, and we knew it was Dr. King. So the car pulled over. The car was being driven by Reverend J.C. Ward. And the car pulled over and all of the sudden the doors open. Dr. Abernathy was the first one to exit the car. Then Dr. King got out of the car. We were expecting a big tall man like you. Dr. King was very short. And he had a white shirt with a black tie, he had loosened the collar, and he had on long sleeves but he had rolled them up to his elbow. And so, he gets out and he walks around to shake our hand. Hosea told him who we were and he said, "Do you all have anything to drink? We're thirsty." And we said, "Yes, we got some lemonade for you. We got some little cookies." Actually, the cookies were tea cakes that my grandmother had made, little tea cakes we called them. And he introduced Dr. Abernathy. He said, "This is Reverend Ralph David Abernathy, the best friend I have in the world right here." And then he introduced Reverend J.C. Ward, Reverend Fred Bennett, Reverend JD Greer, who served in the legislature later. He said, "We're headed to Charleston, South Carolina to meet Ms. Septima Clark." And he said, "We'll see you all later." That was it.

The next time I saw Dr. King was at the Dorchester Academy down in Midway Georgia, Liberty County, at a SCLC workshop. And on and on and on. The last time I saw Dr. King alive was on March 21st, 1968 at New Zion Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia as he and Dr. Abernathy were

traveling around the country organizing the Poor People's Campaign march on Washington. And at the same time they were in Memphis, Tennessee working with the sanitation workers. And that was my last time seeing him and at that meeting he told us that he and Ralph – meaning Dr. Abernathy – had to return to Memphis. He said, "Andrew Young doesn't want us to go back. We've got too much on our plate." He said, "but Hosea says if the president and vice-president of SCLC don't return to Memphis to help the sanitation workers both of us should resign." And he said, "Hosea's right, so we got to go back." He said, "But when we finish in Memphis we're going to come over to Monroe, Georgia" -- where we assigned then -- "and we're going to help y'all with this Moore's Ford Bridge lynching case." We were not working on the Moore's Ford Bridge lynching. We were working on school desegregation. But he said, "We're coming to Monroe because Dan Young, an undertaker in Monroe wants us to come. Where's Dan?" We said, "We don't know." Dan Young walked in the church 15 minutes later and sat between King and Abernathy. He said, "Martin, you and Ralph have to come to Monroe and help us with this lynching case." And Dr. King said, "Dan, when we finish in Memphis, Ralph and I will come." That was March 21st, 1968. In two weeks Dr. King was dead. So he never could come. Abernathy did come. Joe Lowry came, Jesse Jackson came, Charles Steele has been there. I mean, you know, you name all of the great leaders, they've all been there. And we're still working on this case right now, today, because as you know, the federal government and state government have reopened this case and it's an ongoing investigation. So that was my last time seeing Dr. King alive.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about – I want to get to that Moore's –

BROOKS: Moore's Ford Bridge.

SHORT: -- Ford Bridge case, but before we do let's talk a little bit about the SCLC.

BROOKS: Oh yeah.

SHORT: You volunteered.

BROOKS: Yes.

SHORT: Then you became a regular.

BROOKS: Yes.

SHORT: Well tell us about that.

BROOKS: Well, many of us young children who were involved in the movement as teenagers were offered positions after we'd gone through orientation and training. I was just one of them from my home area. I was not the only one. There were some from Alabama, Mississippi,

Louisiana, Texas. So I was just one of the young people that was asked to come in full time and it was because of Hosea Williams. Had it not been for Hosea Williams I doubt if I would ever have joined SCLC full time. But Hosea Williams brought me in. I was hired full time in 1967, one year before the assassination of Dr. King. And Hosea said, "Well, I've been holding this position for you; you got to come take it. If you don't take it I'm going to have to let it go." And I said, "Well let it go." I said, "I want to go to New York. I want to get rich."

My mind was on going to New York and joining relatives who had left the South. Some of them were doing very well in New York. Some of them were working with Percy Sutton. Percy Sutton was a very wealthy black man in New York. He owned the radio stations, he owned an insurance company, he owned a bank, a very wealthy man and a big supporter of the Civil Rights Movement. So some of my kinfolk who had left Georgia had gone to New York to escape segregation and they luckily had, you know, become partners with Percy Sutton.

So they had a couple of jobs waiting on me and I was ready to get out of the South and Hosea Williams said, no, we need you. Hosea called me son. He always treated me like I was his own biological son. And many people thought I was his son. Because he would say, "I raised this boy, and you know, this is my boy, this is my son." And they didn't know. I said, "No, well, he's like my godfather." But Hosea made it happened. In 1967 I took the position. I was on the field staff. And after the assassination of Dr. King, Dr. Abernathy became president.

And when Abernathy became president he had to build his own team, because most of the senior staff members who were working with Dr. King, they left the organization after the assassination of King. Andy Young left, C.T. Vivian left, Y.T. Walker left, James Bevel left, you know. And

so, Abernathy had to build his own team. And he told Hosea Williams he wanted me to come off the field and work directly with him. And I was -- Bob, I was blown away. Here's the national president of SCLC asking a little old peon like me to come and work with him. And I was his special assistant, I was his communication director, and I would help write his speeches, I would fill in for him. I kind of became a regular on radio, TV, and in the media because a lot of time he would say, "I don't want to do those interviews; you do them". And I said, "Well what about Reverend Bernard Lee?" Bernard Lee was Dr. King's traveling companion. But after the assassination of Dr. King, Dr. Abernathy said, "Well Bernard is not going to be loyal to me as he was to Martin. So I need somebody to fill that slot." So I became that young guy who always carried the bags, got the plane tickets, got the rental car, got the hotel, fill in for him. And Mrs. Abernathy, his widow who lives here in northwest Atlanta, could talk more about that than I can, because she told me one day, she said, "You know how much Ralph love you, how much he relied you." I said, "No, I don't." She said, "He wouldn't hardly do anything unless he was sure you were going to be with him." He would travel. When he traveled around the world I was there with him.

So my career in SCLC happened because of Hosea Williams, and was extended because of Ralph David Abernathy. And I did 20 years in SCLC, starting from my volunteer years and all the way up to 1980 when I came to the Georgia House of Representatives.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about the genesis of SCLC. It was formed by Dr. King and Reverend Abernathy.

BROOKS: Yes.

SHORT: Shortly after the bus boycott in Montgomery.

BROOKS: You're correct. After the Montgomery bus boycott which started on December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks sat down on the front of the bus and refused to go to the back and she was arrested and Dr. King and Abernathy were both pastoring in Montgomery at that time. Dr. King was pastoring Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. He was only 26. Abernathy was pastoring First Baptist Church. He was only 28. So these were young bucks, as they would say. Young guys. They were not older men. And Dr. King, when he was assassinated was only 39. So you could see just how youthful they were. But they just happened to be pastoring in Montgomery at the time that Rosa Parks was arrested and her arrest kind of sparked the modern day civil rights movement. Now, you need to know that Rosa Parks was not the first woman to be arrested for sitting on the front of the bus. The first woman arrested was Claudette Colvin, who is today about 70, 72 years old and will be here in the Atlanta area very soon. She was a young teenager who got arrested but because of unique circumstances, she was not chosen to be the role model for a movement. But after Rosa Parks was arrested, Reverend E.D. Nixon, who was the NAACP president and also a A. Philip Randolph member in a railroad union, because he was a railroad man just like my daddy, Dr. King and Abernathy were really the catalyst working with Reverend Nixon to build that movement.

That movement lasted 381 days. No black people rode those buses. They walked, they carpooled, they rode in taxi cabs owned by black folk, or they simply said, "We won't move. We just will not get on those buses." For 381 days. They broke the back of the Montgomery system. And they were sued – Dr. King and Abernathy were sued by Montgomery and the case went up to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court ruled in their favor. So, after the Montgomery bus boycott, Dr. King, Dr. Abernathy, Reverend C.K. Steele from Tallahassee, Florida, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth from Birmingham, Alabama, Reverend T.J. Jemison from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Reverend Joseph Lowery, and Reverend S.L. Harvey, they met in Louisiana, in New Orleans, and they decided -- well, we won in Montgomery, but the problem exists all across the South. We still have segregation. We still have racism. We still have these issues. We won in Montgomery but it's not over. So they formed an organization to carry on that movement beyond Montgomery. And it was named the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They moved the headquarters to Atlanta. And of course SCLC is still based in Atlanta.

SCLC became the – I guess you could call us the – the modern day civil rights activist oriented organization. Because there had already been civil rights organizations before SCLC – the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, you had the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, you know. So you had other groups. But SCLC became something different, something unique, and it was because of King and Abernathy and that team of leaders. And so, when I look back at SCLC, I say you know what? Without SCLC we probably wouldn't have defeated Jim Crow as we knew Jim Crow. We would not have desegregated America. We

would not have gotten the '64 Civil Rights Act which came out of the Birmingham movement of '63. We would not have gotten the Voting Rights Act. which came out of the Selma movement in 1965. We would not have gotten the Open Housing Act which came out of the Chicago demonstrations in '66. You see? Without SCLC where would we be? The concept of affirmative action, looking at all of these black elected officials across America. We wouldn't be in these positions. So, SCLC has played a very unique role that complements the work of the NAACP and the other organizations that were forerunners before SCLC.

And so I'll always be a part of SCLC. It's like a lifetime membership, but the organization really changed the face of America and had an impact on the world.

SHORT: Explain to us, if you will, Dr. King's philosophy of non-violence and how he taught you and others how not to turn the other cheek.

BROOKS: In the SCLC workshops that we had to attend before we could go out and organize communities, we weren't just sent out. We were trained before we were sent out. People should understand that. You had to attend workshops and seminars and go through training to be employed by SCLC. You had to be checked out thoroughly because we weren't taking any chances that you were a plant, that you could have been someone sent to the organization to create chaos and sabotage the work of Dr. King and Abernathy and become someone on the inside that could really create an explosive situation that could hurt the organization or hurt the leadership. So we had to go through extensive training. We would go to Macon, Georgia on

Saturday mornings and we would meeting at Tremont Temple, we would meet at First African Baptist Church, and we would sit in these seminars and we would listen to Hosea Williams and Andy Young and Dorothy Cotton and C.T. Vivian and Y.T. Walker, Septima Clark, and they would walk us through how we had to conduct ourselves, how we had to organize communities and how we had to respect communities and how we had to adopt the philosophy of non-violence.

That philosophy was transcended down from King because King had become a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and reading and studying Gandhi and Gandhi's use of non-violence in attacking apartheid in South Africa and across India. Dr. King became a student of Gandhi. And so, he developed this philosophy around the Gandhi principles. And he said if we're going to run this organization and be successful we have to adopt those same principles. He said we cannot have the philosophy of an eye for an eye, you hit me I hit you. He said we have to be non-violent warriors. We can't win this battle if we're going to do to others what they've done to us. If you're attacked you have to accept it. If you're spat on you have to accept it. If you're kicked you have to accept it. When you're out leading marches and if the troopers hit you on the head with a billy club, get on the ground – we were taught how to protect our bodies, how to get into the fetal position and roll up in a ball. We were taught all of that. If you're tear gassed, how to protect your nostrils from the tear gas coming at you. If the dogs come at you what to do. Don't run from the dogs because if you run they're really going to attack you. So all of these techniques we were taught in seminars and in classes.

Dorchester Academy down in Liberty County, Midway, Georgia was another training facility.

Penn Center nears Charleston, South Carolina was another training facility. A little place called Frogmore, Penn Center. But here's something that we learned from the teaching of King and this is something that really made us successful as organizers. Because you go to remember now, we were 15, 16, 17, young students in college and high school. Dr. King always said the ability for you to organize communities is going to be based on two things: your ability to keep cool heads. You can't let people make you angry. Before your enemies can destroy you, they first must make you angry. You've got to remember that. That was instilled in us. You can't let them make you mad. If you get angry, you pop off, you attack them back, they won. They get you angry they got you right where they want you to be. The Ku Klux Klan may call you the N word, but you've got to take it. They may call you a communist. You've got to take it. You know you're not a communist. You've got to take this stuff. Before your enemies can destroy you, they first must make you angry. That was the first thing. The second this is, in order to be successful as an organizer, you've got to relate to the people where they are and not necessarily where you want them to be. He said you go into communities and you've got to relate to the folk where they are. You go in talking over the people or down to the people you'll never ever organize communities. You've got to be able to go out there and talk to those farmers in the fields. You've got to talk to the folks standing on the street corners, those unemployed kids doing crazy stuff. You've got to go to those corners you got to talk to them. You've got to go into the barber shops, the beauty shops, you've got to go into the places of worship. You've got to be able to relate to people. And he said if you can talk to people on their level and relate to them on their level you will be successful. If you go up talking over them you're going to miss

them. You'll never organize. So those are two things that we were taught.

And I think that's why the SCLC organizers were so successful all across America. I mean all across this country. It was not just down here. We were in Chicago, we were in Los Angeles, we were in D.C., we were in New York, in New Jersey, in Detroit. We were all over. Hosea Williams had the largest staff in SCLC and we were scattered all across America and we were successful. Now some of our colleagues were killed. Some of them were brutalized and beaten and killed. I consider myself one of the blessed ones. I'm still here. But believe me, it was training, it was discipline, it was hard work, it was dangerous work, but that's how SCLC was so successful in accomplishing so many things that people now take for granted.

SHORT: You didn't have the resistance in the rest of the country that you had in the South did you?

BROOKS: In certain areas we did but it wasn't consistent like the South. The South was, you know, still struggling to reckon with the desegregation and integration and because of the history of the South there was just automatic resistance. But when we went into Chicago I was not in the first campaign in Chicago now. That was 1966. I was not there on the ground in the beginning. I went in later with Hosea. But in Chicago where the late Reverend James Orange and James Bevel and a young Jesse Jackson – Jesse was based in Chicago in seminary school – they started these demonstrations in little pockets – little neighborhoods around Chicago, Gage Park and Cicero and Skokie. They started marching into these, we call them ethnic enclaves of

recent immigrants who've come to America, they had set up these little neighborhoods but they didn't want black people to move into them. There were segregated pockets around Chicago. And so, Jesse Jackson, James Orange and others, James Bevel, they begin to march. And Dr. King was called to Chicago. And Dr. King and Abernathy went to Chicago to march into these neighborhoods and they were attacked, they were attacked, and I mean they were hit with bricks and bottles and there were all kind of weapons all out there. People had guns and were it not for the FBI and the State Patrol of Illinois and law enforcement, I think Dr. King might have been killed in Chicago. If you look back at some of the old film footage where Dr. King was leading these marches in Chicago he's ducking and he was interviewed right after one of those marches and he said, "You know what?" He said, "We have never faced mobs like these even in Mississippi and Alabama." He said, "We were just absolutely shocked that we would receive this kind of resistance in the Chicago area. That was one area which was very tough. And when I fly into Chicago now and I have to go into the Midway airport rather than in O'Hare, you fly into Chicago in the Midway and you drive from Midway into Chicago. You go through some of those same neighborhoods where Dr. King and Abernathy had to lead those marches. Now Jesse Jackson decided to live in Chicago and he says even today in some of those neighborhoods there is resistance. Not as much, but there is resistance.

So in certain parts of the country there was resistance. But it was not the same in the South. In the south you had the Ku Klux Klan, law enforcement, public officials all in the same boat. I mean the card carrying members of the Klan were, you know, the sheriffs, they were the majors, they were the commissioners, and in some instances, of course, law makers and legislators. It

was a little different down here. But the South has changed tremendously and that's why today when you look across the landscape of America you find more black elected officials across the Deep South than any other region of America today.

SHORT: Wasn't that due in part to the One Man, One Vote law?

BROOKS: Absolutely. You know it was. After we overcame, you know, the county unit system and the way votes were apportioned based on areas rather than based on the one person one vote principle. And then of course, the Voting Rights Act. – the Voting Rights Act. But yes, a lot of the impediments that were in place to keep us out of public service have been dismantled and the Voting Rights Act has become the protector of voting rights across the South and other regions of America. You're absolutely correct.

SHORT: What is – what was the relationship between SCLC and other organizations like the NAACP and CORE?

BROOKS: Dr. King and Abernathy had a very strong working relationship with the NAACP and CORE and the National Council of Negro Women and other groups, because you see, before SCLC King and Abernathy were NAACP which was founded in 1909. So when Dr. King and Abernathy created the idea of having SCLC as an organization nationally and chartered they decided that SCLC was going to have an integral working relationship with all of these

organizations that were forerunners to this young organization called the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And if you recall, 1964 when Dr. King won the Nobel Peace Prize, when he was handed a check for \$50,000 in 1964 – now today the prize is over a million. If you win the Nobel today you get a million dollar check. In 1964 he received a \$50,000 in Oslo, Norway and he said in Oslo, Norway and it's all chronicled in the media, you can go back and look at the film, he said I'm going to accept this check on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement. And he said this is a \$50,000 check; 10,000 will go to SCLC, 10,000 will go to the NAACP, 10,000 will go to the National Council of Negro Women. We're going to give 10,000 to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He said we're going to divide this money up so that all of the organizations, Congress of Racial Equality, CORE, all of them will share in this prize. \$50,000 was divided up among all the organizations. The check was made out to Martin Luther King, Jr. He endorsed the check, gave it to SCLC and then SCLC gave the other organizations \$10,000. Now that was a lot of money in 1964.

But that was an indication of how Dr. King was committed to working with all of the Civil Rights family, that SCLC was not going to be standing over here by itself. No, no, no, we're in the family. We're going to support all of the family members. And that's why Dr. King had such a strong following. If you look back at the major marches on Washington, '63, beyond, Abernathy carried on. It was because all of these organizations connected to King and Abernathy because he was – they were reaching out to them. Bayard Rustin, who of course helped organize the march on Washington 1963 said there had never been leadership like these guys. They were young bucks. They were younger than Bayard Rustin, and he said, "We've never seen leaders

embrace all of the other organizations like King and Abernathy." And King and Abernathy were a team like that. You got to – you can't separate those two guys. Everybody says Martin Luther King, Jr., and I always say don't call the name Martin Luther King, Jr. without mentioning Ralph David Abernathy. They were a strong team. They were like brothers. And King would not do anything unless Abernathy was involved. King never made a decision unless Abernathy had input. He would not march – he would not go to jail unless Abernathy was with him. When he checked into a hotel when he was traveling, Abernathy had to be in the room with him. Had two beds – they were like brothers, and that's the way they were in Memphis when King was assassinated in 1968.

SHORT: You mentioned the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

BROOKS: Uh-huh.

SHORT: Which was a group of students, really, from around the country. But let's go back to 1960 to Greensboro, North Carolina.

BROOKS: Oh yeah.

SHORT: In the first real sit-in at a segregated lunch counter. What can you tell us about that?

BROOKS: Well, now I was not there but I know – many of my colleagues – some living today, like John Lewis – Congressman John Lewis, my neighbor, my congressman, my friend, my hero, who's still living. John Lewis was a part of the student sit-in where students in D.C. and New York decided they were going to get on buses and they were going to travel across the South to sit-in at lunch counters. And I regret that I was not able to be there. I just wish I could have been there, but I was not. But John tells me the story of how they came to Greensboro and how they sat in, how they were beaten, how they were taunted, spat upon. He talked to me about how they went into Anniston, Alabama, Montgomery, Birmingham, they got to Anniston, one of the buses was burned. You could see the film. You could go back to the archives and look at the bus, the flames that had engulfed the bus in downtown Anniston and they barely got off the bus. Now you have to understand there were young white students joining these black students, so when the Ku Klux Klan or the law enforcement officials saw these white faces with these black faces they started attacking the white kids first. They were offended that white children, teenagers, college students would dare join these black folk. And so, the white students became the targets first.

They were hit – they were beaten, tear gassed, acid thrown on them, dogs sicked on them first.

Because it was like how dare you come down here and be with these black folks, you know.

And so, John tells me, he said the white faces were the faces who were hit first and then they got to them. But John talked to me about the attacks. He talked to me about the tension. He talked to me about how the law enforcement officials would look the other way, the State Troopers and local law enforcement. If they saw them under attack they would just like turn their head away.

And if you protected yourself and it appeared that you were being a little too aggressive you would be arrested for assault on a law enforcement officer.

So I was not on the sit-ins with them but I have learned so much about the sit-ins from having a chance to sit with John Lewis and Faye Bellamine and Benny Ivy and Julian Bond, Jan Meadows, Connie Curry – Connie Curry – who’s written a book about the sit-ins. They have educated me on how the sit-ins occurred – Cleveland Sellers was another one who is now up at University of North Carolina. There were so many young people who dared to get on those buses and travel and risk their lives. That was a big part of the Civil Rights Movement, but I was not on those sit-ins with them. But I wish I had been.

SHORT: I can remember the sit-ins in Atlanta. First at Leb’s Restaurant, at Richie’s.

BROOKS: Yep.

SHORT: Even at the Pickrick.

BROOKS: Yes. Now Lonnie King, the great Lonnie King who was a student at Morehouse in the early 60s when I was still a kid growing up down in Warrenton, Lonnie King told me about the sit-ins in Atlanta, and he lives here in Atlanta up the street from Ebenezer Baptist Church on Jackson Street. But Lonnie King told me that as a young student at Morehouse – and he was chosen to be the leader and he was leading the marches from the campus downtown. And he

said there was only one church in that AU campus neighborhood that was allowed the students to meet, and that was Reverend Joe Boone's church, Rush Memorial Congregational Church. He said Reverend Boone decided that the students needed a place to congregate before they marched because they couldn't do it on the campus; they had to come off the campus. And he said Reverend Boone's church was the only one – it's on Brawley Drive now. It was Chestnut then, but it's called Brawley now. But Lonnie King told me, he said, "Tyrone," he said, "it was very difficult for us." He said, "We were fired up – we were determined to resist segregation in public accommodation. We started the marches from the campus downtown." And he told me this story. You really should interview Lonnie King one day.

He said, "Tyrone," he said, "One day I picked up the phone and I called M.L." He called Martin Luther King, Jr. M.L. That's what he called – he was a member at Ebenezer now. Lonnie King and his mother were members of Ebenezer – may still be. He may be. His mother's deceased. But Lonnie said he called M.L. one day, and he said M.L. picked up the phone and he said – M.L. said, "My daddy's on the other line," daddy King. Lonnie began to ask Dr. King, and literally beg Dr. King to come and join the students. Because Dr. King was going all over the world, you know, traveling. And Lonnie said he kept saying to M.L. we need you to come and give the students support. You're the leader. Everybody identifies with you. If you come and give us support we know we'll get more students, we'll get more support; we'll get more media attention, which is important, of educating the public. He said Dr. King was just listening. He would say anything. But he said he could hear daddy King saying, Martin, no, son, you got too much to do. You don't need to get bogged down in Atlanta. You got things in Alabama, you

got things in Mississippi, you got New York, you got everywhere. Don't get bogged down at home. You're not going to get any support at home. This is your hometown. You're not going to get the same following in your hometown. He said this is what daddy King was saying and Lonnie was listening. And finally, Lonnie said after talking to Dr. King and begging him for about 15 minutes, he said Dr. King said, "Lonnie, I've heard everything you said. All I need to know is where do you want me to meet you and what time?" (Laughter) And Lonnie told him. He said I want you to meet us – Lonnie told where. I don't remember where. But Lonnie said I want you to meet us – he might have said Rush Memorial. He said I want you to meet us this place at this time. We'll have all the students ready for you. We're going to put the word out that you're coming. We're going to leaflet the campuses. And he said when Dr. King showed up he probably had ten times more support.

And I saw a picture of Dr. King and Lonnie King with this young student – this female student in the middle of them. The AJC did a little profile on Lonnie about a year ago and when I saw the profile on Lonnie I called him up and I said, "Tell me who that beautiful woman is in the middle of you and Dr. King and then tell me about some of the others behind you." And he walked me through all of that. He told me who the people were. And I said, "Where are y'all going on this day?" He said, "We were going to Rich's Department store on that day." He said we're going to Rich's on that day. And he said the next day we went up the street and we started picketing other businesses. He said but the target was Rich's because Rich's was a large employer in downtown Atlanta at that time. So Lonnie King is someone that has educated me on the student movement in Atlanta in the early 60s and how Dr. King became a part of the student movement.

Dr. King was not the leader. Lonnie King was the leader. And he says they're not related.

Lonnie says there is no relation but I said Lonnie, you're a King, he's a King, you got to be in some kind of way. There's got to be a connection.

Lonnie King was born down in South Georgia. I forget the little town he was born in. Of course Dr. King was born here in Atlanta. But Lonnie King is someone, along with Julian Bond and others, who could really give you the kind of in depth history of how that student movement took off here in Atlanta. But Lonnie King says Dr. King was a major contributor to boosting them up and giving them more support and more media attention came after Dr. King got there. They were arrested. Dr. King went to jail at Rich's with them.

SHORT: You been to jail 66 times.

BROOKS: Correct.

SHORT: Tell us about some of those.

BROOKS: Oh Lord. You know, I've been to jail in my home state of Georgia a few times. But I remember the incident of going to jail in 1968 in Washington D.C. This was during the Poor People's Campaign. Willie Bolden was the wagon master that brought the mule train, which is a major component of the Poor People's Campaign, from Marks, Mississippi all the way to D.C. And the reason that mule train took off from Marks, Mississippi in 1968 is because that's where

Dr. King and Abernathy decided that there should be a Poor People's Campaign march on Washington to focus on poverty in American. Poverty, period. Poverty among poor white folks, poor black folks, you name it. Said Dr. King and Abernathy went to Marks, Mississippi to witness the abject poverty that had been portrayed in the media. The New York Times and other media had written stories about poverty across the South and in Appalachia, and they focused on Marks, Mississippi.

Marks, Mississippi in 1968, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was the poorest county in America. And so King and Abernathy went out there. And Dr. Abernathy and Hosea told me that when Dr. King landed they drove him to Marks, Mississippi. So Dr. King started looking around and he saw outdoor toilets, he saw homes with no running water, he saw shotgun houses with holes in the roof. He saw little children walking around bare feet. Little children little bellies protruding because of malnutrition. He said Dr. King said, "I can't believe this is America." Dr. Abernathy talked to me about this. He said Tyrone, he said, "Martin broke down and cried like a baby". He said, "Martin King cried like a baby when he saw this poverty, just cried". Said, "Ralph, I just can't believe people in America, the richest nation on the planet, could live in conditions like these." He said Martin broke down and cried like a baby. You know, just – just weeping. And he got up and he said, "Ralph, Hosea, we've got to call this to the attention of America. We've got to do something about this." And that's when they decided that there would be a Poor People's Campaign to go to Washington and demand from Congress and the White House and all of the federal agencies, focus on poverty.

And you recall the Herman Talmadges of the world and the Ernest Hollings of the world, from

South Carolina, these were very powerful men in Congress. They headed powerful committees. And the Civil Rights Movement was able to get their attention. Well, Hosea sent me to Marks, Mississippi to help Willie Bolden bring that mule train across Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Carolinas, Virginia on up to D.C. So we came across Mississippi with a State Patrol escort. Came across Alabama with a State Patrol escort. As we're coming into Georgia across that Alabama line, the first town is Tallapoosa. We come up I-20 coming into Tallapoosa. Governor Lester Maddox said, "I'm not letting no mules come down I-20 into Atlanta." We had a mule train. We had mules up front. And we said we are coming because we come across Alabama on interstate highways with State Patrol escort, Mississippi, here were are coming into our home state of Georgia. Maddox said no. So he sent Lieutenant Hightower down I-20 – a big tall trooper. The tallest trooper I've ever seen in my life. Seven feet tall. He came down there and he said, "If you don't get off this interstate we're going to arrest you." "We're not getting off the interstate." So they arrested us. Put Willie Bolden in the jail in Tallapoosa, put me in the jail in Douglasville, and they locked up our mules in stockade. Yeah.

The news media called Dr. Abernathy. All the media rushed to Dr. Abernathy in Washington D.C. He was already at Resurrection City in D.C. We had set up what we called Resurrection City, which was a tent city from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Monument on the mall. Nothing but tents. And so the media called Dr. Abernathy. "Dr. Abernathy, your mule train is in jail in Georgia. What are you going to do?" And Dr. Abernathy with his slow Linden County, Alabama southern drawl said, "Well, we're going to give the governor of Georgia 24 hours to release our mules and our staff. Otherwise, we might have to move Resurrection City

from D.C. to Atlanta." The next day Governor Maddox said, "We're going to let the mule train come on into Atlanta. We're going to have the State Patrol escort them in." So the troopers came out. Lieutenant Abernathy came out and the troopers escorted us on into Atlanta. We brought those mules and wagons down I-20 and we stayed at Pascal's on Martin Luther King. It was Hunter Street then. It wasn't Martin Luther King in '68. And we had our rally at the old West Hunter Street Baptist Church which is right down the street there on the corner of Chestnut and Hunter then. Today it's Martin Luther King and Brawley.

The next morning the troopers came, they escorted us on down I-20 to Augusta and then across – went across Augusta in South Carolina, South Carolina troopers picked us up. Then North Carolina, then Virginia into D.C. Well, we get to D.C., about a week after we arrive Dr. Abernathy, Hosea, Willie Bolden, Jimmy Wells, Bobby Nelson, we went over to the U.S. Capitol building. Jimmy had just had a march – led a march on the U.S. Capitol that day. Cause every day there were marches on federal agencies, Department of Justice, the White House, the Congress. On this particular day, Jimmy Wells – Jimmy Wells, by the way, just retired from the Fulton County Marshall Service. He's retired now, but he was an SCLC staffer then. He had just had a march. The march is over. But here you have Abernathy and Hosea together with us standing around. We didn't matter to the police but the police decided we're going to arrest Abernathy today. And when they arrested Abernathy they arrested the whole group. And the charges were there was a march on the Capitol but there was not sufficient permits for this particular march. Well Jimmy Wells said he had the permits. The march is over. Everybody's scattered. But this was a tactic to bust up the movement. So they took Dr. Abernathy and Hosea

to jail, too us along with them.

So we were in the D.C. jail over night. The next morning we faced an African American judge – the next morning. Go into the courtroom and you know the judge says, "Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, we're honored to have you here in D.C. We want to thank you for your spirit of non-violence and the fact that we aren't having a whole lot of incidents with all these people in from all over the world. But Dr. Abernathy, your staff violated code section so and so and so of the District of Columbia and unfortunately this court has to impose a fine of \$200 each or give you 30 days in jail." And Dr. Abernathy responded. He said Your Honor, "Thank you for your kind words," he said, "but we're on a Poor People's campaign; we don't have \$200 to give the court." He said, "Unfortunately, we'll just have to do the time." So they took us back to our cells. Now Dr. Abernathy was in a big cell; he had TV and nice furniture and everything. We were in these little old small cells. Hosea said to Dr. Abernathy, he said, "Doc, you're the president, you got to get out. You got to go back to Resurrection City. The only person over there is Jesse Jackson. And every ten or fifteen minutes he's hold news conferences. That's all he's doing. You got to get out." So Dr. Abernathy said okay. He got out.

The next day, Willie Bolden, Jimmie Wells, Bobby Nelson convinced Hosea to get out. We said, "Hosea, you're the organizer. Dr. Abernathy needs you. You need to get out." So he said okay, he got out. The rest of us stayed in jail. We did 12 days in the D.C. jail. On the 13th day we were transported across the river to Lorton, Virginia to a federal prison because the D.C. jails were full. Civil rights workers going to jail every day for marching. And so, we get to the Lorton Federal Pen and the warden walks up, we all lined up there, you know, we young rookies,

big afros, skinny guys, you know, and the warden says what's your name? I said Tyrone Brooks. He said young man, he said, "We have a policy here. If you work a day you get a day off. And you could be out of here in about six days." I said, "Sir, I work for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. I'm not working for your prison." He said, "You'll go into the hole then, meaning solitary confinement." So they put me in the hole. Everybody else in line said the same thing. We're not working for your prison. We all were in solitary in separate little cells. For about 12 days – I asked Reverend Walter Fauntroy who was our leader in D.C. to bring me all of Dr. King books. So he brought me a big old box of books and I read Dr. King's books. We all agreed to fast – no food, just water and juice for 12 days. Now we were already skinny guys and here we are fasting. Fasted for 12 days. We were in these where you didn't have windows. You didn't know if it was sun up or sun down. You didn't know if it was day time or night time. Well we fasted for 12 days and Reverend Fauntroy picked us up on the 13th day and brought us back to Resurrection City. So I did, along with my colleagues, we did almost 30 days in the D.C. jail in 1968.

But the longest period of time I stayed in jail was right here in Georgia. 1970, Covington, Georgia, Newton County. Hosea sent me down to Covington to lead a movement and there was a sheriff by the name of Junior Odom -- arrested me and my colleagues. We stayed in his jail for 45 days awaiting trial on civil rights charges – marching without permits, inciting a riot, all this stuff they were always throwing us. Finally, federal judge, because Maynard Jackson was vice-mayor of Atlanta who tried to get us out. He couldn't get us. Billy Randall from Macon who just finished law school who became a state representative, he tried to get us, couldn't get us.

Dr. Abernathy sent attorney Howard Moore. Howard Moore went to a federal judge here in Atlanta whose name was Tidwell, and I think it's Ernest Tidwell.

SHORT: Ernest Tidwell.

BROOKS: Ernest Tidwell signed a federal habeas corpus order that was delivered by U.S. Marshals. And that order said you try them now or you release them now. One way or the other you're going to deal with them. Try them now or release them now. When the Federal Marshals delivered the papers to the sheriff and the District Attorney down in Newton County, they both said we're dropping charges. So we were released. But we stayed in jail 45 days. That was the longest period I've ever been in jail. But it happened right here in my home state of Georgia, not in Mississippi, Alabama, anywhere else. It happened here.

The last time I went to jail was 2003 in Taliaferro County. Some people said Toliver [ph] County but we pronounced it Taliaferro. The county commissioners down in Crawfordsville, Taliaferro, were resisting a landfill coming into their county. And because they were members of the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials where I serve as president, they came and asked me for help. And they explained to me that a superior court judge, Judge Parnell Davis from my home county of Warren was the sitting judge. They said Judge Davis is over this circuit and he says if we don't sign these papers to allow this company to do the environmental impact studies and apply for a permit with the EPD of Georgia, he is going to put us in jail for contempt of court. And we made a decision to go to jail because don't want a landfill in our

community. And we were sitting in a meeting over at the Atlanta Life Building on Auburn when they came. Dr. Joe Lowry was sitting in the meeting with me. And when they said, "Tyrone, we're going to jail, we want you to go with us," Joe Lowry said, "Well, if he goes to jail I'm going." And so the commissioners resisted the court order, they defied a Superior Court judge and the judge ordered the sheriff to pick them up. On the day that they were going to be picked up, Dr. Lowery and I and others went down to Crawfordsville, went to the sheriff's office, we told the sheriff, "We're going to jail with these commissioners." And the sheriff said, "Well you haven't done anything." We said, "Well they haven't done anything either, but if you're going to take them to jail we're going." That was 2003. So Dr. Lowery and I went to jail with those three commissioners down in Crawfordsville, Taliaferro County.

They took us up to Greensboro because there is no jail in Crawfordsville. And they took us up to Greensboro and we were arrested with them. And finally, the commissioners won their case before the Georgia Supreme Court. They won their case. But it was a funny thing about that. Right before the judge signed the order to put them in jail, he saw me sitting in the back of the courtroom in Thompson. And when the court was over the judge said, "Well, Representative Brooks, would you come down front?" I walked down – I been knowing him all my life because he grew up in my hometown. He and my older sister used to play together in my mama's backyard. So he called me down the bench. He said, "You're going to sit back there and not come up to speak to me?" I said, "Your Honor, I said I was invited by these commissioners and I didn't want to do anything in your court that might embarrass you." He said, "Well, you know, I've been knowing you since you were a little boy; I don't understand why you – " I said, "Well,

I'm here with the commissioners. I just want you to know, if you're going to put them in jail I got to go with them." And he just shook his like oh, my God, no. He is retired from the bench but he lives right there in Warrenton behind the courthouse. Parnell Davis. When I got elected to the legislature, whenever he came to Atlanta he would come in this chamber to visit with me. So, 2003 was the last arrest for me in my career. And I had the chance of taking Dr. Joe Lowery with me on that occasion.

SHORT: The two things that really, really gave impetus to the movement were the sit-ins and Bloody Sunday.

BROOKS: You're right.

SHORT: Got national attention. It was a disgrace.

BROOKS: It was a disgrace but it happened and the late Maynard Jackson used to say that Bloody Sunday march which produced the Voting Rights Act, he said – Maynard would say the Voting Rights Act. became the most important federal legislation signed into law since the Emancipation Proclamation. That's the way Maynard Jackson used to refer to that Voting Rights Act.. And he said the Voting Rights Act. came into being because of that march. But I was not in that first one. Of course all of us have seen the film and Hosea and John Lewis have talked to me about how it happened, what happened, many of the people that were injured on

that bridge later died. But were it not for that march, there wouldn't have been a Voting Rights Act. Without a Voting Rights Act, you would not be talking to me today as a law maker.

SHORT: Yep.

MALE SPEAKER: We got that.

BROOKS: Oh, you got that?

MALE SPEAKER: Yes, so you can keep going if you want.

SHORT: Well, there's no doubt that the Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama passed the Johnson's Voting Right Act.

BROOKS: No doubt about it.

SHORT: That completely changed politics in the South.

BROOKS: It changed the politics of the South. It really changed the course of America in terms of our how American would become a greater nation by allowing a people of color to serve in a body politic. I just wish I had been in Selma that day. But Hosea Williams was based in Selma.

C.T. Vivian was based in Selma. John Lewis was working for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, and John was down the road in Lowndes County, which is a little county between Dallas and Montgomery. If you're on Highway 80, you come out of Selma going to Montgomery, about halfway up there's a little place called Whitehall, that's Lowndes County and that's where SNCC was based. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael, John Lewis, all of them. All right. Up there in Selma, C.T. Vivian and Hosea and James Bevel had been organizing in Selma and they had agreed with the local citizens that they were going to march from Selma to Montgomery. The reason they were going to march is because right down the road in Marion a young man who had been in Vietnam who had come back home was killed because he dared to stand up and ask the State Troopers and police to stop beating his granddaddy and his mother. His name was Jimmy Lee Jackson. Jimmy Lee Jackson was killed in Marion, Alabama before the march took off from Selma, Montgomery. James Orange told me – he was in Marion – he told me one day, he said Ms. Lucy Foster and other women, Amelia Boynton decided after Jimmy Lee Jackson was killed in Marion that they were going to march to Montgomery to protest all this violence. And after Jimmy Lee Jackson was killed there was an agreement that they would march from Selma to Montgomery which is 50 miles. Hosea was there in Selma. C.T. Vivian was in Selma. James Bevel was in Selma. And Dr. King was in and out.

On the day that they had agreed to march Hosea was still there. Dr. King had to preach at Ebenezer. Dr. King sent Andy Young over to Selma to tell Hosea to wait till next week. And Hosea said Dr. King needs to understand the people here in Selma are going to march whether I

go with them, whether you go with them, whether he's here or not, they're going to march because they're sick and tired of these killings and they want the right to vote so they want to go to Montgomery. Have to cross that Edmund Pettus Bridge to get to Montgomery. Hosea said he told Andy, "Andy, tell Dr. King we'll march today. When he gets here he can lead a march. But we got to go today." Hosea said to me, he said, James Bevel came up to him and said, "Hosea, Dr. King changed his mind; he said go ahead and march and he'll catch up with you later." Well James Bevel was a jokester. Hosea said Dr. King had never told Bevel that, but Hosea said to me, he said Bevel was trying to give him encouragement, just go ahead and march. Well, Hosea decided that he would kick off the march in Brown Chapel AME with Reverend F.D. Reese. John Lewis came up from Whitehall, Lowndes County, to join them. So when you look at the photographs of the lead marchers, you see Hosea Williams on – in your photograph he would be on your left side. John is on the right side. Hosea has on a – I think he has on a white trench coat, John has on a black trench coat. I think that's the way it goes, or vice versa. Well they are right up front. Right behind them is Reverend F.D. Reese, pastor of Brown Chapel. And Hosea told me it was about two or three hundred people with them. And Hosea says as they begin to march up – got right up on the top of that bridge, the State Troopers were waiting. And he said the sheriff – Jim Clark – of Selma and those State Troopers had blocked the bridge and they could hear them on their bullhorns saying, Stop, do not come any further. Stop. And Hosea said he and John decided we ain't stopping, we going on no matter what happens. He said as they continued to march those troopers kept coming toward them in a wall. It was like a long line, a wall of troopers just coming at them. And they had billy clubs and they

had tear gas and they had dogs on the side and they had trucks behind them. And Hosea says all of a sudden it just looked like an army facing them. And he said the tear gas started coming, the troopers started coming, then there were law enforcement officers on horseback swinging billy clubs and running over women and children, shooting that tear gas, just beating people, just beating people. And they beat them back across the bridge and Hosea said some people couldn't get up and they were still beating – they were beaten down again. They were beaten down and they couldn't move. And he said he and John made it back to the church. And Hosea told me, he said, "Tyrone, when we looked back at the bridge we could see blood running down that bridge toward us where they had brutalized people so much so that their wound had opened up and blood was coming down that bridge." He said tear gas was in the air like a fog, like a thick fog. And he said they went back to the church and they gathered there at the church and he said they called Dr. King to let him know what had happened. And then all of the sudden here came all the media coverage, you know. Cause all the cameras were rolling. All the networks were there. And pictures, you know, in Life magazine, Look magazine, New York --

SHORT: It had woke up the conscious of America.

BROOKS: It touched the conscious of America and it touched the president of the United States. It touched Hubert Humphrey and Everett Dirksen who were the leaders in Congress. Humphrey being the leading Democrat, Dirksen being the leading Republican. And Hosea told me that he and Dr. Abernathy and Dr. King all conferred and said Dr. King called President

Johnson, said we want to meet. And he said, "We want you to know that we're going to march from Selma to Montgomery come hell or high water." Dr. King said, "Mr. President, you make the decision on whether or not we will receive federal protection." And he said the president said, "You will have federal protection. We're going to have Federal Marshals there. We're going to nationalize the National Guard. We're going to have FBI and we're going to have enough troopers to protect you all the way to Montgomery. We guarantee you that." And of course, President Johnson was, you know, holding his news conferences and speaking and saying the negroes have a right to march, they have a right to peaceful assemble, they have a right to vote. And so, the federal government protected that second march. If there had not been federal agents all the way from Selma to Montgomery, I believe a whole lot of folks would have died. But the protection of the federal government allowed that march to proceed the second one with King leading it all the way. And you know, some of us little rookies, we were on the tail end of the march, we could see the troopers but we could also see in the distance – we knew they were Klansmen. We could see people in little pick up trucks with shotgun racks and we knew who they were, but they were not going to come near those Federal Marshals. They knew those Federal Marshals were going to drop them if they did. So they stayed back from us. There were taunts along the route. You know, a truck full of them would ride by us and scream the N word at us and call young white kids N lovers. There were a whole lot of white faces in that march, of course, all the way. It was a mixture of blacks and whites and brown, red, yellows, lot of Jewish leaders who had come down from the North. A lot of famous Hollywood entertainers and actors were in that march. Harry Belafonte, Sammy Davis, Jr., Dick Gregory, all these great leaders.

Joan Baez and you know. So we were – we were awe that we were seeing all these people that we see all the time in the media.

Well we get to Montgomery and Dr. King delivered his message on the front steps of the Capitol. And it was so – I don't know what – I can't describe the feeling. Being able to march all the way and then stand back in that crowd listening to Dr. King. Abernathy introduced him. Listening to Dr. King standing up there speaking and saying that we would get the right vote. And I remember Dr. Abernathy telling me that after that march how they met in the White House with President Johnson and President Johnson said, "Yes, we're going to move this legislation through Congress, it's going to be bipartisan, there was resistance from the Southern Dixiecrats, the Strom Thurmond's and others, of course. But the bill passed with bipartisan support. And Humphrey and Dirksen led it and Johnson signed it. But when Johnson signed it he said, "I'm delivering the South to the Republican party." For the next 100 years I'm delivering the South. Well we don't think 100 years. But we think that the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act certainly were historic and monumental in many ways. It helped change America. It helped American become a greater nation because people of color had been able to move into the body politic. But also, it gave the Republican party and opportunity to take advantage of disgruntled white people in the South. The Nixon strategy has been quite successful in galvanizing support across the South where this is the only region of America that the Republican party have a base today. This is the only region. And this base is shrinking now, but this is – this is a result of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

SHORT: Are those two really the greatest triumphs of the movement?

BROOKS: I think so. I think in the words of Maynard Jackson, the Voting Rights Act became the most important legislation ever signed into law since the Emancipation Proclamation. That's what Maynard used to say all the time. He said without the right to vote we wouldn't have the opportunities that we have. We wouldn't – we wouldn't have the standard of the living that we enjoy today. We would not have business opportunities, economic opportunities, the chance to go to school any place you want to go, all of the things that have come to make America greater have been as a result of the Voting Rights Act. And so, I don't think you can dismiss the Voting Rights Act and say well, it was just an act. No, one of the most – it has to be considered the crown achievement of the Civil Rights Revolution. Civil Rights Act is fine. Civil Rights Act opened up public accommodations, educational institutions, neighborhoods where we can live. But if you don't have the right to vote you really are not a part of your society. If you don't have the right to vote you really can't make a decision as to the course of your government, federal, state and local. So I agree with Maynard Jackson. The Voting Rights Act became the most important piece of federal legislation since the Emancipation Proclamation.

SHORT: What do you think are the most important issues facing African Americans today?

BROOKS: I think today it is economic. It is not civil rights. It's economic empowerment. It is having the opportunity to have a job, earn decent wage, raise your family, stabilize your

neighborhood, educate your children, reduce crime in your neighborhoods. I think it's all around economics today, economics which impact the poverty in our midst. And it's not just African Americans; it's poor white folks, it's Latino Hispanics, some segment of the Asian population, Native Americans. We're all in this together. But in the African American community, when you start talking about the ills of our society, there's a greater disproportionate impact on the African American community than any other segment of the population. Latino Hispanics -- right behind us of course. But I think today if you talk about a movement, it has to be centered around economics. It's about a greater infusion of the wealth in a more equalized way so that all of the neighborhoods, all of the children, all of the communities can be lifted up. It's about economics today. It's about jobs. If you give a person a job, let them earn a decent wage, you can reduce the crime, you can keep families together, you can reduce your prison population, the stress on law enforcement and the courts. So today, this millennium, 2009 and beyond, we've got to focus on an economic enhancement movement. We've defeated Jim Crow. We've buried segregation. That's over. We do have pockets of resistance today. But we don't have to worry about the Ku Klux Klan any more. The Ku Klux Klan is bygone relic of our history. But today we have to worry about creating jobs and giving people an opportunity to earn a decent wage and paying the mortgage, paying the tuition, having decent transportation, a clean environment. This is what the movement has to deal with today. This is what the new Civil Rights Movement has to confront today. The crime in our communities, we read about it, we see it every day. Saving these young children from lives of misery and jails and prisons.

SHORT: What's the status of the SCLC today?

BROOKS: SCLC is transitioning into new leadership. My good friend Senator Charles Steele has retired. He gave it five years – he resigned from the senate in Alabama to head it for five years. He's moved on. He and I are still committed to SCLC, we love SCLC. SCLC has to adapt to the changing issues in our society. SCLC has to be the Civil Rights vanguard, but SCLC has to focus on economic enhancement and education and saving our children from lives of misery, and keeping families together. That comes back to economics. Because the stress on families sometimes causes families to disintegrate, break up. The families break up. And this happens in the black community more so than any other segment. The families break up. Daddy goes one way, mama goes one way, the children are lost. There's no compact family to raise the children and the children end up in juvenile, they graduate to real crimes, they end up in big prisons, lives of misery. They serve their time, they come back, can't get a job, got a stigma of a felony on their record. And this leads to more crime. This leads to more recidivism. And so, the civil rights leaders of today have to be focused more on economic development, economic enhancement so that we can keep families together, we can reduce the crime, we can enhance education, and I think this is the next civil rights movement in this country. I really do. It's got to be around economics. And Jesse Jackson preaches it more than anybody. But I think that's the next frontier for the civil rights movement.

SHORT: When did you get interested in becoming a politician?

BROOKS: Well, it wasn't my idea to ever be in public office. Reverend Joe Boone, who was the first Director of Operation Bread Basket in SCLC, he was of Dr. King's ministers in that inner circle, he suggested to me the latter part of 1979 that I should come to the Georgia Legislature. When he said that to me I said, "You mean you want me to go and do some research? You want me to go and pick up some legislation? You want me to run an errand? What do you mean?" He said, "No, we want you to serve." And I said, "Reverend Boone, nobody's going to vote for me." I said, "I'm considered a radical civil rights worker. Who will vote for me?" Big afro, Dashiki on, Tommie Smith/John Carlos medallion around my neck. I said who's going to vote for me? You know what he said to me? "He said well they've already voted for your daddy, Hosea Williams. He's up there already." Hosea was elected in 1974. Well I told him no. I said no way. I said the people of Atlanta are not going to vote for anybody like me. And he said, well, you think about it. The next day Dr. Ralph David Abernathy called me and he said, "Son, Joe Boone called. He tells me we want you to go to the legislature." I said, "Dr. Abernathy, you know nobody's going to –" He said, "They've already voted for Hosea." "What do you mean?" "Julian Bond is up there." "Yeah, but not me." Well they got me into the race in 1980. We won the race and we're here on the verge of 30 years and it's almost unbelievable. This was an accident that I didn't plan but it happened.

SHORT: Well let's talk about your goals. You came here in what, 1981?

BROOKS: Yeah, I was sworn in in '81.

SHORT: Freshman legislator. What did you hope to accomplish?

BROOKS: I just wanted to survive it. I just wanted to come in and exist and work with my colleagues. And I remember the late Sydney Marcus taking me to Speaker Murphy – Tom Murphy, who was the king of this chamber. We called him King Murphy. The late Sydney Marcus took me in before I was sworn in and I remember sitting in Speaker Murphy's office on this couch, just the three of us, and Speaker Murphy said, "Young man," he said, "we know who you are, you don't have anything to prove. I just want to know one thing." I said, "What is that, Mr. Speaker?" He said, "Do you want to be a serious law maker?" I said, "Yes, that's why I'm here." He said, "If you want to be a serious law maker I'll help you." He said, "I will always be there for you to help you, to guide you, to advise you, but I will never do anything that will hurt me back home in Bremen." He said, "I have to get elected in Bremen in Haralson County. You get elected in Atlanta." He said, "If I can help you without hurting myself back home in Bremen, you can come to me." He said, "But always know, if you give me your word on something I expect you to keep it." He said, "If you can't keep your word come back and tell me." We shook hands and Speaker Murphy made it possible for me to become successful in moving legislation. He and Larry Walker, Terry Coleman, Calvin Smyre they have helped me survive here for 30 years. And I gave you a little legislative chronology. You can peruse it and see what we've been able to accomplish. I always tell people whatever you congratulate me on moving

legislation through that's okay, but you have to understand I am just one vote. If I can't get 90 other people to vote with me, legislation doesn't pass. So it's not me moving legislation; it us moving legislation, collectively. And that's the legislative process. But if you have a presiding officer who will cooperate and work with you, you have a governor who will work with you, you have a senate that will work with you, you can move legislation. So whatever – whatever people give me credit for, they should understand that it was a collective group of us that were able to come together and do it as a team rather than one single individual. And I know how, you know, the media will say well, Brooks passed this or Brooks – no, well, Brooks introduced it but we passed it. And so I'm proud that we've been able to accomplish some meaningful, significant legislation that –

SHORT: Two significant things. First the flag.

BROOKS: Yes.

SHORT: You were an early leader in an effort to change the flag.

BROOKS: Yeah, in the early 80s I was asked to take the lead on the flag issue and it lasted almost 20 years and we were able to reach consensus in 2001 when Roy Barnes was governor. And Roy Barnes helped us tremendously get the votes. Speaker Murphy did not block us. He could have just winked his eye and killed us, but Speaker Murphy gave us the green light and we

were able to get it out and Mark Taylor was Lieutenant Governor and we were able to get it enacted. On December 31st, 2001 Governor Barnes signed it into law and gave me the pen. And I said I want to chop this pen up and give pieces to all of my colleagues who helped. He said well I got pens for them, too, don't worry. But that was a significant day for us because we took down the old Confederate Battle Flag, retired it to the museums and archives and raised the new flag. And we're very proud of that accomplishment. But the work we did in areas of judicial reform where we – we had to challenge the state on –

SHORT: Yeah, let's talk about – I was going to talk – ask you about that.

BROOKS: Well it started out as a lawsuit in 1988 to force the state to give more African Americans opportunities to become judges and prosecutors. And it led to an out-of-court settlement under the watch of Governor Zell Miller. We signed an out-of-court agreement in 1992 that has led to the election and appointment of more African American judges of any state in America now. We lead the nation in terms of black judges. From the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, Superior Court, State court on down to Magistrate Court. We're number one. So that litigation which led to an out-of-court settlement, to me has become a landmark. It's called the Brooks litigation but you look at it, you have to say that all of the co-plaintiffs working with us across the state, Michael Bowers, who was Attorney General; Laughlin McDonald over at ACLU, our lawyer; Governor Miller signed it in his office. To me, that was a very monumental day because it changed the face of our judicial branch. It reformed the judicial branch, not only

getting us more black judges and opportunities to become prosecutors in these circuits across the state that are 30% and above black, but it also changed the judicial nominating commission, judicial qualification commission to give us input.

And I think the other thing, if you look at that whole chronology of legislation, reforming the welfare system in the mid 80s, having the support of Joe McWilson from Cobb County as my partner on that, changing the old workfare program to what we call Peach today and how we've moved from punitive welfare reform to positive job creation and support to give people a hand up so they can become gainfully employed. And then finally, I think when you look at what we did for the law enforcement community in 2006. If you look at that chronology you'll see House Bill 101. Governor Perdue signed it into law. House Bill 101 was a bill that we sponsored to help those African American law enforcement officers who had been denied membership in the Peace Officers Benefit Annuity Retirement Fund, which is a pension system. They couldn't join because of their race, in the 50s. And all the through '64 and all the way up to '76 they were locked out. Once it came to our attention, Governor Barnes and the late Bill Cummings – not late but former Representative Bill Cummings, we all worked together and got Senator Eric Johnson in the senate from Savannah – we all worked together and we passed House Bill 101. And what it did was it allowed these law enforcement officers who had been denied membership in the pension fund, Peace Officers Benefit Annuity Retirement Fund, to come in. The state paid half their membership. They paid the other half to come into the fund. So their pensions will increase when they retire, and many are retiring now. But Governor Perdue signed that in 2006. And when I travel around the state and I run into law enforcement officers, black and white, they

say thank you. Because nobody had paid any attention to this. And I said well, it came to my attention from Sergeant Earl Westbrook on the Atlanta Police Department and Sergeant Richard Strout. Westbrook is black, Strout happens to be white. Strout, who still works with the APD, Strout pushed these black officers to get legislation enacted so they could enhance their pensions. And to me, that's very, very, very important.

So, you know, I let people judge what's the most important in terms of what we've been able to accomplish over these 30 years. But to me those are very meaningful, significant pieces of legislation I have worked on. Everything we do is important, but those are things that we're very proud of. Reapportionment of course. Passing legislations and challenging the reapportionment process from '81 to '92 to 2001 to make sure that we got fair, equal representation in terms of districts, congressional and legislative and all the way down county and municipal to make sure that African Americans and minorities would be represented in the body politic.

SHORT: Now, Tyrone, I'd like to ask you about your involvement in the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee.

BROOKS: Yeah, the Moore's Ford Bridge lynching case – I'm glad you brought that up as we close out, because this is a live case today. On July 25th, 1946, two African American couples, poor sharecroppers, were captured and murdered by a mob of Klansmen in Walton County, Georgia – Monroe. It's a sad saga in American and in Georgia's history. It's what we say it's a stain on our history and a burden on our souls. But this occurred in 1946. Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr. was 17 years old in 1946. He was so outraged that he wrote letters to the Atlanta Journal Constitution and other media. His letters were published. He was 17 years old. As I come in the SCLC and grow up I discover that Dr. King still had this case on his agenda. And when we last saw Dr. King alive on March 21st, 1968 in Macon, Georgia at New Zion Baptist Church, Dr. King talked about this case and made a commitment to come to Monroe after he and Ralph Abernathy finished with the sanitation workers strike in Memphis. He couldn't come but Abernathy and all of the great leaders, Hosea Williams, Joe Lowery, Jesse Jackson, Charles Steele, Ed DuBose, all of us had been there.

Now here's where we are now. In the year 2000, something told me to go talk to Governor Barnes about this case. I had been in Monroe and I had been in an interview with one of the eye witnesses to the lynching of Mr. Roy Jackson. Had a FBI agent in the room and got it recorded on video camera at the suggestion of Robert Howard. So I went into Roy's office on that day for something and Roy asked me, he said, "Where have you been?" I said, "I've been over in Monroe, Georgia." He said, "What have you been doing?" I said, "Well, Roy," I said, "We're working on this Moore's Ford Bridge lynching." And he said, "You know when I was a law student at UGA our law professors would have discussions about that case." And he said, "What do you think we ought to do now?" I said, "Well you're the governor." I said, "Why don't you order this case reopened?" He got up from his desk, went around to his computer, sent an email to Buddy Nix, who was heading the GBI. And the email read like this: Tyrone and I are sitting here talking about the Moore's Ford Bridge lynching; we think this case ought to be reopened. I'm ordering the case reopened right now and the full resources of the state are at your disposal.

Buddy Nix got the email and he told me later, he said, "That was almost like a celebration in the office when they got it because they wanted to get back on this case."

Vernon Keenan heads the GBI now, and he's working it and got his agents on it. But as a result of Governor Barnes ordering it reopened and us working on the feds through Congressman John Lewis and others, we've been able to get the U.S. Department of Justice to reopen it. So now there's a federal/state task force working this case in Monroe, Walton County. We have a volunteer FBI agent who's retired who drives from Birmingham, Alabama over to work with us. He just volunteers his services. Because he worked on Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman case in Mississippi; he worked on the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing case where the four little girls were killed, and he lives in Birmingham. His name is Bill Fleming. So he comes over to volunteer.

But this is a live case because many of the suspects are still living. You see, the suspects were very young when they committed the crime in 1946. Today, they're in their 80s, their 90s, and beyond. But I tell – I try to draw the parallel between what's happening here and what's happening with the International War Crimes Commission in rounding up old Nazi's who committed their war crimes against Jews in 1943 in Poland and Germany and other parts of Europe. The International War Crimes Commission is hunting down old Nazi's today, right now. And they're going to be tried, some of them have already been tried, in the Hague in the Netherlands because these crimes were crimes of murder and genocide and there is no statute of limitations on murder. And so we always say if these old Nazi's can be rounded up around the world like the Paul Henss from Lawrenceville, Georgia two years ago and John Demjanjuk from

Cleveland, Ohio, they can be deported back to Germany to stand trial. Yes, we have to do the same here in America. These old suspects, they may be up in age now but they were young then. And there's no statute of limitation on murder. Because of the leadership of Roy Barnes, governor of Georgia 2000, we were able to set up a reward fund and that reward fund is now grown to \$35,000. And we always say any citizen out there who wants to collect this reward, call the FBI, call the GBI or call the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials or by going to our website at GABEO.org if you have information that can help us arrest and prosecute these suspects. Then you can collect the reward and remain anonymous.

So this is a live case. This case was the catalyst to drive the Emmett Till bill into federal law. President George Bush signed the Emmett Till bill into law October 7th of last year and there's \$100 million appropriation attached to that bill so that more agents can be hired, more forensic scientists, prosecutors, lawyers, working these old cases across the South. They call it the Cold Case Squad. If you read Jerry Mitchell's article that I gave you earlier from the Jackson, Mississippi Clarion Ledger you will see how in Mississippi they're still working on many of those old cold cases. The Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman case is not dead. There are other suspects still living. Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman were killed 18 years after the Malcolms and the Dorseys were murdered here in Monroe, Georgia. So the Monroe, Georgia lynchings at the Moore's Ford Bridge are one of our priorities today. And thank God the FBI and the GBI are on the scene, on the ground working to bring closure to this horrible massacre.

SHORT: Tyrone, I've enjoyed this conversation. I could talk with you all day but I know you have –

BROOKS: I don't want to put you to sleep.

SHORT: -- time limitations. I would like to ask you one final question. How would you like to be remembered?

BROOKS: Oh Lord. Whenever I leave this planet I hope that the historians and the people of this state and the nation will look back and say here's a little old fellow, a little cotton picking peon peasant who was born in Washington, Georgia, grew up in Warrenton, who was fortunate enough to have great parents, great mentors, mentees, he had an opportunity to come into the Civil Rights Movement and survive it, wasn't assassinated, stayed in good health, ended up in the Georgia House of Representatives and served 30 years and the only thing I want people to look back over me and say is, you know what? He tried to help the people to the best of his ability. That's all. There is nothing outstanding about me that people would look at and say – kind of Dr. King. Dr. King said he didn't want to be known for a Nobel Peace Prize or anything like that. All he wanted the people to say about him is I tried to help somebody. And really that's all I want. The people to say he tried to make a difference. He tried to help the people who needed the help who couldn't help themselves. That's enough.

SHORT: Well you've done that.

BROOKS: I want to continue to do that as long as I live.

SHORT: Good. Thank you so much.

BROOKS: Thank you, Bob.

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