Interview with **Richard Hatcher**
Date: December 12, 1988
Interviewer: Terry Kay Rockefeller
Camera Rolls: 3079-3085
Sound Rolls: 337-339
Team: C

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #3079]
[sound roll #337]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:00:15:00

Interviewer:

I wanted to begin by asking you about the Congress of African Peoples [sic] in Atlanta in 1970 and the significance of that meeting and more than that, the significance of your deciding to go. Who was there? What did it mean that you joined them?

00:00:27:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, the Congress of African People's [sic] [clears throat] meeting involved a lot of people who considered themselves nationalists and who, at that time, were considered extremists almost. And so, for a so-called mainstream elected official such as myself to attend such a meeting was a little unusual. Many people felt that a certain stigma would attach if you

became associated with people who, in some instances, were even advocating the violent overthrow of the government. And so, there certainly was not a…it, it was not a, a usual situation. But I went [clears throat] for a number of reasons. First of all, I felt very comfortable in working with any Black people and I felt that nationalists had a very important message and, and one that should be listened to and that it was important that some of us who were in elective office have a clear understanding and a relationship with individuals who perhaps might not be at all interested in running for elected office themselves. And so, I, I, it, it was an interesting place to be at that particular, at that particular time. And the speech that I delivered there as I recall today, was not necessarily a great speech at all but it certainly was a, a speech that talked about some of the concerns that Black people had at that time. The James Baldwin quote from his "Stranger in the Village" essay, Blacks at that time truly did feel that even though they were citizens of the United States, they were strangers in the village. They were, they were not accorded the same rights and the same opportunities that other citizens of this particular village were accorded. And so, it was a, a speech that basically said that the present condition of, of Blacks in the United States was unacceptable and something needed to be done. And there had, even before that meeting, among nationalists particularly, been a growing movement towards some kind of national Black political convention. And, in that meeting, at the Congress of African People's meeting, there certainly was further talk and definition and refinement of the idea of calling this massive convention of Black people and plotting our political strategy, planning what we would do and, and looking at perhaps new political institutions. There was great discussion at that time about the possibility of a third party and there was some discussion at that point even, about a Black running for President of the United States as a Democrat. All of that was swirling around that Congress of African People's meeting.

00:04:23:00

Interviewer:

Was there a divis, or divisions within the Black community that you saw a chance of kind of bringing together and repairing or healing by going to, to Atlanta?

00:04:33:00

Richard Hatcher:

There, there was a, a tremendous amount of distrust between the nationalists, people who considered themselves nationalists and the elected officials, Black elected officials and people who operated in the electoral politic arena and in the civil rights, civil rights arena. The leadership of the civil rights community, for the most part, saw many of these nationalists almost as anarchists and as people who were more interested in "Burn baby Burn" than "Build baby Build." And so, there was this kind of division, the schism within the Black community. And one of the reasons that, that I found myself in many instances, in meetings with nationalists and with others was that [clears throat] I, I saw the damage that this…and other people saw it too, the kind of damage that this division was doing to the whole movement, to the whole effort to improve the lot of Black people in this country. And

because my base in Gary was a fairly secure base, that is by that time, by 1970, the majority of the people in the City of Gary were Black, certainly it was clear that I was in fairly good shape at home. And I also would like to believe because I believed that it was critically important that these two factions come together. There were times when I found myself being the kind of middle, middle person who sort of met with this group and met with the others and was able to speak with some legitimacy to the concerns of both groups. And there were other people who played that kind of role also, I, I think particularly in the civil rights arena. I think of a Carl Holman, an M. Carl Holman who certainly was almost like the glue who was, you know, sort of in touch with everyone. He was in touch with people on the far left and he was in touch with people on the right and he, he, he kept all of us kind of talking to each other, sometimes through him. He served as a kind of conduit for many of us. And then much credit has to be given to people like Amiri Baraka and Hayward, Hayward Joyner [sic], Haywood—Hayward Henry, who were nationalists themselves but understood the need, very much, the need for Black people to come together and—

00:07:39:00

Interviewer:

Sorry. Interrupting you and, and have you take us through the steps.

00:07:42:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Can we just stop for a second?

Interviewer:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Stopping down.

[cut]

00:07:45:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:07:49:00

Interviewer:

How did this notion that the nationalists had at, at Atlanta grow into the Gary Convention? What, what were the steps that led people to come together [unintelligible]?

00:08:00:00

Richard Hatcher:

I think several things were happening. The nationalists were very active around the country and they were talking to people and people were listening. And they had this wonderful sense of history and of Africa, what Africa really should mean to us. And much more so, I think, than many of us who were elected officials, the nationalists were thinking in terms of where we ought to go and where we ought to be in terms of power in this country while I think many of us who were elected officials felt that we had already arrived, that, that after all, we'd become mayors, we'd become Congress…members of Congress and so we really were there. But the nationalists understood better than we did that there was still a very long ways to go and much that needed to be done. And so, the idea of this national convention to really talk through these things and to plan a political strategy for our people evolved out of these meetings, the meeting in Atlanta and some of the Black Power conferences that had taken place in the '60s, during the '60s. And there, there was this feeling that we must come together and, and somehow fashion our, our destiny, fashion, fashion our future. As I said, much better understood by the nationalists than we. And the other side of it was that nationalists seemed to know a lot more about Africa and understood African institutions better than many of us who had been pretty much weaned on, on American institutions as such. And so, they brought all of that to the table. And people…it was an exciting notion, and people responded to it. And, and, and in some sense, without being critical of elected officials, I was one myself but in some sense, it was a matter of kind of catching up because it was clear that the people were moving in that direction, were moving towards the idea of Black unity, of, of relating to Africa and all of that. And so, for many elected officials, it was a matter of, of saying, There go my people. I must catch up and lead them. What eventually evolved in terms of the Gary Convention, the National Black Political Convention was that the elected officials, the civil rights leadership pretty much took over the planning of that Gary convention for 1972. And at one point, there was even some question as to whether nationalists would be permitted to be a part of the planning. Which is ironic since it was probably more their idea than ours to—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Richard Hatcher:

—begin with.

00:11:14:00

Interviewer:

We just ran out of film.

Richard Hatcher:

OK, OK.

Interviewer:

We got that in. So, it was a quick switch and then I'm gonna—

[cut]

[camera roll #3080]

00:11:19:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it please.

[slate]

00:11:22:00

Interviewer:

You and Congressman Diggs and Amiri Baraka were a kind of fascinating trio to come together with this convention.

Richard Hatcher:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

How'd that come about and how did you, how did you work together? What was it like?

00:11:33:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, it was interesting. At the point where there pretty much was a consensus that this convention should be held…the meeting, the last meeting that I recall was in Washington D.C. and there was a, a group of, of Black leaders in that meeting and the decision was made that there ought to be three conveners. Congressman Diggs was, at that time, a very prominent member of Congress. He had founded the Congressional Black Caucus in 1970. He was a logical person to select if you were talking about an elected official at the federal level. Amiri Baraka was clearly at that time the leader of the nationalist movement in this country although Maulana Karenga was also very prominent and, and very active in that, in that movement. So, the selection of Baraka basically said that the nationalists were in. The selection of Diggs said that elected officials were in. Aside from the fact that the decision was made subsequently to hold the meeting in Gary, I'm not quite sure why I was selected as sort of the third or the in-between person other than, as I indicated, this feeling that I felt comfortable talking to both sides and relating, relating to both sides. And so, it was a kind of way, I guess, of, of putting a moderating influence [laughs] between these two, these two groups or representatives of groups. We—

00:13:21:00

Interviewer:

How did your working relationships evolve? I mean, how did you, did you get to work together at all?

00:13:24:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, we, we, we absolutely worked together. I recall one time that we felt it was very important that John Johnson of Johnson Publications be supportive of this because we wanted him to do stories in *Ebony* and *Jet* about this upcoming convention. And so, we thought it was really very important to go see him personally, which we did. The three of us went, went to see him. And the, this incredibly plush office and Mr. Johnson was very gracious, which turned out to be a surprise to us because going in, we really felt that he might not be so receptive to the idea of this kind of convention with this mixture, this volatile mixture of different parts of the Black community. But he, on the contrary, was very responsive and very supportive. And…but we did that together and that required us being together and talking to each other. And then as the planning continued, it just necessitated almost a day-to-day contact between us. And we were…when you think about it, it's pretty incredible, this convention was pretty much put together over a period of a little over a month. And to put together a convention that ultimately brought close to ten thousand people of, of these broadly disparate backgrounds and so forth together, now that I look back at it, it was pretty, pretty incredible. There was some distrust, I must say. We did not know each other, the three of us did not know each other very well but in this process, we got to know each other very well. And I think we got to like each other quite a lot. We understood each other better. And I think particularly between Congressman Diggs and Amiri Baraka, that whereas they had been divided before, I think they came much closer together. There were

still things that they disagreed with each other on and I'm sure they disagreed with me [laughs] on just about everything but I think we really became friends. And it's a friendship that has survived over the period of the last twenty, twenty years or so. So, that was one of the, the wonderful ancillary benefits of, of this convention for me personally.

00:16:03:00

Interviewer:

What, what was Baraka's role? What, what was Baraka doing to make the convention possible?

00:16:09:00

Richard Hatcher:

Amiri Baraka was first of all, one of the hardest working people that, that, that I had…have ever had the opportunity to work with. Secondly, he really understood, he, he was, he was a person, he was a very literate person [clears throat] and he really understood power relationships and, and how important a meeting such as this could be. And, as a consequence, I think he really committed himself and all of the resources at his disposal. So, while I as mayor of the City of Gary, was in fact able to utilize much of my staff, city police department and other resources that were available to me, he also had resources in terms of people who could write, who could type, who could put things together, who were willing to stay up all night and work all night if that's, that's what was required. And so, he put all of that into this convention and, and, in many ways, that was critical to the success of the convention. There certainly were other people. I, I, I keep thinking again, of Carl Holman and, and how important a role he played in helping to put the logistics of this convention together. And there were people in Washington, Ivanhoe Donaldson, I remember, sent at least two staff persons that he had to, to Gary for about two weeks before the convention to work on the organizing of this convention. The support, the support was tremendous but through it all, especially while the convention was underway, Baraka and, and, and the people that he brought in really kept things moving when papers had to be…resolutions had to be typed overnight, in many instances, he's the one that got it done. And he was the head of the Resolutions Committee, he was chair of the Resolutions Committee and that was a lot of work but he was able, able to get that done. And he—

00:18:30:00

Interviewer:

Can you describe his staff and how they worked together? Do you think?

Richard Hatcher:

Yeah, well just—

Interviewer:

Do you have that picture in you?

00:18:35:00

Richard Hatcher:

Just to give you an example, as I said, they were very hard working and would work for hours on end without any real relief. And, but if you watched them back in the rooms at this huge high school where the convention was held, they would work for maybe an hour or two hours, then they would take a fifteen-minute break. And the break would be to form a circle holding hands and then they would begin to do chants and sing for about fifteen minutes and it seems that the music, the singing, the, the chants refreshed them and then they would go back to the typewriters and work for another two hours. It was a pretty incredible sight. Most of them wore these long white flowing gowns and turbans. They were just incredible people and they, they, they produced work that made it possible for that convention to go on and for us to have the documents we needed when we needed them.

00:19:51:00

Interviewer:

For sure. I wanna ask you about the City of Gary, you know, once the decision was made. How was the decision made to meet in Gary and then how did your city respond at first and then as, as things evolved?

00:20:01:00

Richard Hatcher:

The decision was made, I believe, in a meeting in Washington and there were, I suppose, lots of reasons. It, it, it came as a great surprise to me when, when someone said, Well, we should do this in Gary. I think the reason given was that we should do it where we have a Black mayor and Gary was one of the few cities in the country at that point that had a Black mayor. And we should do it at a place where Blacks from all over the country could come and feel comfortable. Wouldn't have to worry about the police beating them, wouldn't have to worry about getting cooperation from city officials. And so, the judgment…and also the fact that Gary was located geographically pretty much in the center of the country so that people coming from the West Coast as well as from the East Coast and from the South had roughly the same, same distance to travel. So, all of those things were factors. Now, there were some real negatives about doing it in the City of Gary. You were talking about a convention of thousands of people and Gary had one viable hotel with 300 rooms. And that, that was a real problem. There were a number of small motels but there, there was nothing approaching the capacity, the hotel capacity to accommodate the thousands of people who were invited or

anticipated coming to this convention. But the decision was made that the positives outweighed the negatives. And then of course, once we knew that there was interest in coming to Gary, city officials and civic leaders in Gary assured the leadership of the Planning committee that they would do whatever was necessary in order to accommodate this meeting.

00:22:10:00

Interviewer:

You said it—

Camera Crew Member #1:

We have to change rolls.

Interviewer:

OK. Right, right.

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, that's a rollout.

Interviewer:

Great, great.

[cut]

[camera roll #3081]

00:22:14:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:22:18:00

Interviewer:

OK.

00:22:20:00

Richard Hatcher:

Once, once it became clear that the leadership wanted to have the meeting in Gary, another problem developed. And that was basically that the White business community in Gary had these extreme fears about these large number of Blacks coming to town. They thought in terms of crime and all kinds of horrible things. It was almost as if the, someone had just announced that the Viet Cong was coming to Gary. And their initial reaction was very apprehensive and there were a number of meetings held and discussions about this. And eventually they said, Well, you know, we'll see what happens. The fascinating thing is that it ultimately turned out that the White business community as well as the leadership of the Black community in Gary opened their arms and welcomed the delegates to town. The Chamber of Commerce prepared a wonderful pouch or folder for people to keep their papers in. It was a leather pouch that had the names, the thousands of names of delegates of the convention on that, on that pouch and gave one to every delegate coming to the convention. So, first of all, their attitude did in fact change in that regard. And secondly, the marvelous thing was that during the course of the four or five days that the thousands of people were in town, [clears throat] the crime rate in the City of Gary actually went down. So, the fears that were expressed initially simply were not realized. The other truly marvelous thing that occurred was that this problem of no hotel capacity required that we call upon the citizens of Gary to open their homes to the delegates who were coming to the convention and they did it with relish. It, it was…there were just hundreds of wonderful stories that were told as the delegates lived with Gary families and over the period of the time of the convention, got to be friends and friendships were established that continue even to this day as a result of the people of Gary opening their arms and, and their homes to the convention delegates. So, overall, it turned out to be a very positive experience for our city and hopefully, for the people who visited.

00:25:25:00

Interviewer:

I want you to just stop now and think about the beginning.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Do you wanna cut?

Interviewer:

No, we're good. The, just the very opening of the convention. You'd been planning this for years, where were you just before you went out into the podium? Can you just paint that picture for me?

00:25:39:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, the interesting thing, the opening session that morning, I had to be in my office, in the mayor's office because there was some city business that had to be, had to be taken care of and I think I was really concerned about two things. One, I was concerned about whether I was gonna get this business taken care of in time to get over to the school for…because it was on the far west side of, of the city, in time for the opening ceremonies. And secondly, to be very honest with you, even at that point, I still had some concern that we wouldn't have very many people, that not very many people would show up. Well, the truly wonderful thing was when I got to, to the hall and came from behind the stage and out onto the platform, I saw a, a veritable sea of faces. ***It was probably one of the most glorious moments of my life when I walked out and saw all of these Black people of every color, every hue, every shade, the colorful dashikis and, and other African garb that some of them wore mixing with three-piece suits and, and so forth, it was just an incredible sight to behold.*** And, in that crowd, to see people over the next few days who were really famous, famous entertainers, individuals who in one field or another, had achieved great success and great national and sometimes international fame but to see them simply mixing with the people walking around like any other delegate, any other person. There was this, this wonderful sense that we had truly come together as a people and a warm feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood that I, I'm not sure we've been able to duplicate since. But it was certainly there and there was a kind of electricity in the air and it was clear that people were there about very serious business. And want…and, and really saw this as a meeting that would have a long-term, long-range impact on the lives of, of Black Americans.

00:28:16:00

Interviewer:

Tell me how you came out on the podium and, and began your speech and the reception that you got. What went through your head as you?

00:28:24:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, I, I, I don't recall who introduced me but whoever did it was extremely kind, overly so. [laughs] And they, they really gave me a very warm introduction, not just as a person who was about to, to make the next speech but also as the host of, of, of, of this gathering and they were extremely kind in their remarks. And so, the response, the reception from this huge audience was pretty incredible for me. I was unused to that kind of, that kind of…warm and, I think, very genuine appreciative response. And, and, and it also caused me, I, I had this sense that I feel sometimes when I'm in a Baptist Church. There is just something about a Baptist audience that makes you feel that you, you've suddenly become 10 feet tall and that you are a combination of Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King and, and any other great orator in the Black community. A Baptist audience makes you feel that way and that's the way this audience made me feel. It, it has to be the kind of feeling that people have, that a, a, a

basketball player has when he knows he can't miss, he knows that every shot he takes is going to go in. Well, a speaker has that kind of feeling with certain audiences, that, I know that I can reach and I can communicate and I can relate to this audience, and that was my feeling as I, I began that speech at the National Black Political Convention.

00:30:20:00

Interviewer:

What was the significance of the variety of people that came to the—

Camera Crew Member #1:

I have to change the tape.

Interviewer:

OK. We need to change.

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible]

[cut]

[sound roll #338]

[slate]

00:30:26:00

Camera Crew Member #1 :

Mark it.

[slate]

00:30:28:00

Interviewer:

What made this special, different from a traditional Democratic or Republican convention?

00:30:34:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, I think first of all, Gary was different because the nationalists and so-called mainstream Black politicians came together at Gary. There weren't that many Black elected officials, maybe two, three hundred or so but they really had not communicated very well with the nationalists and the nationalists with them. But Gary represented, maybe the first time that these two came together, agreed on something, agreed to work together on something and in some instances, even agreed on goals and, and objectives although there was much disagreement also. So, that made it different. It, it, it really was our total community that was coming together. Some…just before the convention opened, unfortunately, Roy Wilkins, who was then the Head of the NAACP, really denounced the entire convention. He said that, you know, it was not legitimate, that the people who were involved were not the really influential people there. And there were articles, I believe, in *The New York Times* and other publications quoting him as saying this was not a good thing that this meeting was taking place and that he would not participate. In all fairness to him, one of his major objections was that the convention, the planners made it clear that this was a convention for Black people and that the Whites would not be permitted to attend or to be inside the hall. And that, Roy Wilkins felt, was inconsistent with the NAACP's commitment and to a, an integrated society. And, and so he, he criticized it on, on that basis. But that criticism, interestingly enough, I think, gave the convention more exposure, more public exposure and caused more people to come. In other words, local members of the NAACP chapters across the country came in full force as did members of the Urban League and so forth. Vernon Jordan, who was then the head of the Urban League himself came to the convention. He did not play a truly active role in the convention but he was there. Sort of…e made a statement by being there and other members of the civil rights leadership of our country certainly came. So, it was this— t

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Richard Hatcher:

—this idea of all these people coming together first of all, this wonderful...

00:33:20:00

Interviewer:

Just—

Camera Crew Member #1:

So, rollout on thirty, eighty-one.

Interviewer:

—the idea of all these people coming together.

Richard Hatcher:

I see.

Interviewer:

That was [laughs]—

[cut]

[camera roll #3082]

00:33:25:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:33:27:00

Interviewer:

OK. All those people coming together, what was the feeling [unintelligible] process?

00:33:31:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, the idea of all these people coming together, this, this wonderful kaleidoscope of colors and political philosophies coming together in one place and working with each other and trying to establish some common goals, that made Gary different. Gary was different in another sense and that was that the nationalists had a better understanding, not only of our history but also, of, of Africa and what Africa was all about. And they understood that it was necessary to replicate, in this country, some of the institutions, some of the African institutions in a way that many of us who were elected officials simply did not, did not understand and, and really appreciate in some instances. Also, we were coming out of a period where the pride, the idea of, of, of Black pride was a very powerful force and it was also the, a time when we were looking at the whole question of power and how…who had it, how to get it, what to do with it when, when you had it. And again, I must say without being critical of many of my colleagues who were in electoral politics and so forth, that the nationalists seemed to understand the concepts of power better than many of us did. And so, when all of that came together in Gary, that made Gary a very unusual and particularly interesting place to be. In addition to that, we had this debate going on about one…whether

we should go the third party route or whether we should remain in the Democratic Party and try to make the Democratic Party responsive to the needs of Black people. And there were very eloquent and forceful and powerful arguments on both sides of that issue and that was a part of the Gary discussion. And then the other part was the whole question, should we run a Black for President of the United States? After all, 1972 was a presidential election year. It was a year that ultimately, would see the nomination of George McGovern as the Democratic nominee for president. But at that time, our focus was…shouldn't an African-American get out and run for president? Well, as the convention, when we finally arrived at the convention, by that time, Shirley Chisholm, the congresswoman from New York City, had announced that she was a candidate for President of the United States. Frankly, that took a lot of Black males by surprise and shock. And many of them were not quite sure how they felt about that. Many of us tried to get Shirley Chisholm to come to Gary, to come to this convention. We were absolutely convinced that that would be the right thing for her to do. Others who were advising her apparently persuaded her that she, if she should come to Gary, she would run the risk of, in effect, be-being rejected by that convention and therefore, before the whole country, it would appear that her own people had rejected her being a candidate for president.

00:37:27:00

Interviewer:

What did you think would happen if she came?

00:37:29:00

Richard Hatcher:

I absolutely believed that if Shirley Chisholm had walked into that hall, just walked into that hall, she wouldn't have had to say a word and the entire convention would have gone up in smoke almost because there was such a great sense of pride that a Black woman had the courage and the fortitude to announce that she was running for the highest office in this country and perhaps, the most powerful office on earth, elective office on earth. And she, without a doubt, would have gotten the overwhelming support of that convention. And I think in many ways, while her candidacy was significant and, and broke new ground, it would have been more significant and would have been enhanced by the kind of momentum that would have come out of Gary in support of her. But for whatever reason, the decision was made that she would not, not come to Gary. But even that debate was a very interesting debate. Should we go with a Shirley Chisholm? Should we go with a Black candidate for president or should we support the party that we had supported for such a long time since 1932, the Democratic Party.

00:39:00:00

Interviewer:

I wanna go back to that third party issue.

Richard Hatcher:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

A lot of people came to Gary expecting the third party to be formed right there.

00:39:06:00

Richard Hatcher:

Hmm, mm-hmm.

00:39:08:00

Interviewer:

How did, what do you think?

00:39:09:00

Richard Hatcher:

I think that, that many of the people who came to Gary thought that the whole purpose of the convention was to form a third party, that there was going to be a Black third party and, and that was just that. Gary would formalize that. However, there were many individuals and I include myself in that number who were not commit-committed or were not convinced that that was the best strategy for us to take. I felt, at the time, that we should give the Democratic Party one more chance. And it seems ironic now some, [clears throat] some seventeen or eighteen years later, that in the last campaign for president, 1988, that I, I heard people saying, Give the Democrats one more chance. It's indicative that over a period of seventeen years, the, the, the, the compensation that people generally receive from a political party that they supports overwhelmingly has simply not been forthcoming from the Democratic Party. But in 1972, that was my feeling. In fact, I think somewhere in my speech, after pointing out what the Democratic Party had done to us since 1932 and talking about our being in the hip pocket of this party and, and it almost being a reflex, an automatic reflex to support the Democratic Party on the part of Blacks in this country and, and yet, when you looked at our role in the party and look at the benefits that we derived from that party, they were not very substantial. But after chronicling all of that, then I said, But I think we ought to give the Democratic Party one more chance. It's interesting that Reverend Jesse Jackson in his speech literally came within a hair's breadth of calling for the formation of a third party. He was very, very articulate and his language was very colorful in calling for a third party to be, to be formed. In the final analysis, the compromise was the formation of the National Black Political Assembly. And the idea was that the assembly would do many of the things that a

political party does without declaring itself to be a separate party. And that it would eventually, the thought was that it would eventually evolve into a third party.

00:41:58:00

Interviewer:

What were the, what were the agenda items you—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Can you stop for a second?

Interviewer:

Sure—

Camera Crew:

Stop down. Yeah, I'm hearing it, I'm hearing—

[cut]

00:42:03:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:42:05:00

Interviewer:

What was the agenda that, that was passed at Gary aiming at [unintelligible]?

00:42:10:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, ***it was a wonderful agenda. It addressed the issue of political parity.*** It was pointed out at that time, that based upon our numbers, instead of having, I believe, around ten or eleven Black congressmen, we should have had forty-three. And so, a goal, a target was set to achieve that level of members of congress. We talked about the need to expand the number of local Black elected officials. And people were encouraged to go back to their home

communities and organize politically and run candidates for offices like city council, mayor and so forth. And that was a major thrust of that meeting, talking to people about and trying to inspire people to go back and to run for public office. And the truly incredible thing is that it happened. People at that time, we had as I said, maybe three, four hundred Black elected officials including dog catchers and everything else. We have evolved down to where we have over six thousand and that all has taken place in, in a short period of about seventeen ears. So, Gary was truly inspirational. A meeting that was held two years later in Little Rock, Arkansas was significant for the fact that there were workshops on how to run for office and a lot of people learned how to go back home and run for these, these various offices. So, political parity was a major thrust of, of this convention. ***But we also talked about economic parity and the need to establish economic institutions. Many of the discussions that are ongoing today were occurring at that meeting. Unemployment, the disproportionate level of unemployment among Blacks, the disproportionate level of poverty among Blacks and what to do about it, what kinds of new institutions could be created to address those problems.*** At that time, one of the major issues of the day was the issue of busing. Busing for the purpose—

00:44:20:00

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] OK.

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, that's a roll out on thirty, eighty-two.

[cut]

[camera roll #3083]

00:44:23:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it please.

[slate]

00:44:24:00

Interviewer:

In the end, the media kind of really focused only on two agenda issues at Gary.

00:44:27:00

Richard Hatcher:

Mm-hmm.

00:44:29:00

Interviewer:

What, what were they and how did that come about?

00:44:31:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, I, I think the two agenda issues that the media spent a lot of time on was the issue of busing for the purpose of integration and the issue, the so-called Israeli issue, the Middle East question. And the interesting thing is that the agenda was not dominated by those two questions. In fact, the first several days of the convention involved the kinds of things I've talked about, political parity, economic parity, the need to promote Black pride. All of those things were very important in terms of, of that convention. One of the things I must say about the meeting and the reason, one of the reasons so many people were able to be there was that at that time, there certainly were a large number of federal programs and those programs made it possible for people to come on expense accounts. That is, they, they were able to come to a meeting like this as a part of their work in terms of community organizing and so forth. And so, a lot of the people who…that were there were there based upon that ability to work on their program. It was a part of the program that they were working for. It also meant however, that they could only…they had to get back home on Sunday so that they could be at work on, on Monday morning. So, ***the last day of the convention was Sunday. We were slated to wrap up at noon. And the purpose of that last day was the adoption of the resolutions that had been agreed to by the body.*** These…many people, I, I would say better than half the people who attended the convention had left by the time these two resolutions on busing for the purpose of integration and the issue of the Middle East came up. And both of them, as I said, were very, very controversial issues. And so, it was the rather limited number of people who remained who debated and voted on those, those two issues. The vote on those issues won against busing for the purpose of integration, which was a, a position directly contradictory to the NAACP's position and many other national Black organizations. And then certainly, the calling for a homeland for the Palestinian people, which at that time, was a very radical position to take. It's interesting that today almost everyone agrees on that but at that time, it was very radical. Those were the two resolutions that were adopted and those were the two resolutions that the news media, which frankly up to that point, with the exception of a very brief mention on the evening news on the day, several days prior, had

pretty much ignored the convention because they were very angry about being locked out and not being permitted to come in. And so, they pretty much ignored it. But when those two resolutions passed, they picked it up and ran with it and that was the story that was told in the national media of the Gary Convention. Interestingly, as I said, only a small part of the discussion acted on by less than half of the delegates to the convention and yet, that became the dominating story. One of the reasons today, if such a meeting were to be held, that I don't think that would happen is that today there are more Blacks involved in the media itself. At that time, there were very few Blacks involved in the media with the exception of the small weekly Black newspapers and a few radio stations around the country. You did not have Blacks at NBC and ABC and so forth in any significant numbers. So, it was a very hostile press that looked at what was going on in Gary and selectively decided what it would emphasize and did so in an extremely negative way.

00:48:55:00

Interviewer:

One final question about Gary. What do you think the mood and the energy and the enthusiasm that the delegates took home with them was? What, what, what, what did they come away with?

Richard Hatcher:

I, I think they were tremendously inspired.

Interviewer:

You can say delegates [unintelligible]

00:49:09:00

Richard Hatcher:

Yes. You have to think in terms of the fact that some of our very greatest orators and speakers appeared on that platform. Some, some of our, our most revered and respected leaders, Coretta Scott King, they were all there. Harry Belafonte was particularly active in helping to organize and raise money to make the convention work. Isaac Hayes, I remember he did a tremendous performance. There were other entertainers who came. Nancy Wilson, who just came as people and just wanted to be a part of something very important that was taking place. And, and so, you couldn't be at that convention for that week without coming away, I think, feeling great pride in being Black, being very encouraged that there was hope for Black people in this country and being very determined to go back to your home, your, your city, your town and to try to implement many of the things that you had heard at that convention. And that is exactly, I think, what happened. ***People went back home, rolled up their sleeves and ran for public office in a way that Blacks had never thought about running for public office before.*** And the amazing thing as I said, many of them were

elected, they laid the foundation for Blacks moving on to the national platform…as they have in recent years. In fact, I believe that you can trace the candidacy of Jesse Jackson for President of the United States directly to that Gary Convention in 1972. Because when that foundation was laid, it was a natural step [clears throat] then, to run in a very serious way, a person for President of the United States. And so, much of the political success that we enjoy today, I think, emanated from the meeting in Gary and the coming together of all parts of the Black community's philosophical spectrum and a kind of determination to go out and to change the world. And, in many ways, that's exactly what has happened.

00:51:47:00

Interviewer:

Wonderful. Let me just stop this.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, stop down.

Interviewer:

OK. What I—

[cut]

00:51:51:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:51:51:00

Interviewer:

What were some of the behind-the-scenes discussions that went on around the third party and then how did…how was the decision actually finalized to not do that?

00:52:01:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, I think those who advocated a third party really attempted to lobby [clears throat] other people and lobby the state delegations to support the notion. There was a resolution that had

been introduced calling for the creation of a third party. On the other side, there were those who were lobbying against it. They were…who were saying basically that this was not the time. I don't think anyone was opposed to it as such but a number of people felt that this was not the right time to, to form or create a third party.

00:52:40:00

Interviewer:

Why not?

00:52:41:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, I think again, it was this idea that the Democratic, give the Democratic Party one more chance. Give them one more chance to prove that they can be fair, that they can treat Blacks in a just way. And so, that was sort of the argument. Now, there were other more fundamental reasons. There were many people at that convention who had a real stake in not seeing a third-party form. Some of them were employed in one way or another by [laughs] the Democratic Party. Some of them were very active and had relationships in that party that they did not want to sever and as a consequence, you know, were, were opposed. There were many reasons. I do not want to in any way suggest that these were not legitimate reasons but there were just many different reasons why people did not see this as the right time. There were some people who simply felt that in a, in a sense, it would be committing political suicide. In fact, you would be out with a third party, the history of third parties in our country, not having been very successful and that you'd be in a third party while the real transactions, the real influence was being wielded in either the Democrat or the Republican party. And, and we'd sort of just be outside and not have anything to say about anything. And so, there were all these reasons on the one side and then there were the counter arguments on the other side, that we had not been treated well by either of the parties, that if we formed a third party, at the very least, we could have our own nominees for president and, and so forth. We would be establishing our independence of the Democratic Party. It would be a little like declaring a, a, a new emancipation proclamation, that we were free of the Democratic Party, [laughs] you know, that had sort of held us captive for…since 1932. All of those arguments were going on on the floor and behind the scenes as these resolutions were coming up for a final vote. Many of the speakers, as I said, placed themselves on one side or another of this issue. Reverend Jackson, as I said, said, You know, I think we ought to stop talking— about it and go ahead and do it. I mean, that it was almost that that way.

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Richard Hatcher:

—about it and go ahead and do it. I mean, that it was almost that that blunt.

00:55:26:00

Interviewer:

That's, that's great. OK. We're just—

[cut]

[camera roll #3084]

00:55:29:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:55:32:00

Interviewer:

What, what did the Harold Washington campaign signify?

00:55:35:00

Richard Hatcher:

Without a doubt, Harold Washington's campaign in Chicago was a campaign of liberation [clears throat] for Black Chicagoans. Up to that point, most of the prominent Black elected officials in Chicago had been part of the machine, the Daley machine and, and even before then. And while they were persons, in many instances of, of, of tremendous intelligence and ability, they had always played the game. They had always been a part of this structure, this machine that said, You do for me, I'll do for you. You scratch my back, I'll scratch your back. And, in many instances, the interest of that machine clashed with the best interest of the Black community. And when that happened, for the most part, these Black elected officials went with the machine and against their own community. That's how strong their attachment and involvement was. The really fascinating thing about the Harold Washington campaign was that without a doubt, the Jackson boycott of ChicagoFest and the march and the demonstrations that were led by Reverend Jesse Jackson really sparked this drive against Jane Byrne and, and for a Black mayor. But the interesting thing is that the people who picked up the ball and really ran with it were not necessarily community activists who for years had been saying they, that you ought to go against the machine and people like Lu Palmer and people like that had been fighting the machine and the Gus Savages and other

people like that. But this time, the thing that was different was that the Black middle-class business community got involved. [clears throat] Mr. Gardner from Soft Sheen, Bill Berry. People, who up to that point, had, had sort of been looked at, I think, pretty much as team players, as people who didn't rock the vote and so forth. But they really took the initiative and they used their money, they used their influence, they used their prestige to get behind this move to support a Black mayor, particularly to convince and persuade Harold Washington that he should run. So, that was kind of interesting that this real push came from the Black middle-class business community in Chicago. And, and, and that way, the community activists the, the people at PUSH and other places, who, as I said for years, had advocated the overthrow of this machine, now had a really powerful ally working with them and they had this wonderful candidate who was truly charismatic, who certainly was about as charming a person as an individual could be and yet, you know, had this powerful voice and was really a strong…had this very strong image. So, all of that came together and the groundwork, I think, for it, had been laid for years but it, it finally all came, all came together. And so, it was, it really freed the, the, the Black community in Chicago in a way that it had never been freed before and particularly, the Black political community. It allowed people who were in the city council and who held other offices to stand up in some cases and speak out, in some cases, for the very first time and Harold Washington gave them this sense of liberation. It also gave, I think, [clears throat] Black people in Chicago in particular, but Hispanic people and progressive Whites, a sense of hope. Because in many respects, Harold Washington's election was about race, yes, there's no denying it but it was also about reform. And perhaps sometimes, the question of reform was more objectionable to certain forces in the city than the question of his race. And Harold Washington made it clear from it clear from the outset that if he were elected, that he would dismantle that machine and there would be no more patronage politics in the City of Chicago. And he was well on his way, at his death, he was well on his way, you know, to making good on that, on that promise. And so, in many ways, Harold Washington freed Blacks from the kind of racial oppression that they had exist, that had existed before.

1:00:32:00

Interviewer:

Do you have to—

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, I'm gonna have to—

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Change tapes.

Interviewer:

OK, just quick change.

Richard Hatcher:

OK.

[cut]

[sound roll #339]

1:00:37:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

1:00:40:00

Interviewer:

So, what was going on in 1983?

1:00:42:00

Richard Hatcher:

We were, in 1983, concerned about the upcoming presidential election of 1984 and what the role of the Black community would be. As a consequence, a group of maybe about fifteen…twelve to fifteen Black leaders from around the country, leaders of civil rights organizations, political leaders, began a series of meetings that took place over the space of a year. We would fly into an airport somewhere, hold a meeting at the airport and leave. There would be no publicity. In fact, we worked very hard to not let the press know that we were having these meetings. We had meetings at the Atlanta Airport, we had meetings at Chicago O'Hare Airport. And the, the discussion initially began around a Black agenda for the 1984 presidential election. That is an agenda by which we could test the presidential candidates and determine whether they were worthy of the support of the Black community. Somewhere along the way, the discussion evolved into a question of should a Black run for President of the United States. And as I said, there was tremendous division on that question. And, at each meeting, we'd have a debate. There would be talk about taking a vote but we would not take a vote because it was clear that the group was very much divided. We had elected officials…mayors, Andy Young, myself, others were there. We had heads of civil rights

organizations, Ben Hooks, Joe Lowery attended some of those meetings along with others. Reverend Jesse Jackson was at those meetings. There were a number of people who, in one way or another, played some leadership role in our community. But this division prevented our reaching resolution of this question and it became rather frustrating, very frankly, to me. [clears throat] So that at the meeting…the last meeting that was held, which was held in Chicago at the airport, I had reached a point that where it just seemed to me the time had come for us to put up or shut up. And so, I asked that we go around the table because some people were suggesting that one reason they didn't want to, say, go with the Black candidate, there was a real question of who that candidate was going to be. And I think many of the persons there had some suspicions that this whole series of meetings had been staged by Reverend Jackson to somehow promote his candidacy. And I can tell you flatly that was not the case, that his involvement was a very sincere involvement. It was, I believe it's time for a Black to run. But it, it was not a question I, that, I'm the one that ought to run. I don't think that when those meetings began and certainly as they went on, that was, that was his thought. So, at any rate, I finally said, Let's go around the table and ask each person here if that person wants to be a candidate for president. We ought to ask that question and we did. We went from one to another and, and asked the question, Do you want to be a pres—a candidate for president? Oh, no, absolutely not. I mean everyone going around the table said, No. Reverend Jackson said, I think that it is so important that a Black run, that if no one else wants to run, then I would be willing to be a candidate because I think it is, it is so important. Well, once we had gone through that exercise, then it became clear that there was nothing left to do but to vote on this question, should a Black run or should a Black not run. And the motion itself was very carefully worded to say only that if it passed, that it meant that a Black should run or could run, that it did not in any way endorse any particular individual being a candidate and secondly, that if people wanted to support…people in this meeting wanted to support a Black candidate who might decide to run, they could do so if they chose to do so. So, it was a very [laughs] innocuous carefully worded motion that ultimately passed and, and, and was, was passed by the group. So that basically, what it did was to leave anyone there or I suppose who, people who were not there, if they chose to run, they could run. In other words, it would not be viewed as a betrayal of the Black community if they should run, which is an interesting, interesting notion.

1:06:03:00

Interviewer:

Wonderful. I have one kind of summary question.

Richard Hatcher:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

For our last program—

Camera Crew Member #1:

We have to change.

Interviewer:

OK. This is gonna be my—

[cut]

[camera roll #3085]

1:06:11:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

1:06:14:00

Interviewer:

Like the years 1965 to '84, what, what, what do they rep, what's the legacy, what do they represent to you?

1:06:21:00

Richard Hatcher:

I think overall, it represents our struggle to participate, to gain access to the political system especially and to become players in that arena, to become full participants in that arena. And if one looks at where we were in 1985—1965, the passage.

1:06:46:00

Interviewer:

Can you just start that again, "If one looks at where we were in 19…"

1:06:48:00

Richard Hatcher:

If one looks at where we were in 1965 with the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act '64 and '65 and then one looks at the end of that period with a Jesse Jackson running for President of the United States, coming in second in the nomination, for the Democratic nomination for president, you can see that tremendous progress was made over that period of time. 1965, you're just talking about the right to vote. 1984, '88, you're talking about the actual right to sit in the White House and run the most powerful country in the world. That all came about over that period of time because I think there were people who had vision and courage and who were willing to strike out and, and open new, new avenues of possibilities. A Shirley Chisholm running for president. You saw members of the Congressional Black Caucus which was formed, I believe in 1970, taking…asserting themselves in the congress and also being our kind of national political leaders during that, during that period of time. You saw this quiet revolution at the local level of, of people running for and being elected to the city council and mayors. And we grew from only about two mayors in 1968 to over three hundred mayors of…and, and mayors of some of the largest cities in the United States today. So, it was, it was a period where we were moving into the system. We were really carving out our piece of the action within the American political system. And, [clears throat] if one looks at, looks back at that, it set the stage. We had just come from the period from about 1865 to 1965 of struggling for civil rights, for legal rights in the courts and so forth but this period, from 1965 up to now has seen us become participants. We still have a ways to go. We have not achieved all that we should but we, we are now real players. We cannot be ignored, ignored. And I believe that our next stage, as I look out to the year 2000, will be…the challenge will be can we take the political progress that we've made over the last fifteen, twenty years or so, and can we turn that into economic progress, which, in the final analysis in the United States of America, seems to be the bottom line.

1:09:54:00

Interviewer:

OK. Thank you. Let's stop.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Stop down.

[cut]

1:09:59:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

1:10:00:00

Interviewer:

What was the experience of the pressure in the years leading up to Gary?

1:10:04:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, in the, the late '60s, the early '70s, there was tremendous repression particularly of, of Black activists, not just elected officials but Black activists. Everyone from the Panthers to people who were just involved in civil rights organizations. In fact, fairly middle-class civil rights organizations like NAACP and so forth. But I think Black elected officials being a kind of new breed, a, a relatively new group of people who were speaking out and speaking up were a special target of the Justice Department. There were lots of frivolous investigations of Black elected officials. They, they were constantly being hauled before grand juries and ef-efforts were made to find something that they had done or to convince other people that they ought to testify against them and so forth. And, and that was going on. People, people's telephones were being bugged. And so, when we went to Gary in 1972 when the National Black Political Convention took place, that was a serious part of the discussion. What to do about this kind of overall oppression that was taking place in the country using police departments, local police departments, the FBI, other federal agencies, even the Army Intelligence Agency was involved in domestic spying on Black elected officials. And it was a very repressive time and, and it was a time when simply to stand up and speak out for the rights of Black people could, could cause you great personal grief. And while it wasn't as bad as the days in the South when, when you might be physically attacked, that didn't happen a lot but you certainly could be investigated. You could be required to spend a lot of money on lawyers trying to defend yourself against many of these charges that were made, sometimes that were simply the result of some newspaper reporter who decided to write the story implying that a, a Black elected official had done something wrong. So, we talked about that a lot and, and what to do about it. And, and how perhaps, we could address that problem politically. If we could become politically stronger, then we could confront the political structure and stop this kind of oppression of Black elected officials that was taking, taking place. And there's not a Black and elected official during that period, say from about [clears throat] 1968 to 1980, I suspect, who did not have a horror story to tell about how he or she was investigated at no—in many instances, with no real reason other than the fact that they had the audacity to speak up, to stand up and to speak out and to try to work on behalf of Black people.

1:13:39:00

Interviewer:

What do you think the effect was on the unity of the movement during that period?

1:13:44:00

Richard Hatcher:

Well, I think it made Black people, it caused Black people to come together, to be more united because it was a kind of circling of the wagons. It was that but for the grace [laughs] of our, your support, I would be the one being, being attacked or investigated or indicted or in some other way, be-become the victim of J. Edgar Hoover and people like that. So, it, it created, I think it contributed to a sense of unity, the need to be united because if we were not, then it was very clear that we could be picked off one by one and literally, the entire movement demolished in much the same way, much the same way right after the end of the Civil War during the reconstruction period that Blacks were subsequently driven, literally driven from office. And there was a kind of second post reconstruction that was taking place in that period from about 1968 to about 1980.

1:15:04:00

Interviewer:

Wonderful. Thank you.

[cut]

[end of interview]