

2012.3.30
JOHN EVANS

JOHN EVANS, seated, speaks to off-camera audience; recording begins mid-sentence.

JOHN EVANS: . . . that so often we lose history and our heritage and those things that people do that we often forget unless there's some way to retrieve the kind of information that's important to not only communities but also this great county and this great state. And so I'm a very strong supporter of the [DeKalb] Historical Society and believe that, regardless of what some people think about what we ought to be doing with history, I just believe it ought to be captured; and it ought to be an integral part of what we're all about. We ought to be able to tell those who come after us at least some of the things that we aspire—some of the things we believe in, and some of the things that we're doing.

I guess I could start out by saying that I came to DeKalb County by chance. Wasn't anything profound about it; wasn't anything determined or predetermined. When I first came to Georgia in 1965, there was this great move to get me to move to the west side of Atlanta. And at that time, taking into consideration where it was located and what the costs were and what we were making, I said, "Don't we have another side of town?" [*audience laughter*] And so the next two days were spent on the east side of town. And we first looked at a place on Rocky Ford in Kirkwood; and then we settled on a place that was located on Bates Avenue, southeast Atlanta, located just a block away from the now Israel Baptist Church. And we lived there for about six years. So just coming to DeKalb was no mystery. There was no edging on; there was no excitement about it. The matter of economics brought us to DeKalb at that time because the monthly [house mortgage] notes that we wound up paying, we could afford based on the salary we made.

But after having come to DeKalb and being a part of the political, economic, and social system in this county, one begins to appreciate, understand, participate in, and become involved. And coming here I first worked at the Interdenominational Theological Center, and we always had a lot of stories about ministers and I guess the latest PTL events [*inaudible*]. But that whole atmosphere for me was a continuation of community service, which I had been involved in when I came here from Chicago:

being involved with the United Methodist Church, being involved in community projects, being involved in the political arena before I left Chicago; so when I came to Georgia, it was just a matter of getting involved in that which I'd already had a great deal of experience in. And notwithstanding when we came to Kirkwood in 1965, we were right in kind of the beginning of a transition period. There was a lot of skirmishing, and there was a lot of movement; whites were moving out, and blacks were moving in. And, of course, at that time we said that the process would probably take about twenty years. And it's been—I will be here in Georgia twenty-two years in July, and so sometimes we are very prophetic in what we say, whether we understand why we said things or not.

But the transition period was a very important period, I think, for me. We began to wrestle with the issues that were generated as a result of transition: housing, employment, being a part of the system, getting involved in participation. And transition communities have a great deal of disadvantages because usually during a transition—the early parts of a transition period, people don't know each other, people don't get involved with each other, people don't have the sense of being together. And so in the earlier parts of the transition period, I think we were all just trying to find our niche, to try to be a part of the system that we knew that was very difficult to penetrate, and to get involved where we could make our witness.

So the earlier parts of my days in DeKalb County were involved primarily with transition and community concerns and those things we thought were necessary to improve the quality of life and particularly the quality of life for a lot of people who were moving from various parts of Atlanta into where we now call East Atlanta and Atlanta-in-DeKalb. And much of what we were doing also during that period—earlier period—we were related, really, to the city of Atlanta. You know, it's a funny thing how I did not really come to this county actually in terms of real serious participation until 1976, even though I had been living here since 1965. We were more concerned with what was going on inside the city of Atlanta; and I guess you could really understand that, because that's where you really had the greater majority of blacks, and we were going through a minor transition period in DeKalb. And prior to South DeKalb and Atlanta DeKalb, what you had in this county was pockets of blacks: Stone Mountain, Glenwood Park, Chamblee-Doraville, and other areas; and we still have those similar pockets here today. But with the coming of South DeKalb and Atlanta-DeKalb changed

the whole makeup, I think, of this county as we know it now, especially from a political perspective. I'm not sure that the penetration of this county for blacks has, in a serious way economically, arrived at the level that at least I feel that maybe we ought to be. But like you said, time has a way of doing things; and a lot of times, I guess, it just takes patience in terms of what we need to do.

But the early days were very frustrating, more so than today, because of the lack of involvement of blacks in the political arena and the social arena and in the economic arena. I guess when I came here in 1965, if you came to Candler Road, the best thing you should be doing was probably going to cut somebody's grass and [inaudible—could be “going”?] to work. There was simply no basic involvement for blacks at that point in the history of—as I perceive the transitional period that we went through in South DeKalb. But I think, as in most cases, time brings about the kind of change—time and transitional period. There's one thing that I believe about transition in this county as well as any other county, that I don't think—none of us have found the answer to simply having totally integrated communities. I think we see it in churches, I think we see it in schools, and I've always been one to believe that that's really not a major issue about where you live. You know, it's how you live and how well you can get into the economic arena and develop your own political strength and your own economic strength. And that means that you have—even though communities are black, and communities are white—it gives a better, I think, a better flavor of what the real, true picture is of any given community. And I don't want to go into a whole lot of details on that.

But some of our original organizations were experiencing, during transition, communities where you couldn't get the whites to come to the community meetings, and you couldn't get the blacks to come because they did not feel a part of the community. And so you went through a real trying period of trying to get people together. And it was during those periods that I just decided in my own experience that that wasn't really a necessary ingredient; people would decide to live where they wanted to live. And I didn't think that the whole notion of trying to impress upon people that they needed to continue to go to churches in black communities, continue to go to school in black communities, and continue to be a part of community groups if you did not live in the community. It just didn't make any sense, anyway. If you had moved out of the community, then you ought to develop your roots in the community

which you moved to; and, unfortunately, these communities have maintained, as I've said, pretty much black and white. And that's really not the issue, but it is factual in terms of what has developed in South DeKalb and in Atlanta-DeKalb.

I think maybe 1968 was the beginning of my political career, I suspect, in DeKalb County. At that time I became a member of [*clapping hands for emphasis*] the DeKalb County Executive Committee, in 1968. And I never will forget the person who recommended me to serve on that committee is now a former mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson, who used to live in DeKalb County, by the way, on Chevelle Lane, for those of you who may not know that. But my career kind of politically started as a member of that committee. From there I became a member of the state committee, got involved in the politics of the county, still being involved in what I considered basic community work.

I never have found that there's a great difference between being involved in politics and being involved in community work, because for me they're all the same. For all that work takes place in our communities, all of the decisions that are made for our communities are done through the political arena, through decisions that they make at the state house, decisions they make at the White House, and decisions they make on the local level in the courthouses and the city halls of our county. So I've never tried to distinguish between political work and community work; I see it as the same. And you can utilize the political arena to enhance and to expedite things that are necessary in the community. But I find—and have found in my experiences—that most people are afraid of politics. I guess they see it as some dirty, unclean, crooked kind of process. Well, I see it differently. I see it as an opportunity to provide for the community and to improve the quality of life for people who live in the community. So I see it as a wholesome, positive process and have always felt that way and have always tried to encourage and influence those who had that feeling to develop a positive attitude and taste for [inaudible] people in the political arena.

[Nineteen] sixty-eight was an interesting year. That was the year of the Democratic National Convention, where there was a challenge delegation from Georgia. I was not an official part of that delegation, but I went to Chicago that year to express my concern about the makeup and the process from which delegates to the Democratic National Convention were selected that year. And, of course, there was a great deal of concern in Chicago about that—there was a lot of action, so to speak, for

those who remember the 1968 convention in Chicago. But I think it's just like any other process: there's always a beginning. And I saw that as a significant beginning for what was to take place in the state of Georgia in future years.

Nineteen seventy-two was what we call "the McGovern years" [sic] politically. And even though I was not a delegate that year, I worked very hard for a young lady by the name of Shirley Chisholm, who ran for president in 1972. I think, really, if there was any one thing that said to me, "Young fellow, if you have not felt your niche in politics," seeing her operate and seeing the charisma and the excitement that she generated as she moved around this state was enough to influence anybody who had any sense of direction about what was going on. And we worked very hard for her. We did everything we could to get as many delegates out of this state as we possibly could; and I think, if nothing else, she kind of generated enthusiasm. She was nothing but a little fireball, just full of life and full of energy; and I think she made a witness and an impact in this country, regardless of the outcome of the election.

[Nineteen] seventy-six: the Jimmy Carter years. We worked very hard on that campaign. Now, I'm coming closer to why I was influenced to run for political office. Funny thing, when you look back, how all of it begins to shape in your own mind, even though, at the time, you don't really see it coming at you. In '76 we worked very hard for the president. I went to twenty states in support of President Carter and ran as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention and won that year and really got myself involved in what I had already known about but had not been—What you call it in the Baptist church?—immersion--into it—[*audience laughter*] baptism. Seventy-six was a great year. I think it was a great year for Georgia, for sure; it was a great year for the South. And it's what I consider entrance into the national political arena through the election of Jimmy Carter as president. But I think the involvement that I had in that campaign nationally and the commitment that we carried in the state was something that had, I think, a great deal of influence on my future political career.

Nineteen-eighty was not such a good year but still a year politically that you had to at least make the attempt to do what we could to generate the interest here in the South and to try to steer the country into another four years of the Democratic Party. However, we were not successful at that, but that's not necessarily the most important ingredient. I think the most important ingredient for me was that this continued to fuel my concerns about what was taking place in the political arena and led me closer

to what I think was very important to me to make the decision to run. I had been asked a number of times to consider it in Atlanta and also had been asked a number of times to consider it in DeKalb. And I felt that kind of desire to make the commitment to run for public office myself.

And 1977 was a—well, really, 1976, when I was beginning to say to myself, “Why don’t you just go to the county where you live and really put your roots down and quit fooling around in the city of Atlanta exclusively when you know you have great feeling for what needs to be done in the county and how it needs to be done?” And it was that year that I decided to quit working at the Interdenominational Theological Center and to come to DeKalb to begin what I considered the new formation of the DeKalb branch of the NAACP. I thought it was the most appropriate vehicle and one that you did not have to reinvent. It was an established, ongoing community group that had at least the kind of positive influence on people that we needed to have. So I came and volunteered my services. And like I say to a lot of people who are always asking the question, “What can I do, and how can I do it?” I can tell you how to do it, very simply: Find out what you want to do, and go volunteer; and you’ll find that you won’t have any difficulty getting involved in anything you want to get involved in. And that was my approach in coming to this county physically and volunteering my services to work with the [DeKalb] branch [of the NAACP]. I stayed with the branch several years as the executive director and then was elected president.

And then in 1982—really 1981—I decided that I would take my bid and try my bid to public office. I thought about the state house, and I thought about the state senate. Let me tell you what made me decide to run for county commission—because it’s hands-on politics. You’re down with the troops, with the people, on a day-to-day basis. I see the state legislature as an important body, but it’s kind of at arm’s length; it’s kind of away from you. Most people really don’t know what’s going down there, even though the kind of laws they develop are very significant in terms of our lives and the quality of lives that we live. But for me, it was too far away. You know, you go down for forty-five days, and you have a great deal of confusion and chaos, and then you come back. So I decided that I would rather run for a local office. And I also have to admit that the numbers were beginning to shape up. You know, it’s a funny thing how things come together--you know, community work, community concern, transition, larger numbers of blacks coming in South DeKalb—and things began to

come together. So in 1982—1981, when I announced on the courthouse steps that I was going to run for county commission, in my opinion it was a very important day for me because it brought together, I think, all of what I had stood for, what I had believed in, and what I wanted to see take place in this county and what I thought I could do as an individual in the system—[with emphasis] in the system—to make changes. I had been on the outside of the system for so long, in terms of trying to make things work, and still continue to do so; but I also felt that being inside the system, sometimes you have an advantage to change things a little faster and to make—improve the quality of life of people generally.

So in November of 1981 a lot of people said to me, “Well, you’re announcing too early. You know, your name is household”; and I didn’t believe a word of what they said because I knew better. I knew that as a new person—once you decide to run for public office, you then become a new person, because you have to take everything that you’ve ever done and try to translate that into people’s mind and, “Hey, would you accept me as your political leader in this community?” And that’s not an easy thing to do. So I ran a campaign for a solid year beginning in November of ’81 and ran through the general election in ’82—and I mean nonstop. And I felt that that was necessary for me to do that, because I needed to make sure that people who knew me in another sense, as a civil rights activist, that they would begin to understand and know me in a political sense. And I thought that was very necessary to generate the kind of support and ultimately the votes that were necessary to win that race in ’82.

It’s been a very interesting four years and what—five months?—almost four years and five months of serving on the county commission. The one thing that I found that was true, that you could, in fact, influence tremendously the kind of things that took a lot of pain and effort when you were on the outside of the system that you could do while you were on the inside of the system. And I still believe that that is a good way. And I believe that if you take what you have on the inside of the system and coordinate it with those on the outside of the system, you can bring a lot of forces to bear that you would not have been able to do so otherwise.

So I’ve felt real good over the last four years and still feel that the county is making progress and that the political arena has given us a new sense of direction. You know, we can talk about how honest we are; we can talk about how humane we are; we can talk about all of those things that we know we ought to do. But there are

only times that come about in our lives when we know we must do and share, and I think we have come to some extent in this county to that position where we know that as a working county we must share. And I believe that the political arena has done more to bring this to bear, especially on elected officials, for they, as well as myself, are people who recognize and understand what it means to influence and give direction to the electorate. And they will not let you [inaudible—sounds like “hash”?] them, in spite of what you think. A lot of politicians think that people don't really know or don't really care about what's going on, but they do. They may not always come forward; but they begin to build up in their own minds what they believe, what they think about you, and what influence they believe that you're having within the system. And I just believe that the political arena, more than any other arena, at least in this county, at this stage, has created a kind of atmosphere that says, “We must begin to share.” I think that's important. The past in this county suggested that, even though we had blacks in the county, there was really no need to deal with them politically, for they do not represent anything in terms of numbers and influence, based on the nature and location that they were situated in this county. And, of course, it doesn't take anybody any real strain now to go to these various communities and determine that they've been there for long numbers of years. And I think it's only since we've begun to make some inroads into the political arena that we have begun to influence this county to say that we have to give up some of that action for the numbers of blacks and the numbers of registered blacks and the participation of blacks in the political process has increased significantly enough to make a difference.

And, of course, one good example—[*Looks around the room*] Is the mayor [of Decatur] still here?—one good example about the city of Decatur. I was involved in some of the initial discussions about going to court—having the NAACP go to court to suggest that we ought to have district elections. And I think it's important for those of us who may not know what happened in that process. Once the powers to [sic] be heard that we were going to court to attempt to have district elections inside the city of Decatur, the elected officials at the state house decided that they did not want to go through that [litigation] process. So they initiated the necessary laws that were necessary in order to bring about district elections in the city of Decatur; and, of course, all of us know—we don't know—as a result of that, Commissioner Elizabeth

Wilson was elected and became the first black to serve on the Decatur City Commission.

So in spite of all of what we think, we know numbers talk. We know registered voters talk. And I think, even though there—even though I have tried and will continue to try to work through community concerns, work through the apparatus that we have in the county and in these communities to try to make a much better county and make this county a greater county, we know that in order to be effectively heard, you have to bring something to the table. You can't come to the table with nothing and expect folks to negotiate with you. You've got to have something. And I think more and more in this county we're now beginning to bring something to the table. And in that process we're beginning to make some changes and have some breakthroughs, make some firsts and to do things that we think are in the best interests of this county as a whole. Like I said, we're not going anywhere; blacks—we would be silly to just pull up, and I think the whites are feeling the same way. So what we do is develop that which is necessary to work together over the long haul.

So it's been an interesting twenty-one years or twenty-two years in July. And we've seen a great deal of change in the county. We've seen the community concerns, we've seen school systems' concerns, we've seen religious concerns—church, and certainly political concerns. And I believe the way that they're working now is probably the only way they're ever going to work is that ethnic groups live in their own respective communities, and as long as we're able to come to the table and enjoy the economic fruits so that we can take care of our children, raise our families, get them educated, and provide for the future, you know, that's all that I think is necessary. I'm not concerned about where I live or where somebody else lives. That's not the important ingredient. I think the important ingredient is to have a piece of the action, and with a piece of the action you can take care of your own concerns; and you can be very, very independent in your own way. And I think—I see this county moving in that direction. But I still believe, as an ethnic group, as blacks, that we're going to have to continue to assert ourselves not only in the political arena; but we're going to have to get ourselves also involved in economics and the development of this county to get our share of the action.

“Dynamic DeKalb” is one of the great terms that was developed as we continue to grow and be an integral part of this system. And I think the term is a good term.

This county is growing by leaps and bounds, and I guess for those who have a great feeling for what it looked like in its rural days and what it looks like now—we're very much an urban county, very much a great county. And I think our participation together in this county will make it even a stronger county. And I believe that, as we continue to become an integral part of the county, as we begin to continue to bring the numbers into this county, that we'll begin to share more in the pot.

It's a very frustrating thing. I believe that character that we should have and the moral values that we should have and the improvement in the quality of life that we certainly ought to be expecting is in a great deal of jeopardy; and I don't think, you know, that it has anything to do with where we live or who we are. I think it has a lot to do with where we are in our society, what our values are, and what we think. And so much of what we hear now on television and reading the newspaper is so negative that I think we have responsibility to begin to kind of counter that with positive things, with a very concerted effort by young people and what they think and how they look at us. And it's a very difficult thing, in spite of all the technological growth and big developments and sprawling highways and all the other material things that we can see on a day-to-day basis, somehow I just kind of think we're allowing some of our things to slip.

And I think those of us who are in public life and who are involved in agencies that deal with the public and those of us who work with communities on a day-to-day basis have to begin to try to turn this thing around—drugs running rampant, teenage pregnancy, crime. As I look at the statistics every month that we get from the police department, it's alarming how those trends are moving upward; and seemingly there's no end to it. And I think that even though some of us attain some of our personal gains, I think we've got to be much more concerned about where we're going as a society. And when we're talking about society, we've got to talk about this county, because we play a vital role in the metropolitan region. So much of what happens in this area is reflective of what goes on in this metropolitan region. And I think it just grips us to a point where we just need to feel the kind of pain and trauma that's taking place, and all of us ought to kind of make ourselves a committee of one to deal with it. And so, as we talk about community concerns, and as we talk about stepping into the future, we've got to become an integral part of the political arena, the social arena, the economic arena, the religious arena, and put back into some of the youngsters'

minds--we've got to put back into their minds that there are more valuable things, more important things, more necessary things that you need to have in order to prepare for a better future for our county. I think that it's important that we do that.

[To MR. MACKAY] Am I treading on any time?

MR. MACKAY: What time is it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: About quarter-till.

MR. MACKAY [to MR. EVANS]: Commissioner, we—if the speaker will receive questions from the audience, sometimes we have people who want to ask questions. Would you mind receiving some?

MR. EVANS: I'd be more than happy.

MR. MACKAY: Well, thank you for that. I also meant to ask if you had any members of your immediate family here, we wanted you to introduce them.

MR. EVANS: No, I did not. [Name inaudible] is in school and stuff, and so—

MR. MACKAY: All right, well—

MR. EVANS: I'll let them see the tape.

MR. MACKAY: Well, I've got about a dozen questions. As I mentioned, I want to invite anyone here that wants to ask any questions you might want to ask Commissioner Evans.

MR. EVANS [*Recognizing question from audience*]: Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What's the status of the courthouse addition?

MR. EVANS: Huh?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What's the status of the new courthouse addition?

MR. EVANS: Well, it's in the planning stages now. I think a couple of weeks ago we were planning with the [inaudible—could be “folks”?] on the commission, in terms of the new addition to the courthouse—another building, really, that would be hooked onto the existing courthouse—and then a site for our proposed jail [inaudible—sounds like “in the same sense” or “in the same sentence”?]. Of course, all that's in the preliminary stages right now. We think that it is necessary and that we're trying to stay at least one step ahead of the federal government in terms of the jail situation and some of its problems. But all of it's in the preliminary stages now, and hopefully within the next several months we will be asked to make the decision and to take necessary steps to generate the funds in order to do that.

MR. MACKAY: I want to ask a question. I want to tell a story first, because y'all will get a good chuckle out of this. I ran into a lady at the Christian Council breakfast from Marietta, and she said, "Jim I haven't seen you for thirty-seven years, but the very day that you announced [your candidacy] for the legislature, you came up and spoke to us ladies in Marietta. And just before you came in the room, one of the ladies said, 'You know, his mother is one of the finest Christian women that ever lived.' And this other lady said, 'Do you suppose she knows what her son doing?'" [Audience laughter] And I don't know that we'll ever change that.

But the question I'd like to ask you, Commissioner, is this: Before we moved to this county in 1934, the politicians had incorporated into the city of Atlanta Kirkwood, which is one of the free-standing cities, and a couple of other towns. And we always called them "no-man's lands." When I was in legislative politics, you'd go to Kirkwood and [inaudible] they'd say, "If you go to the DeKalb County courthouse, they say, 'Go down to see the mayor of Atlanta.' If you go to [Atlanta] city hall, they say, 'Go back out there [to DeKalb County].'" And it was called "no-man's land," and the morale of people politically in Atlanta-DeKalb was very low; they thought nobody really cared about them. Has that changed?

MR. EVANS: No [audience laughter]. It's still--that feeling is still there, and I don't think it will ever go away because—

MR. MACKAY: Unless we can get as far into DeKalb--

MR. EVANS: When—one--it has to go one way or another in order to at least cure the notion that they're a no-man's land and nobody cares for them. And, of course, you know, the—I guess the last couple of referendums have not said anything decisive about how people want to go. They've been fairly well split: some want to stay, some want to go into Atlanta, and some want to come into DeKalb. And, of course, just like anything else, I guess, elected officials did not see a clear mandate; so they kind of left it alone again and will come back to it later once it starts [inaudible].

MR. MACKAY: Are there other questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER [off-camera]: Is there anything afoot to enlarge the parking area for the post office?

MR. EVANS: Huh?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is there anything afoot to enlarge the post office parking area?

MR. EVANS: You mean on [West] Ponce de Leon?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

MR. EVANS: I don't have any earthly idea, to be really truthful. Don't have any earthly idea whether or not there's anything. That would be a good question. I know some folks up in Glenwood Park and other areas don't want a post office in their community. I know we've been hearing about that, but I don't have any notion as to—

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Why do they don't want one? [sic]

MR. EVANS: I really don't know, but I'm glad to respond if you ever find out what's on their minds, but they don't want a post office in their community. But it's just one of those things.

MR. MACKAY: One other question I'd like to ask you is when—forty years ago we had some open and avowed race-hating, racist organizations, religious [inaudible], religious bigotry, and so forth. I was curious, as you were going to and fro, whether you—we know a lot of people have attitudes that are bad attitudes, but have you encountered, in these five years, any literature or organizational activities you would consider as attacking a race or religious group?

MR. EVANS: In my—well, in my whole experience, I guess, even before I was an elected official, I don't recall ever seeing but one piece of material distributed by the KKK at one point over in our community. Of course, you know it's there. But one thing I've found in my experience is that, you know, whatever's there, a lot of times you just can't detect it. People are not as discourteous as they used to be. I mean, they know how to be courteous now and move you along, and then not give you at least the appearance that they don't care for you and don't want to involve themselves with you because of your race. Of course, I'm not naïve to think that it's not there; but I at least think we're able to camouflage more now.

MR. MACKAY: Also another thing [inaudible] politicians [inaudible] better than the rest of us. We used to think of this as a black-white society. And if you go down to the DeKalb Farmers' Market, you feel like it definitely could be black or white [sic]. We're becoming a pluralistic society, aren't we?

MR. EVANS: Well, I think we—I think it's a matter of time before we recognize that even in spite of a lot that people would want to maintain, we're going to have to change our way of doing things.

MR. MACKAY: We have a lot of other definite ethnic groups, which I think helps us—

MR. EVANS: That's right.

MR. MACKAY: --judge people on individual merits. I know when I made my last race for Congress, I locked up all eight Chinese votes in the district.

MR. EVANS: All eight! [*Audience laughter*]

MR. MACKAY: And [now?] there are five thousand at least. Well, I mean, I really wonder, do you have any notion what the population of Southeast Asian and Asian people [inaudible]?

MR. EVANS: No I haven't looked at it. The only thing—well, at least in terms of registered voters, the only thing they put on the slip is "Other." And, of course, there's no—I'm sure they have a break-out, but at least I haven't seen it.

MR. MACKAY: And then the Hispanic population.

MR. EVANS: Yeah, it's increasing in this county. But I think all of that, you know, is saying in one form or another that whether we like it or not, we're just going to have to kind of change our way of doing things. And I think people, even though they may not like you, they at least have a little more smarts now to just be courteous and not do anything derogatory, even if that means not really being involved [inaudible]. You know, to me that's not anything serious. The only serious thing is when we look at unemployment rates and how they impact blacks and other minorities. Then that's when you get afraid, because, you know, then you're being choked out of the part of the system that could provide to you material things that you need in order to do for your families and for you community what needs to be done. That's the part that's frightening, not so much the living patterns and those kind of things.

Until we learn that even though we may be shut out in areas of unemployment-- we look at youths from eighteen to twenty-five--I think I saw in the paper yesterday where thirty-nine percent of black youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five are unemployed. You see, that creates problems, because the people are not working; they're going to be doing other things. And all of those other things impact us, either directly or indirectly. And so I think that people have to begin to learn that until people are able to provide for themselves that we're going to be paying for those byproducts in terms of increased millage rates and things that we have to do every year in order to try to generate the money to maintain what's necessary to run the

county. And, of course, the thought of having an additional jail means that something is happening. And so many of us just don't quite see that there's a byproduct of all things, and those byproducts eventually come back to us if we're not careful. So unless you take care of everybody, you wind up paying for it on the other end; and, of course, it could be much more difficult.

MR. MACKAY: We're proud to have our first vice president, Mrs. Linda Chestnut [spelling?], the wife of David Chestnut [spelling?], the chairman of MARTA; and so we've got somebody to carry a message home to him [MR. EVANS and audience laugh]. Will you comment on the public transportation in DeKalb County?

MR. EVANS: I think—I'd be glad to. One of the things that I think was so very, very important is that we need public transit. And one of the things that we also would not necessarily agree is that anytime you get to talk about the development of a system, people always get to talking about how much money you've got, how much money you're going to get; and so I'm sure that those decisions kind of determined the corridors that the rapid-transit system took. For example, in the railroad corridor, you don't spend as much money, because you don't have to do as much. You don't have the impact on the homes, you don't have to go through a lot of things that normally if you went through other congested areas. We have never believed and felt that DeKalb had its ample share of transportation, particularly bus transportation. And even though, when I was appointed to the MARTA board from the city of Atlanta, former Chairman Walter Russell always attributed me to DeKalb. I said, "Walt, I don't represent you" [MR. EVANS and audience laugh]. So, just to go through that. But we—I always did try to fight for additional service out here in DeKalb.

Even as much as two weeks ago, we were talking about some consideration for North-South [public transportation lines] as opposed to East-West, like a Candler Road corridor, light rail, special bus service, or something that would bring a better flow of conditions for traffic and for public transportation. I just think that we're just in a serious battle where we've put in a serious amount of tax dollars, and we have not gotten our share out of it. And I think, with Brother Chestnut being the chairman, and I think with our five aggressive representatives on the MARTA board, I think a lot of it will begin to change, especially after we complete the referendum system from Doraville to the airport. But we've got to continue to press the issue, and we don't

think DeKalb has everything it ought to have; and I believe somewhere down in the future we'll be able to make up.

MR. MACKAY: Thank you. Our time is up. [*To off-camera audience member*] Ruby, we have some refreshments?

Meantime, MR. EVANS holds up his hand as if to request more time but is not acknowledged.

MR. MACKAY, *to off-camera audience member "Ruby"*: Did you have a question?

RUBY [last name?]: No, other than an announcement. We're going to be a little crowded unless those of us who are in folding chairs will fold these chairs and put them over at the side. That will make room. And the other question is, before we serve and have refreshments, may we have some air-conditioning?

MR. MACKAY: Oh, yes. One other question.

RUBY [last name?]: But not until—not until [inaudible]

MR. MACKAY: Yes. One other question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *to MR. EVANS*: We have had a long history in our county with blacks and whites working together, as you well know; and the Historical Society appreciates your interest and participation and support, Commissioner Evans. We're interested as a body how we can get more black history, more black input into the Historical Society. Could you speak to this issue?

MR. EVANS: Well, I think—based on what I think, in terms of history from those who came from way back—for example, like the Nelms up in Nelms community, people who've been around—[inaudible name; first and last names sound like "Valley" or "Fairley" and "Jetson" or "Jedsen"?]—and others from the various communities, if we had not had them—

MR. MACKAY: We have had them [speak to the DeKalb Historical Society].

MR. EVANS: I think, really, when you're talking about real history in this county, as far as black folks are concerned, they really give a better case for where they came from to where we [African-Americans who moved to the community from other areas] kind of started helping them out. That's really the way I see it, because really we are newcomers to the county, when you take a look at those in—Miss Green [Greene?] and all those up in Stone Mountain—who've been here since [inaudible—sounds like "dirty"] and can certainly relate history as it really ought to be told, you know, back in the days when on up to where we are now and where we plan to go in the future. So if we've

had those persons in here, I think we have really--then begin to coordinate—for example, like you've had Mrs. [Elizabeth] Wilson from Decatur and come out to Stone Mountain and [inaudible] put it together.

MR. MACKAY: We're looking for a professor or a writer or a historian who can kind of pull that together in writing as well—

MR. EVANS: That's so important.

MR. MACKAY: --so if y'all have any suggestions, let us know.

MR. EVANS: All right.

MR. MACKAY, *to audience*: We'll let the commissioner remain seated and will bring refreshments to him [MR. EVANS laughs and raises his left foot, which has been resting on a pillow, revealing a cast or bandage around his foot], since he is still a little out of commission [*audience laughter*]. You'll come up and meet him and greet him and have some refreshments. Let's move these chairs out of the way, and I'll cut on their air-conditioning. *Audience applause*

END OF RECORDING