

Interview with Sylvia Hill

"There were outcomes to the [Sixth Pan African] conference. I've read and I've heard people say that the conference didn't produce anything, and I'm like, wait, wait, wait. ...

It was really Six-PAC that led me to return and work on Southern Africa. There were a group of us who committed ourselves that we were going to work against colonialism, and it was based on the investment in this congress and the agenda of the national liberation struggle." — Sylvia Hill

Introduction

Sylvia Hill is professor of criminal justice at the University of the District of Columbia and part-time faculty member of The Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. She received her doctorate in education from the University of Oregon in 1971 after having majored in psychology at Howard University. Hill is one of the long-term activists whose key role in Africa solidarity work has been recognized by colleagues, although little noted in the public record. She serves on the board of TransAfrica Forum.[1]

Hill and her fellow local activists in the Southern Africa Support Project (SASP) were at the heart of the Free South Africa Movement that brought demonstrators to be arrested at the South African Embassy every day for a year beginning on November 21, 1984. Hill was also one of the key organizers for the Sixth Pan African Congress[2] in Dar es Salaam in 1974, and for Nelson Mandela's tour of the United States following his release from prison in 1990.

As Hill notes, the organizational outcomes of the Sixth Pan African Congress (known as Six-PAC) were not readily visible. Similarly, the wider currents of identification with Africa that grew among African American activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s broke apart on the shoals of internal division and government repression in less than a decade. The African Liberation Support Committee,[3] which brought out tens of thousands to demonstrations on African Liberation Day in 1972, had largely disappeared by the late 1970s, when an upsurge of student anti-apartheid activity followed the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa. By the time of the Free South Africa Movement[4] in the mid-1980s, few other than direct participants remembered the events and organizations of a decade before.

This lack of organizational continuity makes it difficult to trace connections over time. Nevertheless, such connections exist, both in local activist communities and in networks connecting them. Such local histories and networks are as important as later media attention and congressional debates to understanding how in the midst of the right-wing Reagan era it was possible, by 1986, to force the U.S. Congress to pass economic sanctions against South Africa over President Reagan's veto.

Such local histories are complex and place-specific, reflecting local configurations of race, institutional and organizational competition, and progressive politics. Local organizing in Washington, DC is particularly complex, since the focus on local action is often blurred by the presence of so many organizations and offices focusing on the national government. After an initial abortive effort to help bring together a national coalition on Southern Africa, Hill and the SASP core group were insistent in defining their top priority as the local community. While they recognized the complementary role of other organizations focused on Africa, and developed particularly close ties with TransAfrica during the period of the Free South Africa Movement, they argued that developing a local base of understanding and support for African liberation was essential. They were also explicit in acknowledging the complex roles of race, class, and gender in defining the environment for organizing.

The interview below, the first of two with Sylvia Hill, focuses on Hill's background, on the organization of the Sixth Pan African Congress in Dar es Salaam in 1974, and on the early years of the organization of SASP and its predecessor, the Southern Africa News Collective.

There is very little public documentation on most of the events and organizations mentioned in the interview, indicating a significant information gap in material that is essential for writing the history of this period. A set of papers from SASP, which went out of existence as an organization in the early 1990s, is housed in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, but has not yet been processed. Other papers are with Hill or other SASP members.

There is much documentation and writing on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC),^[5] which Hill mentions as a significant influence. But most of these sources give little attention to the international and Pan African consciousness that set the context for this civil rights group's work in the U.S. South. No one has yet published a history of the Center for Black Education and the Drum and Spear Bookstore, which were founded by SNCC veterans in Washington, DC in 1968 and had significant influence on community education and black studies programs around the country. Nor is there a published study of the complex ideological and political dynamics of the African Liberation Support Committees or of the Sixth Pan African Congress in 1974.

Prominent works on the anti-apartheid movement, such as Robert Massie's 896-page book *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), often fail to include even a passing mention of the Southern Africa Support Project or of Hill and her colleagues.

There are brief articles on the Free South Africa Movement and SASP by Sylvia Hill and two other SASP members, Cecelie Counts and Joseph Jordan, in a special issue of the Oakland, California-based *CrossRoads* magazine, "That Covenant Was Kept: Lessons of the U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movement" (April 1995).

The second interview with Hill in this collection focuses on later organizing work by SASP, the Free South Africa Movement, and Nelson Mandela's U.S. tour in 1990.

William Minter
September 2004

Transcript

Interviewee: Sylvia Hill
Interviewer: William Minter
Location: Washington, DC, USA
Date: September 23, 2003

HILL: After the Sixth Pan African Congress—I'm not really sure of the context of the conversation, but we were talking about African Americans who had come out of institutions like the U.N. or the State Department. And [Mary Jane Patterson][6] said if you want to understand people [who have careers in international affairs], you have to understand the country where they first gained their insight on Africa, because that shapes how they operate in the world of politics and how they see things. And so, she said, if the person went to French-speaking, formerly French colonial countries, they tend to have a Francophone perspective [*laughter*]. And I have always used that as a way of understanding where people are coming from in terms of their various positioning in a larger political context. And that was a comment that she made that I never forgot. It's always very useful.

Q: That's great. She didn't happen to make that comment when I interviewed her, but it's actually fundamental to our understanding of this book as well, because countries played key roles at different times. I mean, every country's important because every country's important, but some have a much greater importance in terms of connections. So that in the '50s and probably the '60s it was Ghana, and in the '60s and '70s, Tanzania. And South Africa throughout, but in a different way.

HILL: But Mozambique was key right at the moment, Angola. Right.

Q: So that shapes the personal interactions, the formation of the possibilities for political action. One of the reasons for the lack of political action in Rwanda, for example, was that those personal connections don't exist.

Anyway, let me go back to going in order chronologically, since personal lives, political lives, and organizations are tied together as part of the raw material for this project. I don't know how far we'll get in the chronology, and if we don't get far enough, we'll get another opportunity to talk more.

So, for the tape, I'm talking with Sylvia Hill on September 23, 2003, and we're talking about U.S.-Africa solidarity and its history. And I'm going to ask where were you born, what kind of family, where you grew up.

HILL: Oh, okay. Go back that far [*laughter*]. Okay. I was born in Jacksonville, Florida. I grew up in the segregated South. My mother was a schoolteacher —she has an interesting history herself, actually—and my father was a postman. And my mother had been a maid when she met my father, and he had committed to helping her go to school. In fact, she died just before she got her PhD. But she was quite a reader, and so was my father. I remember one time she caught me reading a *True Story* magazine—she gave me Richard Wright's book [7]and said if you want to read something that's got a little spice in it, read this, or you can read the Bible even. It has greater spice. She was an agnostic. That's my perception. My father was very religious, but she was not.

Q: In what church?

HILL: Methodist (AME). And so we lived in an unusual neighborhood. I now recognize that she probably would have been a political organizer given a different time. She had her organized garden club, she taught jazz piano to some local women in the neighborhood. And she was an airplane mechanic during the time of the war, a civilian employee at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida.

Q: Airplane mechanic in the war?

HILL: And so she was like a neighborhood mechanic—cars and everything.

Q: And you were growing up there what period?

HILL: Oh, okay. Born in 1940. And I left there in '57.

Q: Left in '57 to go to—

HILL: Washington, DC, came here.

Q: To DC? To go to college or to work?

HILL: I left to—actually, I got married at 15. My mother died when I was 13, and I married at 15. So I think '57—

Q: And your father had already died earlier?

HILL: No. No, my father was living. But at 17, I had an aunt and uncle who lived here, and they encouraged me to come, because I had dropped out of high school, but I got my GED[8], and they encouraged me to come live here with them and go to school. So that's how I got here initially.

Q: Live with whom?

HILL: With my aunt and uncle, Edythe and Elmer Geathers, here in Washington, DC. So that's how I initially got to Washington, DC.

Q: And what kind of work did they do here?

HILL: They both worked for the government.

Q: And so you already had your GED? And you were able to continue at—

HILL: Actually what I did initially was I took a continuing education course—I thought I wanted to be a writer, and I took a continuing education class at American University. And actually it was a great turning point in my life. Because the particular professor who was there, Greek—some guy from Greece, who was not even—like a visiting professor—some reason he was here. But I do remember him taking me and saying, you are almost illiterate. Your writing—your spelling is like it sounds. But the good thing about him, he had gone—called and found that the public school system had like remedial [classes], not English as a second language, but ways you could improve your skills. So he gave me this information and told me I should go, and I dutifully went, thank goodness [laughter]. And so that year, I spent improving grammar skills and so forth. I was quite a reader, but not a writer in that sense.

And then after that, I went to Florida A& M for a year. And the reason was because the GED was from Florida, so I had to go [there]. I couldn't go to Howard [University]. I had to transfer into Howard. Some little policy quirk in there. But I spent a year at Florida A& M, and then I transferred to Howard.

Q: A year, then to Howard.

HILL: And then I had the good fortune to be at Howard during the era from '59 through '63, when Stokely Carmichael, Courtland Cox, Ed Brown—Rap Brown's brother— were all students there.[9]

Q: And was Charlie [Cobb] there, too, at that time? [10]

HILL: I'm not sure. Charlie might have been there. I met him a little bit later. So he may very well have been here, I just had not met him in that period. Yeah, I remember that, he probably had left by that time, when they had the Freedom bus there and we went to say goodbye to Stokely, and all of the students going to challenge racism in the South. A whole busload of people who went to the South on the Freedom bus.

Q: So you were involved in support committees for that?

HILL: I don't want to say that. I was just—

Q: It was the atmosphere?

HILL: Yes. Well, it was part atmosphere. I mean, I had a sense of it, but I was so—I hadn't found my sense of self, person, not even in an academic sense, let alone a political

sense or a personal sense. I don't know, I think I was—there was a moment of pondering—

Q: You were a student.

HILL: Yes, right [*laughter*]. But I had enough sense that you go to these political events—and in part, wasn't always my instigation, it was friends. I lived off campus. I didn't live on campus, and that's always a disadvantage because you miss a lot of the hub of—

Q: Activity.

HILL: —activity. But my good friend, who's from Miami, dated Ed Brown, so that kept me in the loop quite a bit. So it was through personal connections, in part, too, that I had some sense of that.

Q: So you graduated from Howard—

HILL: But then Howard also had professors who were—they were not a faculty political force, but you always encountered individuals. I remember when Lumumba[11] was assassinated, my French professor was [saying] how can you all sit here, we would be out on the street. So you had those moments of—

Q: The French professor was from where?

HILL: He was from France, actually. But teaching French there.

Q: And progressive?

HILL: And progressive. Progressive. So you had those kind of people that you had contact with. I remember we used to go to restaurants as a class, not individually. So where you'd talk about political things in that kind of social setting. He used the idea of going to French restaurants to talk politics. And that was great. It was a new vision. I'd certainly come from the South and never been to a French restaurant in the segregated South. I'd never even had pizza. So in that context of a historically black university, it was that potential to encounter new and different people with new and different, broader political experiences than you could have experienced in the limits of your background geographically, but also access to communication and issues. The TV was—emerged, I think, when I was about 10. It was being developed at least for—in its commercial sense—somewhere around—I think it was around then.

Q: Not that had a lot of—

HILL: It didn't have much information on it either. But I do think the technology has so much to do with political momentum. And you can really see it in the tracing of the

movements, because I remember when we thought the fax machine drew us closer to the liberation movements, right? And now we have Internet [*laughter*].

Q: Apart from the atmosphere, then, when did you become involved more systematically with political organizing or Africa or social justice?

HILL: Actually, it was later, though I certainly was involved in doing footwork for the March on Washington. Putting up posters, that kind of stuff. But I was not involved in a thinking way.

Q: You were one of the many who contributed.

HILL: Yeah, right, and I want to try to convey that, because I do think a lesson that can be learned from this is how people evolve into—you don't just jump up necessarily and become political. Some people do, but then some don't, and I was not one that did. See, a lot of what I was reading was some French intellectuals—I was reading Camus and Sartre. And so my discussions, while they were not the traditional mundane of the textbook in a classroom setting, it still was not yet progressive. It's like I had not yet read Fanon. I read Fanon out on the West Coast. You know? I had not yet gotten there. But then I was beginning. Because I was in psychology, I was doing a lot of—

Q: That was your major?

HILL: Yeah, experimental psychology. I was beginning to get challenged in the narrow confines of that field. A professor, who really I later studied with for my doctorate, allowed us to push that paradigm. We had to develop theories, and he just—

Q: Who was that?

HILL: His name is Arthur Pearl.

Q: And he was professor of psychology at Howard?

HILL: At Howard. He was a professor—I think he stayed there maybe two or three years before he left and went back to the West Coast. But he had an interesting—he was a longshoreman, had been a longshoreman. Had studied in Marxist study groups. Had gone to Berkeley, as an adult more or less, and gotten his degrees and his doctorate. And so he had a unique experience, and of course because he had come from a Russian- Jewish heritage, he also had—well, he'd grown up in a political atmosphere as well.

So I finished Howard in '63, and I was attending graduate school there in psychology. I got involved in the War on Poverty as a researcher for the United Planning Organization. And pretty much not involved in any political groups then, but a friend convinced me that I should come out to the University of Oregon and get my PhD.

Q: University of Oregon?

HILL: With Art Pearl. Yeah, with Art Pearl.

Q: So when did you go there?

HILL: I went there in '66.

Q: So you had had several years of graduate school at Howard, but then essentially transferred—

HILL: Transferred, yeah, and I really decided I didn't want a master's in experimental psychology. I wanted to deal more with social political issues. And I just found that paradigm too narrow. So that's when I first started feeling this sense of wanting change, but it was much more reform of the school system, community building, reform of the community. It was much more focused around that. It was not international at that time.

Q: And so then you were in Oregon from when to when?

HILL: '66 to '71.

Q: '66 to '71. Pretty substantial time. Was there any political or—

HILL: Yeah. Well, just as I got there, if not that year, at least the next year, the Black Student Movement, along with the Black Panthers, the Black Student Union in San Francisco State and L.A., began to emerge and flower. And there was an attempt to, if not develop black studies programs, at least get more black students on campus. So I, along with a few other students—there were not many graduate students there, black graduate students there—we—there was an Upward Bound program that Dr. Pearl was running. And it had a number of people, one of them who later became my husband, who had been in SNCC.

Q: Okay, was your name Hill or is that your married name?

HILL: That's my married name. My maiden name was Sylvia Bennett, but many people know me by Sylvia Belton, because that was my first husband's name.

Q: Okay, but who you met in Oregon—

HILL: That was Hill, James Hill. And he had worked in SNCC.

Q: Where?

HILL: He had been in Mississippi, but mostly in Helena, Arkansas. In fact, there's a guy doing a book on what they did in Arkansas now. I can't think of his name. Chip Gibson. But at any rate, we—it was a pretty large political group, ex-SNCCites, friends of SNCC, various kind of folks. There was one guy, for example, his parents were from Cuban heritage. This was a diverse group of people.

Q: What town is the University of Oregon in?

HILL: Eugene, Oregon. They called it the Berkeley of Oregon, but at any rate. But it was a town then of about 70,000 people. It's about 100,000 now. But about 70,000 people. And when they first got me to come out there, they told me there were 500 black people, but I never saw those 500 [*laughter*]. I think we swelled to maybe 200 after I got there.

But Arthur Fleming was the president then. Do you know Arthur Fleming, who was the advocate of aging kind of issues? Well, Arthur Fleming was there, and in fact, he's the person that had gotten Art Pearl to come there. And we led a demonstration against Fleming and demanded that we have a program that would bring black urban youth to campus. We called it Project 75. He gave us initial money that he got from Ford Foundation or somebody. And we started this project, called Project 75, and that was one of the most unbelievable political experiences, bringing 75 kids from everywhere from L.A. to San Francisco to Portland and Alaska to that campus. And we were it for them. We had to figure out how to retain them and how to deal with the politics, not to mention the criminal justice system.

Q: Did this group have a name?

HILL: We called them Project 75. Like a project.

Q: You were the project?

HILL: The project, yes. Yes, we were. And we had a student—I wasn't one of the employed people, but we had student help, that they hired students to—

Q: Right. Work-study and things like that.

HILL: Yes, work and those kinds of things. But at any rate, that project brought with it the teeming contradictions of the urban city, right straight to Eugene. At one point, we had the Black Panther party in Eugene. So nothing was sacrosanct at all. But we had to deal with those issues. And Eugene had a strong antiwar movement. And so it—and the various Black Student Unions had connections. I traveled back and forth to San Francisco State [University] Black Student Union, etc. So there was that kind of nurturing.

Q: So you personally were in touch with the people in San Francisco at that point?

HILL: Yes.

Q: So with that particular—

HILL: —with Jimmie Garrett[12] and—and one of the things that we did, because we had aligned ourselves with the white student left, I should say, the antiwar protesters. And we had to wrench the student money first away from the university—our student activity fee. And then we had to wrench it away from the fraternities and sororities who

dominated the use of the money. So that gave us a budget; small though it might have been, it still gave us a budget. And therefore, we could bring speakers. And so we brought in speakers to kind of nurture the campus, and entertainment and so forth.

Q: During that period in Eugene, what was the Africa connection? Obviously the black student movements had some kind of vision of connection, but—

HILL: The Panther party and us were the two divergent political images. The Black Panther party, of course, had an international program. And though we didn't know much about it, it had an international focus. And Fanon, certainly you had to read. And Marx. So we were beginning to do that kind of reading, so we were developing international perspectives—

Q: And your group, apart from the Project 75, did it have an organizational name or identity?

HILL: No.

Q: It was just a bunch of people with a particular background?

HILL: A particular background and kind of linked to each other. We did have a Black Student Union. And I probably, and my husband, we probably were the older, with two or three other people, but everybody else was pretty much fairly young. So we somewhat viewed ourselves as kind of developing this politically. In keeping with the political thrust of educational activities on campus we created a political process that encouraged them to want to return to their communities and use their education to improve their communities.

Q: The mentors—

HILL: Yeah, right. A little bit. So we would bring speakers. We would have black cultural programs that encouraged students to express their artistic talents. We called it "Doing It Black," and my husband produced the program annually. It was quite a cultural event for local communities beyond the university.

Q: Did any of the liberation movement people get there in that period?

HILL: No, but the person who brought the Africa message, I remember distinctly, was Owusu Sadaukai,[13] who is now working for George Bush's—[laughter]. All these folks who were rigidly radical and now are very conservative. I think there is something about opportunism and a way of thinking that makes the political shift possible.

Q: Is he still using that name, or has he gone back to Howard?

HILL: No, he's gone back to Howard Fuller.

Q: And he's working for Bush?

HILL: Yeah. He works with the Bush political camp. He served on the Bush transition team during the last election and works on encouraging educational vouchers in African American communities. But he was a person that we invited to speak, and he brought the initial film footage, because Bob [Van Lierop] hadn't finished it, of *A Luta Continua*.^[14] And I remember distinctly looking at that film and envisioning social change based on a science, much like I saw the *Battle of Algiers* in San Francisco with Jimmie Garrett and a whole bunch of Black Student Union folks. I remember for the first time having this sense that you can have a science of change because you have to think methodologically about what you're doing. It's not just haphazard and just occurring willy-nilly all based on chance factors.

When I got involved in the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) I was in Minnesota then. So that was '71. I do remember having contact with the Africa Information Service in New York.^[15] That's right. I remember that group in New York. But groups were kind of flourishing. Now, what I remember most distinctly in terms of my sentiment—like a political sentiment—was the importance of African people being successful in throwing out colonialism. And the only way I could include that is to just say I just felt like we need a victory somewhere. It was that level of sentiment. It was not an analysis of anything related to a strategy for changing U.S. foreign policy.

Q: And at that point, given where things were, late '60s, etc., that victory was connected with Southern Africa, with Angola, Mozambique.

HILL: Right.

Q: I don't know what—

HILL: It was not particularized to South Africa.

Q: Right. And it wasn't linked, as in an earlier period, with Ghana, which of course was the first big victory. But at that time you weren't focused on international issues.

HILL: Now, I do remember Ghana being an issue. I was living with my aunt and uncle then. What I remember was the kind of drum beat of the failure of [Kwame] Nkrumah^[16] and his preoccupation with the symbols of power. The news beat was "this is not a worthy leader." I mean, he was almost Saddam Hussein as characterized in the media. It was just talked about in the context of my family's house, so I do remember that. So that's what I remember about Ghana. But that wasn't—you're right, it was much more than an attachment to the region. And a lot of that had to do with the shaping of—I mean, *A Luta Continua* was a visual where you could really see something that kind of gave you a handle on what this national liberation movement was about and what the people looked like and so forth.

I must say, too, at the same time, that another organization that was very influential since '66, when I went out there, was based in Washington, DC, and that was the Center for Black Education. And it started—it couldn't have been started in '66 because Jimmie Garrett was out there, but I think it was about '68 when they came here.[17]

Q: Was the Center for Black Education associated with Drum and Spear? Was that visible as well?

HILL: Drum and Spear was visible. They had classes. The classes dealt with a lot of international issues.[18]

Q: Here in DC?

HILL: Yes.

Q: But you weren't back here—

HILL: No, I was coming back and forth. I was coming back and forth at least annually, if not two times a year. So I remember when Charlie [Cobb] went to live in Tanzania as part of that effort to build people-to-people ties.

Q: And Courtland [Cox] went at the same time, right?

HILL: Yes. I think he went on a visit though. He and Frankie Cox returned. But if I recall correctly, Charlie stayed a year.

Q: More than—

HILL: More than a year, but I know he stayed some time.

Q: Right. So you finished up your doctorate in Oregon. And it was in psychology still?

HILL: No, it was in education. And I moved to Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Q: To teach?

HILL: Actually my husband moved there to direct their Upward Bound program. And then I later taught. I was so exhausted after getting my doctorate, I just—like that first semester, I don't think I did anything but deal with the snow [*laughter*].

Q: How long were you in Minnesota?

HILL: From '71 to '74.

Q: And you taught part of that time? At Macalester?

HILL: At Macalester. I taught one course at Carleton College. But Macalester— well, C. L. R. James[19] was very much a part of the Center for Black Education. And Roosevelt Brown, he was based in Bermuda. And he has a lot of wonderful letters from the exchanges between him and Nkrumah. In fact I even have some of those.

Q: Now, Roosevelt Brown [Pauulu Kamarakafego], tell me more about who he is.

HILL: OK. He was in parliament there [in 1968].

Q: In Bermuda?

HILL: In Bermuda. And actually became an exile because he had a big political fight and left the country.[20]

Q: And then he came to DC?

HILL: Well he moved around a lot, but DC was one place. But he had wanted to host a Sixth Pan African Congress, a world congress.

Q: Okay, so it was his—

HILL: Yeah, really came from him. And then a lot of influence from Nkrumah and—

Q: Who was in Guinea by that time.

HILL: And C. L. R. James. So the first meeting of a group of people was held in Bermuda, organized by him. And I believe that was in June '69, [the Black Power Conference in Bermuda]. I can get you the exact dates on this stuff. I have stuff at home. At that meeting—

Q: So you went to that meeting?

HILL: No. I was in Minnesota then. But I know they had this earlier meeting there [in Bermuda] because C. L. R. James wasn't able to get into Bermuda [for the first organizing meeting for the Sixth Pan African Congress in April 1971].[21]

But in any case, subsequent to that meeting, they formed a steering committee. And of course Courtland [Cox], Charlie Cobb, Ed Brown, any number of people were the hub of thinking about this. Jimmie Garrett asked me if I would be interested in working on convening people of African descent worldwide. You know, you have to just say we were thinking big [*laughter*]. That's the great thing about naïveté. There are some advantages to it. Because you just go with the idea instead of thinking about all the reasons why you can't do it.

And the main problem we had was how were we going to finance this, number one. But we had other kinds of political problems as well because some people felt that— Stokely

and those fellows [Amiri Baraka, Owusu Saudaki and others] felt it was not the right historical moment. Who were we to even convene this type of meeting? I may even have the letter—but I know Courtland has a letter that he [Stokely] wrote condemning us. But that was the beginning synergy of my getting really grounded in African liberation. Now, it wasn't yet so focused—it was certainly focused on decolonization and African liberation in that sense.

Q: But not necessarily organizational until that.

HILL: We had a call, in which Geri [Augusto][22] was instrumental. She drafted it, basically wrote it. I mean, everybody contributed. It was one of those collective idea products, but she was the person who wrote it.

Q: And the ALSC [African Liberation Support Committee] was getting started roughly at the same time.

HILL: Roughly at the same time. Hence the conflict.

Q: And so you moved—

HILL: Well, I stayed in Minnesota at Macalester. We had a fairly extensive black —it was not black studies. I can't even think of what it was called. It was like a house, with cultural money for educational purposes. So then it became a question of, well, if we can get some notable black people to give speeches, and if they contribute the money for the Sixth Pan African Congress, we can begin to finance the USA organizing activities. So there were people like Goler Butcher[23] who came to speak at Macalester. It was a range of people. From one end of the political spectrum to the other in some sense. But they did make their contributions to making it possible for us to have funds for the North America secretariat—in fact the secretariat was right over on Kilbourne [Place NW]. When I came over here I thought about it. Something like 1712 Kilbourne, right up in there.[24]

Q: And who was in the secretariat at that point? It was—

HILL: Well, the main people here initially were Geri, a government worker named Edie Wilson, and Courtland. All of them were based here in Washington, DC. They were the international secretariat in order to mobilize support from different regions of the world where there were people of African descent. I was the only person based in Minnesota. But what I set up was the infrastructure to mobilize the USA delegation —kind of the North American secretariat, as distinct from the worldwide. James Turner[25] of Cornell University and Julian Ellison of the Black Economic Research Center were co-leaders of the USA Secretariat.

Q: And you went to Dar for the—

HILL: Yeah, it was quite a challenge. First, I had to get people there. And that proved to be a set of political twists and turns that I still don't quite understand always. About '72 we started organizing seriously to get there. One of the themes that we promoted in our organizing was trying to get people to see the interrelationship between domestic problems and international problems of Africa. As Courtland would say, the specifics may be unique, but in general it's the same condition. And we wanted to have a set of kind of local meetings to introduce the idea of the Sixth Pan African Congress, and have people nominate their delegates and analyze their domestic issues. One of the central contentions became political forces led by Baraka,[26] mainly, and others who felt that only a group of people who had unique political history should go to Dar es Salaam. So that would have been him— Baraka, Haki Madhubuti from the Congress of African People, Gene Nelson, Howard Fuller (Owusu Sadaukai). Notably male. Might have been one or two women sprinkled in from ALSC.

But they felt that they had the unique experiences and knowledge and the nationalist perspective, and that they should go and represent the people of African descent in the United States. Courtland, myself, Ed Brown, we had the distinct view that we needed to—that one of the important points about the congress and the tradition of Du Bois was to build people-to-people ties, and that it was important for this congress to introduce U.S. black people to the world of black people that were very different than what they think, and that you didn't do that without carrying as many people there that you could.

Q: And without some test of who they were?

HILL: Were. Yeah, exactly. Well, we launched those visits as best we could, and of course the limitation of money and time and capability narrowed that down. But in any case, it did become pretty public, and people did start sending in their money to— and let me just point out, too, that the Embassy of Tanzania was very critical. Once President [Julius] Nyerere committed himself, I must say Ambassador [Paul] Bomani and his chargé d'affaires Hamza Aziz—Hamza Aziz was the person he assigned to it—they were determined that this should happen. [27] And, well, we start—now mind you, we are not a corporate entity.

So at this point, before then, I had gone—well, we had gone to Henderson Travel. I don't know if that was the only black travel agency, but [it was] the only one that I'd heard of and anybody else that I know of. And they had an office in Atlanta. So Henderson Travel had contracted with an airline to take the delegation to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I think I will never forget this. So I had more than \$90,000 in this bank account. On Wednesday—now mind you, the people are supposed to leave the following Friday. On that Wednesday, the airline broke the contract. Well, the airline said that our manifest list was questionable, the FBI had come to see it, and [the airline]didn't want any part of this, so the contract was broken. [James] Turner, acting without my knowledge, attempted to make travel arrangements for a delegation of 10 persons.

And there was no way for me to get this money back to people before I end up as the Garvey of this period, right?[28] So this is Wednesday. We fly to Atlanta, Hamza Aziz

and myself, talk to Henderson Travel. We find we have no airline contract with no possibility of a contract. The problem we have now is you have to have a 30-day manifest list, 30 days to the State Department, Aeronautic Board, and whatever. And we obviously couldn't do that. So I don't know who, but I was told that there was this policy that—the president of a country can request the president or the state department of another country for a group of people to be permitted to come, and this would get us by the 30-day manifest list. But now we had to find an airline.

Q: This was '74? What month?

HILL: '74. This was June. The conference was June 19-27, 1974. We were to depart on June 17, so this was right before then, Monday of the same week. So here I am in Minnesota trying to get these people—and we had already sent out the telegrams. We had sent out everything telling people where to be in New York, what time to be there, what time the flight was going to leave. And I knew that I had one last opportunity to give them instructions, and that would be the Wednesday before the Friday we were to depart. At that point, I had no flight.

So Hamza called and told me that the government of India, India Airlines, would be willing to contract. So I had to meet him in New York with the money to put the down payment [*laughter*]. Here I am—really, I was so frightened, because I had never done anything like this before. Courtland and all of them—Courtland, Geri, and Kathy Flewellen [29]—everybody is in Tanzania, because they—Courtland and Geri had gone a year ahead to work out the logistics there. So I was pretty much left here. Edie Wilson had gone to Tanzania, and I was pretty much left. [James] Turner was up in Ithaca, New York, but he pretty much didn't get involved with the logistics of anything. And if anything, he was being pressured to derail the whole operation by other political forces—Baraka, Haki [Madhubuti], and so forth. Julian Ellison of the Black Economic Research Center also didn't get involved in the operations of the secretariat.

So on Wednesday, I sent the last telegram out, telling them that the flight—there would be a flight departing from—at that time, I didn't even know what time it was going to leave. I had already told them to be there at 8:00 a.m., so—and the flight would depart, and there may be some logistical changes—

Q: Problems.

HILL: Or problems, but we would get to Dar es Salaam. And of course, it ended up, instead of leaving 8:00 a.m., we left 8:00 p.m. And then we couldn't all fly from London to Dar on the same flight, so some people had to stay overnight. Those were logistical problems that people were very upset about. But as I said to them, if you just knew what it took to get you this far here.

But we got to Dar, and the infrastructure for the conference, in terms of the production of work, was our first challenge that we were not clear about. They had very old typewriters, no electric. In fact, Mary Jane Patterson quickly had some flown over from Kenya

through her church ties. When you said Kenya—took them from the church in Kenya, because we had to—

Q: So Mary Jane was there?

HILL: Yes. We had to type the comments. You have to produce this stuff, the transcript, before the next meeting. So we spent all night long typing. And they had a mimeograph machine that you had to roll like this. And so a lot of the content of the discussion I missed because I was so bogged down with that level of logistics often.

Q: And Kathy Flewellen—

HILL: So Katherine Flewellen was there, and Loretta [Hobbs][30] was there. And they were very instrumental in the operations. But they, too, were in the hub of trying to get these papers in several languages out. That was a challenge. And then the translators did a boycott and demanded to be paid in U.S. dollars before they would continue to translate [*laughter*]. I tell you. And here we were like—so we had to get the U.S. dollars together.

Q: So you're saying that, in a sense, your engagement in making it happen almost kept you out of a lot of the discussion?

HILL: Yeah.

Q: Is that fair to say?

HILL: Yeah, that's fair. Now, one of the lessons of history was the difference between a nation-state and any solidarity group or a collection of individuals. Now, President Gairy,[31] I think it was— immediately, two or three Caribbean countries demanded that political dissidents not be allowed to participate. That was the first conflict. There were two main political ones, and while I was involved in them, I wasn't—not a decision-maker, but they're good examples because they give you, I think, a good example of the problems of collections of people trying to be parallel to nation-state. It poses certain issues.

So, of course, President Nyerere followed the dictates of nation-states, because that's his community, I learned. Not us, as activists, with various ideals and ideas. Then C. L. R. James refused to attend, in support of his radical allies. And then there were delegations who felt very strongly that we should not have the conference, that we should have backed out and refused to host it in Tanzania. Well, we said no, we had to go forth. And I think there was a feeling that the good that would come out of it would outweigh some of the negatives. At that time, most of us political activists were operating in the either/or, it's either all good or all bad.

So that was one. And I talked to President Nyerere about it, and he said, well, you don't have people to feed, you don't have a set of trade relationships, you don't have to count on

aid. You can think about what your political beliefs are and act on them, but that's all you have to think about [*laughter*]. Something to that effect he said. So you can afford to take those views, and I admire you for taking them, but I can't do that. I'm the head of a nation-state that functions in a world that's organized a certain way, and I have to be political about how I operate.

Q: Feeding my people.

HILL: Right. So that was a very important lesson. The second political lesson had to do with the national liberation movements versus the nation-states, and that had to do with the design of the agenda. And of course, Geri and Courtland and Kathy were more heavily involved in this debate, because I was still in the United States, but nevertheless in part. The part of our—I will say my naïveté—I won't pass it on everybody, but that includes mine—was really I didn't understand a nation- state. I remember one time C. L. R. James said you need to read about a nation-state and its limitations as a progressive force.

A central part of the call to the conference was to mobilize within the diaspora people who were in science and technology, in order to aid with development and begin to focus our resources in support of the development of the nation-state, hence, the people, so to speak. So that's the logic of the—the naïveté. And I must say, too, ALSC always had a question about that, but it was formed in rhetorical terms, like, aid going to the masses versus the state.

Q: ALSC had a question—what?

HILL: They had questions about—they felt that such a center would solidify the bourgeois class in African nations.

Q: The technical—

HILL: Yeah, the Pan African Technology Center we were proposing. And it really organized quite a number—we had 3,500 or so people who were in the sciences around the world. Fletcher Robinson MD, Alycee Gulatee MD, and other physicians, as well as Drs. Donald Coleman and Neville Parker, engineers, were instrumental in conceptualizing, writing, and organizing support for this center.

Q: Who were ready to offer skills—

HILL: Or at least they wanted to talk and participate in such an effort of creating a center. This proposal was derailed during the conference by a number of countries who argued that there was no need for a Pan African Science and Technology Center because the Arab Center for Service and Technology was open for everyone in the African world.[\[32\]](#)

Q: But fewer than that actually went.

HILL: Right. But quite a number of scientists from the African diaspora did go.

Q: In one way or—

HILL: —or another. Some stayed. In fact, Neville Parker is one who participated in organizing, and he stayed there for maybe 15 years or so after, to help build a whole engineering program at the University of Dar es Salaam. And I guess that's the other thing we really have to show—there were outcomes to the conference. I've read and I've heard people say that the conference didn't produce anything, and I'm like, wait, wait, wait. But that's another part. But in any case, the national liberation movements saw this world congress as they should have—

Q: As an opportunity.

HILL: As an opportunity to put the case of their struggle as the agenda for the diaspora. And moreover, they argued—which none of us disagreed with—that with some countries colonized, you can't even address the development issues because you're dealing with the colonization issues and apartheid and so forth. But it was quite a struggle between the various nation-state ministers about that agenda. And of course, when we were thinking about the agenda back here in DC on Kilbourne Street, we acted like we were going to shape it, I suppose [*laughter*]. It quickly became clear that nation-states have a lot to do with that, and national liberation movements are struggling themselves to make sure to shape the conference content a certain way. So that was another, I think, a kind of seminal moment in my life of the difference between these various forces and the national bodies.

Q: Even though you were focusing on the secretariat, obviously you were hearing what was going on in terms of the liberation movement perspective in particular. What do you remember as the message or the messengers that people responded to?

HILL: Well, the height of the debate was this race or class issue that had its form that it manifested itself in the United States, and then it manifested itself between, say, [Léopold] Senghor of Senegal versus the liberation movements. So there were tensions. And what I recall is that FRELIMO, Samora Machel,^[33] and putting forth the notion that it's not either/or, but you do have to pay attention to these class, gender cultural traditions, issues that hold people back from transforming their conditions. And while you may think the chief is great because you've never seen anybody wrapped in gold—I mean, he didn't say this, but this is kind of my cynical way to put it—the chief also participates in not making it easy for national liberation to occur, because the colonial forces have made it comfortable for him to be a chief and wear the gold robe and so forth. There was just a lot of tension and debate and acrimony around the question of whether race or class had primacy in any analysis of strategy and tactics of struggle.

Q: And that was more or less at the time, as well, that the ALSC was having those internal debates. But some of the ALSC people were boycotting the conference, or not? Did they end up coming?

HILL: They came. Well, Owusu came, and Gene Nelson came. Some—

Q: What was the name?

HILL: Gene Nelson.

Q: Where was he from?

HILL: He is now in Texas. In fact, I just found a tape. I was cleaning out a closet over these hurricane days and found this tape where I guess I had taped him somehow, just a speech.

Q: But then he was where?

HILL: He was in—Duke.

Q: Oh, okay. So he was also in North Carolina with Owusu at Malcolm X University.

HILL: Right, yeah. Right, they were all there. In fact, he almost sounded like Owusu. They had the same cadence of speech and such.

Q: And had they shifted to a Marxist position by that time?

HILL: Oh, yes.

Q: So they had—by '74, they were—

HILL: Oh, yeah. That was very clear.

Q: And others were not?

HILL: Well, they were probably the clearest, the most rigid from my point of view. Baraka had been a cultural nationalist and had just turned a Marxist—well, more Maoist, I suppose. So he was engaging this with religious fervor, is the only way I can describe it. It was that kind of passion. So they were central. And then Haki Madhubuti, out of Chicago, that whole group were more cultural nationalists.

Q: By that time, had the MPLA-UNITA split surfaced to consciousness for you all?

HILL: Yes, it had surfaced. It had surfaced.

Q: But not yet exploded?

HILL: Not yet exploded. It had surfaced to the point where ALSC had had a meeting about the difference between UNITA and MPLA, and I remember Bob Van Lierop went

there to speak to them about the dangers of them getting entangled. This meeting took place after the conference.

Q: Entangled with UNITA?

HILL: —with UNITA. Then Walter Rodney^[34] —and I have this tape, I'm sure—talked about it in the context of the conference. It's not formally a presentation, but he talked about—

Q: To a group?

HILL: Yes. About this UNITA/ALSC, or a solidarity group aligning themselves with UNITA.

Q: That would—you haven't transcribed that?

HILL: No, I haven't.

Q: That's the kind of resource that if we located and processed for this project, having it copied, transcribed—

HILL: Yes. Well, it should be. It's critical. Right. So the meeting was very formal, which people were not accustomed to, but as you know, one of the things that the delegation quickly learned is that not everybody spoke English, and that you had to really organize the meeting to facilitate—

Q: Translation.

HILL: —translation and engagement of different groups. And therefore, it would be formal. You just can't talk because you want to talk. And then we had had to divide [the American group into delegates and observers]. And in typical American fashion, our culture, people didn't want to be an observer, they wanted to be a delegate. That kind of stuff. I spent my money to come here, and I can't talk? Just the ugly American syndrome, it emerged as well.

So another piece of this was President Nyerere and Bomani, Ambassador Bomani— President Nyerere wanted to meet with the leaders of the delegations. But he said five people—

Q: For everybody?

HILL: For everybody. So we were meeting in a room. I will never forget Mary Jane Patterson for this, too.

Q: Okay, so Nyerere is meeting with five people, and these are you—

HILL: No, no, no. [James] Turner proposed that the five be Baraka, Owusu Sadaukai, Haki Madhubuti, and Ed Vaughn, who ran a bookstore in Detroit. And himself, of course. The five were all men. So they excluded me. Now this is when—and of course, you develop yourself politically, but I've often looked back on that because I was so hurt, but I was hurt like a woman being hurt, who wanted people to appreciate her for her work.

Q: Rather than on principle.

HILL: Yeah, rather than on principle. Rather than on principle, so I felt wounded, as opposed to—

Q: Offended?

HILL: Offended, politically offended. So that was an important lesson. That's how you develop your political personality, really. But Mary Jane Patterson said, wait— because of course, she had functioned internationally in different arenas. So she had a sense of herself, as an older woman. And she said Sylvia has done all this organizing, she's been a political operative and so forth, and she should be part of this delegation. But they replied we only have five slots and these are the five people, who are national organizers, and she's not a—doesn't have a political constituency.

So that night, Ambassador Bomani came and said to me there will be a car to pick you up to take you to the president. You will meet with the president alone, and when the gentlemen get there, you will already be there [*laughter*]. They have such a sense of humor [*laughter*]. So sure enough, the car was there. I was there like a half an hour before they got there. I was already on my second cup of tea [*laughter*] when they walked in and they were so stunned to see me sitting there. It's just a perfect story, isn't it?

So that was one of those moments of coming of age politically, as well. And the other thing was learning how to not be perfect on an international/national scale, being willing to take the risk of failure in order to make something happen, and having to stand before people who were super-critical. But then there are always people who do something special. I can remember this woman from Canada gave me a little totem, Indian totem from Canada. And she said, this is just a little gift for you because I know what it took to get all these people here. So we had special moments like that.

But I always felt that people didn't have the sense of what it took logistically to do that when you don't have an infrastructure, essentially. Certainly Macalester's infrastructure helped a great deal. And had it not been for a woman who was my administrative assistant—because at that time I was running a program, the Institute for African Education, that connected teachers with children in communities. I think we were working pretty much two jobs. There was that program at the institute we were running and then it was Six-PAC we were running. So Joanne Favors [the assistant], she was very key in—she was part of the infrastructure. And then, of course, black college students came in and helped with the logistics of news production, arranging visas, etc.

But just the sheer logistics of handling passports for 199 people and all of that. So that was the grounding, but it was really Six-PAC that led me to return and work on Southern Africa. There were a group of us who committed ourselves that we were going to work against colonialism, and it was based on the investment in this congress and the agenda of the national liberation struggle. I ended up truly feeling that national liberation struggles were the transformation for change in that region. So I returned —again, I returned to Minnesota, but by September '74, I had moved to Washington, DC.

Q: You and your husband?

HILL: Yeah. And Kathy Flewellen moved here—

Q: Now Kathy came from where? I haven't talked to her.

HILL: She was in Minnesota. See, Kathy was a student of mine. I taught her one class, but she was in that whole black student program that was there on the Macalester campus.

Q: Also moved to DC.

HILL: Yeah. When she was graduating, I said, Kathy, would you be willing to go to Dar es Salaam with me and work with these people on the Sixth Pan African Congress [*laughter*]? She said yes. So that's how she got there to help in the pre-conference organizing. So then she moved here after the post-conference organizing. And of course, Courtland [Cox] came back and so forth. And we started—first, we started trying to think about how to get the city council to have a resolution against apartheid, I think. I don't think it was full decolonization. I think we targeted that. Then second—

Q: Now, did you form a formal group at that time?

HILL: No, we were just meeting. In fact, Geri's mother, Florence [Tate], was in this. It was just a collection of people. And that faltered and kind of fell apart. People went their way. Then I and Jimmie Garrett, we had like a Marxist study group going on. And then Sandra Hill, Cecelie [Counts], a number of us, we—Loretta [Hobbs] was in there, too. We're still thinking big. We launched the National Black Coalition on Southern Africa. I forget the exact name, but a coalition without any people coalescing, right? The exact name was the National Black Coalition on Southern Africa, with contact persons in Philadelphia; Baltimore; Dublin, Virginia; Chicago; Newark; Norfolk, Virginia; and New York.

And I forgot to mention the demonstration in '72.

Q: Right, the ALSC—

HILL: Right, that was kind of critical, too.

Q: You weren't in DC at that time?

HILL: No, but I came to the demonstration. But that was one of those critical moments.

Q: So this National Southern Africa Coalition, it never—

HILL: It didn't last for long, but we had a few good meetings. It was two or three different groups. We were just trying to work out the political direction for a solidarity group. But out of that, we decided that we needed to study more and try to figure out how to build a base. And that's when we started the Southern Africa News Collective.

Q: Now, that would have been in—by '75, right?

HILL: Yeah. It was shortly after—yeah, about '75. Because that was the height of the MPLA-UNITA war and the tension here, with people allying themselves with one or the other. And we held this meeting that really had to be about 500 or 600 people attended, nationally, on the UNITA-MPLA debate. And then out of that, we did a newsletter analyzing the pitfalls of the nationalist position [that considered] UNITA as a progressive liberation movement. So Florence was on one side and Courtland on the other, and Ed Brown was there.

Q: And the involvement of other people in that debate—Prexy was not involved?

HILL: He may have been. Prexy was based in Chicago or New York, so I don't have a recollection of him at the meeting, though he could have attended. I don't remember all of the particulars right now. I'd have to look at it. But there were lots of people. About 500 people met in an auditorium at Howard University. But I know that a lot of it had to do with the folks from ALSC. And then the cultural nationalists were there. I have to look for those papers.

Q: Did your local group take a strong position?

HILL: Oh yes, we were strongly pro-MPLA. And we were very concerned about how groups came to ally themselves with one liberation movement or another, and the kind of criteria you used to make that judgment.

Q: And how large a group?

HILL: Well, the news collective was small. We were basically seven people.

Q: And you put out a newsletter for how long?

HILL: Actually, I think we lasted about three years. SASP also produced a newsletter called *Struggle*.

Q: And is there an archive of that someplace?

HILL: I have copies, but actually, once SASP started, a librarian, Karen Jefferson,[35] joined. And she quickly, archivist that she is, organized. She began forcing us to see that we had to go beyond individuals having things in their houses at this place or that place.

Q: And has that now been deposited someplace?

HILL: It's at Howard.

Q: In the Moorland-Spangarn [Research Center]?

HILL: Yes. At least up to a point. I think there may be later periods that aren't in there. So the news collective was—and I'll just skip through this and then we'll get to SASP, and then you can finish that up later. But the news collective was meeting, we met virtually every weekend. Our style was [that] different people would draft a piece after—well, first we'd talk about what we thought needed to be done, and different people would draft it, and then we'd have collective editing.

Q: Fun [*laughter*].

HILL: Right. It's amazing we lasted as long as we did.

Q: And about how many people were, at that point—

HILL: Well, at that point, there were seven. There was Kathy [Flewellen], Sandra [Hill], Cecelie [Counts], Rose [Brown], Cheryl [Gardner], myself, and then later Adwoa [Dunn-Mouton]. At one point Jimmie Garrett was in, but we had to ban him; but that's another story. Also, Sandra Rattley was in the news collective for a short period.

Q: That's another story. I was actually asking how many people did it go to? How many copies did you print?

HILL: Oh, I don't—

Q: Roughly.

HILL: Roughly? I don't know, I guess probably roughly guess just maybe 500 or so. It wasn't large.

Q: And basically locally or around the country?

HILL: Locally, but to some extent around the country, too. We had a few people we mailed. We had retreats, and at one of our meetings we decided that part of the difficulty of writing about organizing is we were not organizing. And that we needed to organize more so that we could really share some of these insights. Thus came the first name of Southern Africa Summer Project, which later turned into "Support" when we realized that it's not logical mobilizing support for refugees in the summer.

Q: The work doesn't finish in the summer and an awful lot of people are away. Not like going to Mississippi for the summer.

HILL: Boy, did we ever laugh about that one. But that summer project was really around refugees, and we wanted to—

Q: And what year was that, when that was started?

HILL: '78.

Q: 1978. So also the same year that TransAfrica was getting started.

HILL: Yes.

Q: Was there a relationship to that national arena?

HILL: Not really. You knew about it. Yeah, you knew it, but we didn't know. We just thought of ourselves as doing a different set of things than what they were doing. Not that what they were doing was wrong in any way—

Q: Right. But that your focus was local—

HILL: Local and grassroots—

Q: —and that WOA [Washington Office on Africa] and TransAfrica people were doing other things.

HILL: Right, that were useful. But we took the information of WOA and other groups for organizing. That helped us. But we actually were trying to, if you will, embed this issue—once we got past the summer, we were trying to embed the issue in different sectors of the community. For example, we identified particular churches that we thought were receptive. We tried to work with particular labor unions and so forth. So we tried to have some kind of analysis around it. And we were trying to figure out ways to link whatever their issue was with what was happening there. And to reach out to like WHUR radio station [at Howard University] and get them involved in mobilizing support. So it was a little bit different of what we were trying to do, until we later decided we needed to really get involved with TransAfrica.

Mostly what we talked a lot about was how to shape information, how to [do] outreach strategies. And in '78 I had gone to Mozambique on this delegation with Bob Van Lierop. And so that gave me, then, a range of actual experiences of what was happening in refugee camps and the challenges that they faced—

Q: You went to some of the Zimbabwean camps?

HILL: Yes.

Q: Right, in Manica [province]?

HILL: Yeah.

Q: And was that also when he was doing the new film, *O Povo Organizado*?

HILL: No, he had done some of the footage. We actually did a film preview—film premiere of *O Povo* here in 1977. I think now I'm losing the time sequence.

Q: You're a lot better than I am, because I'd have to go back and look at my papers.

HILL: Yes. But I know even before we started, we had a little group. Another group we had before we even got to the Southern Africa Support Project was the Mozambique Film Project, where we were helping Bob get *O Povo* seen. So that was just a moment in there. It wasn't long before we developed the support project. But the visit there, then, of course, gave me another passion—

Q: So that was your second trip to Africa? You'd been to Dar and then Mozambique?

HILL: Yes, right. I had been to Ghana before. I went to Ghana in '72. That was so different.

Q: As just a visit?

HILL: A visit, in part, sponsored—it was a delegation that we put together out of Macalester College, because Kofi Annan, who was a graduate of there—his brother, Kwabena Annan, worked in this project.

Q: So his brother was at Macalester?

HILL: Yes. And so his brother organized this visit for us—a dozen or so people for us to Ghana. And of course, we went to Nkrumah's house and so forth, but it didn't have a lot of outreach to—didn't have any, that I know of—to Afro-Americans. And at that time, I didn't know the history of the Afro-Americans who had gone there, lived there—

Q: In Ghana?

HILL: In Ghana.

Q: Right. So the delegation who went, it was basically Macalester people?

HILL: Yeah, and their children, and it was—

Q: Just a cultural acquaintance?

HILL: It was a cultural enrichment. We went to the university, we went to Accra—but we did a public sweep of the country. But again, it was truly a cultural heritage experience. It was not political.

Q: Let's jump forward again in time to post-'78 and the SASP role. And more people became involved in that over the years, and—

HILL: Well, what happened was at first we were—the news collective kind of shaped what SASP was doing. We had one meeting with the news collective and then one meeting with everybody. But what we soon figured out was that there were people who really liked to tediously deal with these political issues. And we were that type. And then there were other people who came to political forums or—either they wanted action or they wanted to talk and share their experiences themselves, or they wanted information. And you had to structure these meetings in such a way that more people could feel—

Q: A part.

HILL: —a part of the collective effort, instead of either feeling they don't know anything, and so therefore they feel bad when they're there, because people are talking about elusive detailed information that may be important for the sanctions issue. But for this group, they don't need to know that. And you don't need to go through that. We had all those kinds of issues that we tried to grapple with. So sometimes we would have like 100 people in the meeting. Sometimes we would have 40. Sometimes as little as 10.

Q: And there was a period there—I don't know, because I wasn't in DC at that point, but the issue of whether the group was only African American or—

HILL: Or multiracial? Yeah.

Q: And who was the core of the group, apart from you and Sandra [Hill], Adwoa [Dunn-Mouton], Kathy Flewellen, and Cecelie [Counts]?

HILL: We were the core group. And then it expanded to Joseph [Jordan] and Ira Stohlman. He worked for the DC government. We were the core group. Karen Jefferson was in there, part of that group at different moments.

But it was interesting—I'll just highlight this to close it out—but one of the issues, at one point in our work, we had started outreaching to different groups. And what we faced on the African American side was what one might call a class question in our organizing and the implications of that, what it meant. And just—I'll give you a perfect vignette. This is another one of these examples.

When there's organizers, you think you're doing one thing and people see it a different way. At one point, a part of our policy was that we always had co-chairs, and it had to be a man and a woman. And when we went out to make presentations, it had to be a man

and a woman, because we were trying to show people that both men and women could know information and talk out issues.

So Kevin [Danaher][36] and I made the presentation. I believe it was at Union Temple Baptist Church, but it was at a black church. And it was good—you know Kevin. Good vibrations and everything. Afterwards, this woman came over to me, and she says, now baby, you can speak by yourself, you speak very well, you really don't need a white man to make you feel stronger [*laughter*]. She had interpreted—that's what I mean about there being cultural differences. People see through this lens—you think you're doing something politically, but the symbolism may be completely different. But just to cite an example of the white-black coalition, it's just complex. Aside from the differences that you have, it's just complex.

Another example was we had many white males who would come to the group. And some were working in the Commerce Department or somewhere, a bureaucratic job, but they had extraordinary analytical skills, and they had time to dig up information. And they wanted to come in the group and really share that information. Well, the problem for that is that they would end up talking all the time. And for the black men and black women, those kind of tensions emerged. But on the other hand, what happens to those people who have this intellectual information and they really want to share it, and this is the way they get to feel—

Q: Involved?

HILL: Involved.

Q: Without dominating.

HILL: Yeah, without dominating. And so that was a kind of tension. One of the real interesting debates that did come to head was the discussion of whites going to talk at white churches. And they really did not want to do that.

Q: When you say they didn't want to go to talk to white churches, what were their reasons?

HILL: None of us were religious people, as such, and particularly wanted to spend our Sunday in church. But we recognized if we were going to break through with these folks taking on this issue, we're going to have to get involved with the church sector. But several people also did not want to feel challenged. It was not a comfortable experience for them, and they did not want that uncomfortable experience.

Q: Well, I can understand that.

HILL: Yes, right.

Q: But that's how you organize.

HILL: That was a lot of the debate. And I don't think—it was never settled well. I think it became more, well, that's because you don't like white people as opposed to really what is the analysis behind this. And, quite frankly, we felt that we had so much complexity, because the black community is so complex. We just couldn't take the time, given that we were all working. We were having so much trouble trying to deal with these different class manifestations of people, and how to get them engaged, that we really couldn't take the time to devote to interracial organizing. We couldn't add the extra level. There wasn't time, and we just didn't—couldn't even figure out how to do it. Prexy [Nesbitt][\[37\]](#) never could understand, because we tried to explain this to him. And he felt that it was important to do as a—

Q: Political statement?

HILL: As a political statement, right. And we felt it was more important to organize the African American community in order to change U.S. foreign policy as a political statement in the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles.

Q: Well, I've reached your one o'clock time.

[1] TransAfrica Forum is the educational affiliate of TransAfrica, which was founded in 1977. See Randall Robinson, *Defending the Spirit* (New York: Plume, 1998), excerpted in this collection.

[2] The Sixth Pan African Congress was held in Dar es Salaam in June 1974. It continued the series begun by W. E. B. Du Bois and other Pan Africanists, and followed the Fifth Pan African Congress in Manchester, England in 1945.

[3] For a brief account of the national African Liberation Support Committee, see Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 173-80.

[4] Among sources on the 1980s, see Randall Robinson, *Defending the Spirit* (New York, Plume, 1998) and the special edition of *CrossRoads* magazine edited by Joseph Jordan, "That Covenant was Kept: Lessons of the U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movement," April 1995.

[5] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) played a pivotal role in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. There is a rich literature on the organization. See, among others, Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Robert Moses and Charles E. Cobb Jr., *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Boston: Beacon, 2001); and Stokely Carmichael with Edwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

[6] Mary Jane Patterson is a civil rights activist who served as director of the Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church from 1971 to 1989, and was active in support for African liberation. See the interview with Mary Jane Patterson in this collection.

[7] Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper, 1940).

[8] General Educational Development, a certificate equivalent to secondary school graduation.

[9] All three became leading members of SNCC in the early 1960s..

[10] Charles Cobb, Jr., a leading member of SNCC in Mississippi in the early 1960s, subsequently became a journalist, working for National Public Radio, National Geographic, Africa News, and other media outlets.. Charles Cobb Jr. is a senior writer and diplomatic correspondent for allAfrica.com, the leading online source of news from and about Africa, as well as the co-author of *Radical Equations* (Beacon Press, 2001), with civil rights organizer and educator Robert Moses. He is also a co-editor of the book *No Easy Victories*, for which this interview and others were conducted.

[11] Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the Congo, was assassinated January 17, 1961.

[12] James (Jimmie) Garrett was involved in political organizing and the black education movement in both Washington, DC and in the Bay Area on the West Coast.

[13] Howard Fuller (Owusu Sadaukai), from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, directed Malcolm X University in Greensboro, North Carolina, from 1969 to 1973. He was the national chairman and organizer of the first African Liberation Day demonstration in May 1972 in Washington, DC. Later he returned to Milwaukee, where he served as superintendent of schools and became a strong advocate of school voucher programs, a cause strongly supported by right-wing foundations.

[14] See interview with Robert Van Lierop in this collection.

[15] See interview with Robert Van Lierop in this collection.

[16] Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, was overthrown by a military coup in 1966.

[17] During 1968-69 at Federal City College, a predecessor institution to the University of the District of Columbia , some black students and faculty left to set up the Center for Black Education as an independent educational institution to promote self-reliance and Pan Africanism as well as to relate theory and practice in the curriculum. See Center for Black Education, *The Struggle for Black Education, 1968-1971* (Washington, DC: Drum and Spear Press, 1972).

[18] Drum and Spear published a book based on a series of articles written and edited by members of the Center for Black Education: *African Liberation: An Analytical Report on Southern Africa* (Washington, DC: Drum and Spear Press, 1972).

[19] C. L. R. James (1901-1989), born in Trinidad, was a Pan Africanist and Marxist and is recognized as one of the leading revolutionary intellectuals of the twentieth century. His best-known book is *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Dial Press, 1938). See <http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr>

[20] Brown's self-published autobiography is *Me One: The Autobiography of Pauulu Kamarakafego* (Bermuda: PK Publishing, 2002).

[21] See James Garrett, " A Historical Sketch: The Sixth Pan African Congress," *Black World*, March 1975.

[22] See interview with Geri Augusto in this collection.

[23] Goler Teal Butcher (1925-1993) was a leading international lawyer who served as counsel to the Subcommittee on Africa of the House Foreign Affairs Committee from 1972 to 1974. She was active in the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law and other organizations supporting African freedom.

[24] Kilbourne Place NW is in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood of Washington, DC, near the address where Hill was interviewed.

[25] James Turner is professor of African and African American politics and social policy at Cornell University. He founded the university's Africana Studies and Research Center in 1969.

[26] See Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[27] Paul Bomani (1925-2005) served as Tanzanian ambassador to the United States from 1972 to 1983. Hamza Aziz (1930-2004) served in the Tanzanian Embassy to the United States from 1973 to 1985.

[28] Black nationalist Marcus Garvey was indicted by the U.S. government on charges of mail fraud in 1922.

[29] Kathy (Ka) Flewellen is a social justice activist and organizational development consultant based in Washington, DC.

[30] Loretta Hobbs is an organizational development consultant based in Washington, DC.

[31] Sir Eric Gairy (1922-1997) was prime minister of Grenada from 1974 to 1979.

[32] See Sylvia Hill, "Pan-Africanism and Non-Alignment," in *The NonAligned Movement in World Politics*, ed. A. W. Singham (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1978).

[33] Frelimo leader Samora Machel led the armed struggle before independence, and became the first president of independent Mozambique.

[34] Walter Rodney (1942-1980), born in Guyana, was a Caribbean and Pan Africanist revolutionary thinker and activist. His best-known publication is *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture; Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972). Rodney was assassinated in 1980 in Guyana.

[35] Karen Jefferson heads the Atlanta University Center Archives in Atlanta, Georgia.

[36] Kevin Danaher is a co-founder and public education director of Global Exchange, based in San Francisco, California.

[37] See interview with Prexy Nesbitt in this collection.