

BARKSDALE, Hudson L.  
INTERVIEWEE

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**Interview # 193**

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**Abstract:** In his interview with Michael Cooke, Dr. Hudson L. Barksdale Sr. (1905-1986) discusses his time as a South Carolina Representative and as a member of the Black Caucus. Mr. Barksdale was the first African-American member of Winthrop College's Board of Trustees (1980-1983). Mr. Barksdale details his experiences in forming the Black Caucus and working to pass legislature that would improve the lives of blacks in South Carolina. Mr. Barksdale also discusses the Caucus's work to increase black election to local, county, and state government positions.

\* This is an edited transcript. Our transcription guidelines are available upon request/on our website.

Time	Keywords
00:00:00	<b>MC: Today is July 21, 1984 and I'm conducting an interview with Hudson L. Barksdale Sr. who is a former South Carolina Representative from the 31<sup>st</sup> district of Spartanburg County. Representative Barksdale could you give us a brief biographical sketch of your life? When you were born, where you were born, your education, and your profession.</b>

HB: I was born in Barksdale South Carolina, that's in Laurens County, on January 28 1904. I grew up in Spartanburg. My parents came to Spartanburg when I was about two or three years old. I went to public schools here in Spartanburg. I took my high school...Bill University had a high school at that time, that's John C. Smith now. I left there after my freshman year. I spent a year at Manning Teachers College in Washington D.C. I came back and took a degree at South Carolina State College in 1936. Subsequently I went to Columbia University Teachers College and earned a masters and I've done further study at Illinois State normal university. In addition to my education I've been involved in business to a certain extent because I had an insurance agency which I operated for about 18 years until a couple years ago.

00:01:38	<b>MC: When did you first become interested in politics?</b>
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HB: I was a teacher in Parkdale, South Carolina and I asked the superintendent about some additions to the school. I told him he'd been there for several years anything he'd want from people he could get it. He said 'yes well Barksdale you don't know politics.' Which means to me he did not give the school extra room because of the political opinion of people in the community. I said if politics is all that powerful, I'd try to get into it. Later on I ran for the school board here in District 70, Spartanburg. Also was in another political race here in Spartanburg for a neighborhood representative. Then I decided to... when after reapportionment of the districts of South Carolina, decided to run for District 31. My friends persuaded me because of my activity in the NEA [National Education Association]. I think I had more important bosses in the NEA than anybody else in South Carolina. With that experience and my known...it was known that I would write my opinion in the newspapers and I'm not afraid to speak out. The blacks urged me to run and I...they prevailed, I decided to run.

00:02:49 **MC: What year did you run for election?**

HB: 1972 I believe it was.

00:02:55 **MC: Was that the first time you had ever run for political office?**

HB: No it wasn't. I had previously stated I had run for several school districts, several school boards, here in the city of Spartanburg.

00:03:04 **MC: Were you successful?**

HB: No I was not successful.

00:03:07 **MC: In what year did you run for that?**

HB: The year is sketchy to me but I did run against the man who is now the Chairman of the South Carolina Republican Party, Dr. Graham.

00:03:18 **MC: I see. What impact do you think reapportionment had on the ability of blacks to make their voices felt in the political arena?**

HB: I think if we had not had reapportionment we would not be as active politically in South Carolina as we are today, and know it was impossible for a black to be elected to run against the whites. Of course it meant a black didn't run. Blacks would not oppose each other in those days. So to say that we would not have had the success we do enjoy now is based on the fact that we did have reapportionment. In the district where I ran it was predominately black. The incumbent, who was a very outstanding legislator at the time and a millionaire, was up to be the Chairman of the Ethics Committee but there was so much abrading against him that they elected me overwhelmingly.

00:04:20 **MC: Who did you defeat? Who was the person you were just mentioning?**

HB: The person I defeated was Cleveland. He was a gentlemen. Incidentally he gave me his manual to the House and also gave me a \$10 contribution and wrote me a letter wishing me good luck.

00:04:34 **MC: So there wasn't any animosity during the election?**

HB: None what so ever.

00:04:38 **MC: It wasn't a racist campaign?**

HB: No it wasn't a racist...not on that basis except that it was a black running against a white. There was no animosity between the two of us.

00:04:48 **MC: Were you successful in other election bids after your initial election?**

HB: I was reelected, let's see...one, two, three times. I served a total of eight years in the House.

00:05:02 **MC: You stayed in House without being ousted by another—**

HB: Eight years.

00:05:09 **MC: Eight years and then you decided not to run?**

HB: No, I was defeated.

00:05:15 **MC: Defeated. In what year?**

HB: That would have been two years...lets see, four years ago. In 1979...maybe 1980.

00:05:26 **MC: During your time in the legislature what was the significance of the Black Caucus? You were one of the original members of the Black Caucus. How do you think that organization addressed the issues that were pertinent to blacks?**

HB: Well, there's an old saying that in unity there is strength. The 13 of us got together under the leadership of Judge [Earnest A.] Finney. We discussed the issues beforehand and we knew we were going to vote to maneuver into the General Assembly. To say that we had a highly significant effect on legislation, you can say it because we...the 13 people votes in one block kind of just something very significant about people who have certain special legislation they want to pass. That includes the members in House who were filing bills and also

the general business community. They sold our vote. They kept appearing before us at our meetings and they solicited the block vote of the Caucus.

00:06:33 **MC: What are some of the areas where the Black Caucus sought to carve out areas where blacks could make progress. What were some of the initial goals of the Black Caucus?**

HB: Well we were concerned about the fact that there were no blacks in, with the exception of [James E.] Clyburn, in important positions in the state government. They were also concerned about salaries for blacks who were employed in the government. We were also concerned about the budget of South Carolina State College. When the budget would come up every year in the General Assembly to adopt a budget we were always concerned that South Carolina State got its fair share of what it was supposed to have due to the presentation of the President of [SC] State, Dr. Nance.

00:07:27 **MC: Was there a real concern there? Had South Carolina State not received its fair share in the years passed before the Black Caucus came into prominence?**

HB: I think perhaps there were...there might have been some instances for when they did not receive their just due of the part of the budget for South Carolina State College.

00:07:48 **MC: In what ways did the Black Caucus see that South Carolina State received its fair share?**

HB: Well we would tell the others who sponsored other—like University of South Carolina, Winthrop College, others, ‘well let’s play ball, if you give us what we supposed to have then we’ll support you.’

00:08:06 **MC: And that’s how it worked out?**

HB: That’s how it worked out to the advantage of South Carolina State College.

00:08:10 **MC: When you were first a member of the House of Representatives, was there a learning process involved? Isn’t the budgetary process a very complicate one? How did you learn to understand that process?**

HB: It was complicated but Finney had been in the House before, also I asked Leevy Johnson. So they schooled us. We had meetings that prior to these registered discussions. We would take the same attitude based on information and knowledge and prior service of these two former legislators.

00:08:44 **MC: So there was an educational—**

HB: No doubt about it. We were briefed on what to expect and all the kind of maneuvers we expected the others to use.

00:08:56 **MC: So that was important to your development as a legislator.**

HB: Very important.

00:09:01 **MC: For new coming black legislators was that process continuing that there would be people capable of filling them in on how the House... and things not to do...**

HB: You mean the addition of blacks who were elected above the other 13? That's what you're talking about?

00:09:24 **MC: Right.**

HB: Oh yes. We had workshops in which we brought in speakers. Not only that but we have an annual meeting in which we bring in some legislator from other parts of the country down to talk to us. We'd have our sessions. There were some in Columbia. We'd have some sessions that were down at Myrtle Beach. We'd always bring in some outside expert in politics. Some blacks who would tell us exactly positions and what to take. We would present them our problems and they would help us solve them.

00:09:56 **MC: As a legislator, as a member of the Black Caucus, did you perceive your position as being only a representative for the county of Spartanburg or did you feel that you had any responsibility outside of Spartanburg?**

HB: I had to accept that the fact there was both black and white in Spartanburg. In addition to that there were issues that were pertinent to blacks throughout the state of South Carolina, also received priority attention from all 13 of us. You see if I had a problem here in Spartanburg, for instance I wanted district seven to have popular election of trustees, because they never had a black on the trustee board, the Black Caucus supported me in this although we were never able to pass anything. I introduced a measure back in 1972. That measure just passed in the House this past session.

00:10:48 **MC: So it was just not...you were not representative of people in your district alone but you felt that you had an obligation to blacks throughout—**

HB: A responsibility to all blacks.

**MC: throughout the state.**

HB: Although I was known to say that any law that would pass affected black and whites a like. I mean together not separately. Any law that passed in South Carolina affected both races.

00:11:11 **MC: Were there any times where the Black Caucus was able to thwart bad legislation? That would have adversely affected blacks?**

HB: Well we worked hard against that death penalty bill. Worked very hard against it. I don't know how successful we were but we do know that we did change the sentiment of some people about it.

00:11:38 **MC: How did that adversely affect blacks in the state?**

HB: Well if a black man came up and he was in court against a white man it was automatic that he was going to lose. To the man. I remember that one lawyer, the first black lawyer we had to be active, was slapped in a court over in Newberry. Slapped in the courtroom. These things ceased now. Blacks in the courts and they work throughout the state of South Carolina and some are elected judges like Finney. See we're not faced with those problems any more. We've drastically changed the attitude toward blacks in South Carolina.

00:12:18 **MC: Were there initial goals the Black Caucus set as priorities during their first years as overall objectives that they hoped to accomplish?**

HB: Yes we wanted to... To repeat myself, we wanted blacks to be employed in high positions in the state government. We wanted blacks to receive compensatory salaries also. We also wanted ourselves to bring about a situation where blacks could be elected particularly in those districts where they had the majority of black voters. If not black voters at least black citizens. We encouraged them to go out to vote. We had a list of every district in South Carolina and the percentages of blacks in there. We know which ones were most likely to have success, because we knew the percentage of blacks there and if they would go out and register and vote we could have many more blacks in the legislature. I think the increased number from 13 to the present number is largely due to the fact we did this.

00:13:23 **MC: Did you have any obligation to go throughout South Carolina to seek out the problems of blacks in the state of South Carolina? Did the Black Caucus—**

HB: Well we knew the problems because we represented... From Spartanburg there was Barksdale, from Greenville there was Mitchell. We had Representatives out of Columbia there. We had some down in Charleston. We knew the problems that ran... Besides we used to go to Voorhees College once a year, present our program over there and encourage the people in that community. We wrote letters to blacks throughout the state of South Carolina to come to meetings with us and

we would instruct them. We had meetings in [University of] South Carolina in the Columbia auditorium there. We had I know at least a thousand blacks. Particularly religious leaders because we still look to preachers you know as our leaders. We had them down to instruct them as what we were trying to do and seek their support.

00:14:23 **MC: So it was an outreach program as well. It wasn't just simply people staying in Columbia?**

HB: Oh no. Besides we got letters, you know, from people who...blacks and white, I got them from Spartanburg County. I got them from Greenville. I got them from all over. Particularly if you had an issue with a legislature. That's one issue that I believe in. The matter of child abuse. I had a child abuse bill passed later on it came down to we got this child protection bill. The first year it was passed because only certain individuals were supposed to report incidences of child abuse but then I had it changed so that doctors and nurses or any of our school teachers or anybody who knew instances of child abuse would report it. Then it came on down to the Child Protection Act and we got so big that the committee to which it was submitted took it away from me. Made it a committee bill. The idea originally was mine to allow that child abuse, nobody said anything about it.

00:15:22 **MC: What other bills can you take credit or partial credit for introducing? During your term in the House during the 1970s?**

HB: Oh I introduced a bill now about the income tax. I was told it would reduce the—increase the amount of money that certain industries would pay. They told me no legislator in South Carolina would say the bill would pass. I also introduced bills having to do with the trustee election throughout the state of South Carolina particularly district 70. My particular interest though, I think was probably elderly because I introduced several bills there to give certain breaks to elderly people.

00:16:05 **MC: Such as?**

HB: Well one I had was that elderly people could be employed and some organization and receive credit for it even though they were on retirement.

00:16:23 **MC: What other bills that come to mind that were important to black people in the state of South Carolina? Maybe that you didn't introduce but you were a supporter of.**

HB: Luckily I think this is through most black communities I was introducing bills that would give us paved streets and streetlights in some sections. I was also interested in housing. I brought the Housing Director here in Spartanburg and wrote letters demanding he resign. Of course I wasn't successful, one reason it

didn't go through was because I was defeated or I would have come back at it. But I learned though the Chairman of the Housing Board White told me in a story not two years ago that the fact I was against a man, he changed his attitude.

00:17:09 **MC: What was some of the problems with his policies that you had?**

HB: Well, He wouldn't integrate the housing. He would put blacks in certain housing and whites in others. He wouldn't integrate. That was one problem. Then again at the time if a tenant had a complaint he wouldn't get to it for three or four months. Sometimes they send these workers out, the workers would sleep on the job and pretend to still meet. They would half do the work they were supposed to do.

00:17:35 **MC: So this is really a detriment to living standards for black people in your district.**

HB: Absolutely.

00:17:45 **MC: What is your overview of the contributions of the Black Caucus of the 1970s and perhaps projecting it into the present and into the future?**

HB: Well I would say that without the influence of the Black Caucus we would today be anywhere eight to ten years backwards from what our present standards are. The very fact that the Black Caucus came into existence meant progress for blacks throughout all South Carolina because what happened in one community was effected to another. Instances of when Spartanburg got a man on City Counsel then Union began to work and they got one down in Union. Because in one community a black could say to the community 'we are behind, Spartanburg is doing something and we are doing nothing here.'

00:18:41 **MC: So it was kind of like a beacon of light for all blacks in South Carolina.**

HB: It was inspiration to them because they could say to each other. 'Well they did this in Spartanburg. They did this in Greenville. Did this in Charleston. Did this in Orangeburg. This in Columbia. If they did it we can do it too. Let's organize and...' Under the impetus and the knowledge that the Black Caucus furnished them did their business. So now we have black males in black [unclear] across the state.

00:19:06 **MC: What is your assessment of perhaps the future? What is your opinion of... is there still room for improvement or is it kind of bottomed out the progress that blacks have made in the political arena? Or is there room for even more progress?**

HB: Oh there's room for more progress. We've got the one citizen on the County Board, or on the City Board, or on the Educational Board, limited to what one

person could do. When we get one elected we sit down and talk about representation. We sit down and don't agitate for any more. We've got one on City Counsel here now. We don't ever think about getting a second one. We did have the young fellow one. We've got that black one on the County Counsel. Nobody thinks of running a second one. Another thing we have to press on, we have to press for zoning... districting. Where blacks are predominant or in numbers in the same district ought to have a black representative like City Counsel, County Counsel are supposed to have.

00:20:15 **MC: In other words you're saying the next problem or next thing for addressing perhaps is the local government.**

HB: Yes.

00:20:24 **MC: What about the Senate? What about the South Carolina Senate? What was the role of the Black Caucus in trying to have an equitable distribution of districts which might enable blacks to have a fair chance of winning election to the Senatorial districts?**

HB: See we had figures on the population of blacks in every district in South Carolina. We told these people 'You've got the majority or at least slight majority, close majority. If you can elect somebody you write that Representative down in the Senate and you tell him you want more equitable laws passed for blacks.' In the instances where we outnumbered the whites we told them 'You ought to have—like Williamsburg, we should have had a black Representative for Williamsburg a long time ago.' And I will tell you the reason I think you don't have one because they wouldn't invite anybody. But we should have went to all those black people down there in that section and we should have had a black Senator long time—could have had. If we had the right pressure put on to the right man to run. So what we did was to say to the districts of South Carolina where you have large black populations where they were in the majority 'You get busy and you have some influence. You tell that Senator you want him to vote a certain way. In other instances we want you to run some blacks.'

00:20:54 **MC: So I guess one of the next frontiers politically speaking for blacks in South Carolina is having greater input in the Senate. Having greater input in the local government such as the City Councils and school districts.**

HB: Yes. Local government, county government, and also in the matter of education and also in the Senate in South Carolina. You see we have Newman down there but what can one man do?

00:22:20 **MC: One of—**

HB: He could filibuster but then we said the filibuster was a vote that blacks ought to have. I disagree with that. We hadn't had any. We had filibuster in the

last session, not this one just past but the one before the past session, then next time we come around we wasted so much time on dispensing this money that we no longer had any filibusters this past session.

00:22:50 **MC: Anything else you'd like to add to the comments you made earlier?**

HB: Well I think I'd like to sum it up by just saying that without the Black Caucus again we would be way...behind what we are at the present time but that's no reason to sit down our eternal vigilance they tell us. So we just have to keep on getting more people elected to city boards, city councils, county councils, educational boards and also in the State government. You see we never had a black on the trustee board of [SC] State College, we kept pressing, and pressing and then we have [unclear]. And to University of South Carolina we kept pressing, pressing, pressing so now we have Kate Pretzel [spelling?] on it. We wouldn't have gotten that if we hadn't agitated for it. We told them constantly we don't have a black on there and we want one. Now you have one, let's try to get two.

00:23:50 **MC: So there is progress but it's still no cause for sitting on your laurels.**

HB: Oh no. No. You can't afford to sit on our laurels there's too much to be done. I had read about a Representative the other day who said 'Most of the laws affecting blacks have already been passed.' Well I disagree with that. Jesse Jackson disagrees with it. That there ain't no work to be done.

00:24:22 **MC: I guess that's the end if that's...there's many more steps to go before anybody can say that—**

HB: Yes. Then there's the matter that a lot of the schools in South Carolina are not completely desegregated after all these years. That needs to be looked into.

00:24:41 **MC: No question about that.**

HB: Local citizens doing that, bringing up something over in Greenville about that situation.

00:24:49 **MC: Ok. I think we have covered most of the ground. I thank you for the interview.**

HB: You are very welcome. I appreciate having the opportunity to do this.

00:24:58 **MC: Thank you.**

00:25:00 **End of Interview.**