

Calvin Hill Interview

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Calvin Hill was born in 1947 and raised in Turner's Station, a steel mill section just east of Baltimore's city limits. He graduated from Yale in 1969 with a B.A. in American history having concluded an outstanding career as a running back and track competitor. A first round draft pick of the Dallas Cowboys, his selection as NFL Rookie of the Year foreshadowed a distinguished professional career that led him from Dallas to Washington to Cleveland with a three game stopover in 1975 with the WFL Hawaiians. Currently, Hill lives in Northern Virginia and is a Vice President with the Baltimore Orioles.

In deciding whether to approach Hill for this interview, the question frequently arose in my mind as to what degree he might be deemed representative of the black athlete, his Yale background and position with a major league front office being more than a bit out of the ordinary. Certainly, names like John Carlos, Connie Hawkins, or even Arthur Ashe would have yielded the more strident and familiar views on black athletic participation that have passed into the realm of accepted public truth. Eventually, I realized that inasmuch as a representative view of the black athlete was an absurdity from nearly any perspective, Hill's experience was as important for its anomalous features as those of former spokesmen (willing or otherwise) for black causes. Indeed, this interview and Hill's selection might provide grist for arguments concerning the intent and worth of forums that consider the "special" issues of blacks. More importantly, they question the sources of firmly held views on such issues. Which are speculative and which spring from historical experience, and can anyone really tell the difference between the two?

In short, the interview pointed out to me (again) the difficulty in assigning too much weight to any one clue in the development of individual thought and actions. An observer of popular culture wrote of Elvis Presley:

The question of history may have been settled on the side of process, not personality, but it is not a settlement I much appreciate. Historical forces might explain the Civil War, but they do n't account for Lincoln; they might tell us why rock'n'roll emerged when it did, but they don't explain Elvis any more than they explain Little Peggy March.¹

Nor do the historical demographics explain the unique circumstances that sent

1. Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock and Roll Music* (N.Y.: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1975): 146-147.

Calvin Hill to Yale nor the powerful influences he felt from his father or William Sloan Coffin. Some of the views Hill expressed in telling a part of his story offer fertile though often subtle material for further investigation.

The interview was guarded yet candid-to be sure, it is no light burden to be approached as a spokesman for an entire race of people. As a writer recently observed, it is a commonplace among historians and social scientists that modern culture has “deconstructed the arch of life” into separate domains.² Surely Hill senses this in his resistance to the reduction of his life to that of athlete, black, black athlete and the sensationalized and compartmentalized aspects of each. There is in Hill the recognition that a life is woven of many threads and that it can’t be unraveled by tugging at the few loose ones.

At a meeting a week prior to the interview, Hill talked about the differences between black and white athletes, addressing the possibility of black superiority. Possible physical differences, he said, needed to be examined in an air of calm, and his own study of black history lead him to wonder whether or not the middle passage of American slaves might not have resulted in the natural selection (through survival of the ordeal) of the physically hardest. More interestingly, he wondered whether the mental resolve of those survivors might have eventuated into a positive athletic attribute. In a notion that goes well beyond standard arguments against the myth of black incapacity, Hill said that he believed black athletes had an “enabling attitude,” a vision of themselves as athletically superior that argues not for their equality but their superiority in competitive situations. As the interview began, we took up with his discussion of visions and enabling attitudes:

ZANG: I’m interested in what sort of vision you had then as a child in Turner’s Station—

HILL: Until my father sort of insisted upon it, my vision was one where you went to high school, you graduated, and you went to work with Bethlehem Steel. My father was not a steelworker, but that’s what most of the men in my community did. That was what my father had to battle against: the idea that I might limit myself. He felt there was more for me. His big thing was to use your mind to make a living instead of your back. He was always trying to reinforce that message-sometimes taking me to see other construction workers or taking me over to Bethlehem Steel to see guys who were dog tired or dirty and gritty-and just asking me to think about that as a goal. In fact, he got me my first job between my tenth and eleventh grade years as a janitor, and I found out for myself how hard the work was and how personally unfulfilling the work was and how frustrating it could be. He said: “This is what I’ve been doing for forty years and I’d like you to do something else.”

2. John J. MacAloon, “Missing Stories: American Politics and Olympic Discourse,” *Gannett Center Journal* 1:2 (Fall 1987): 122.

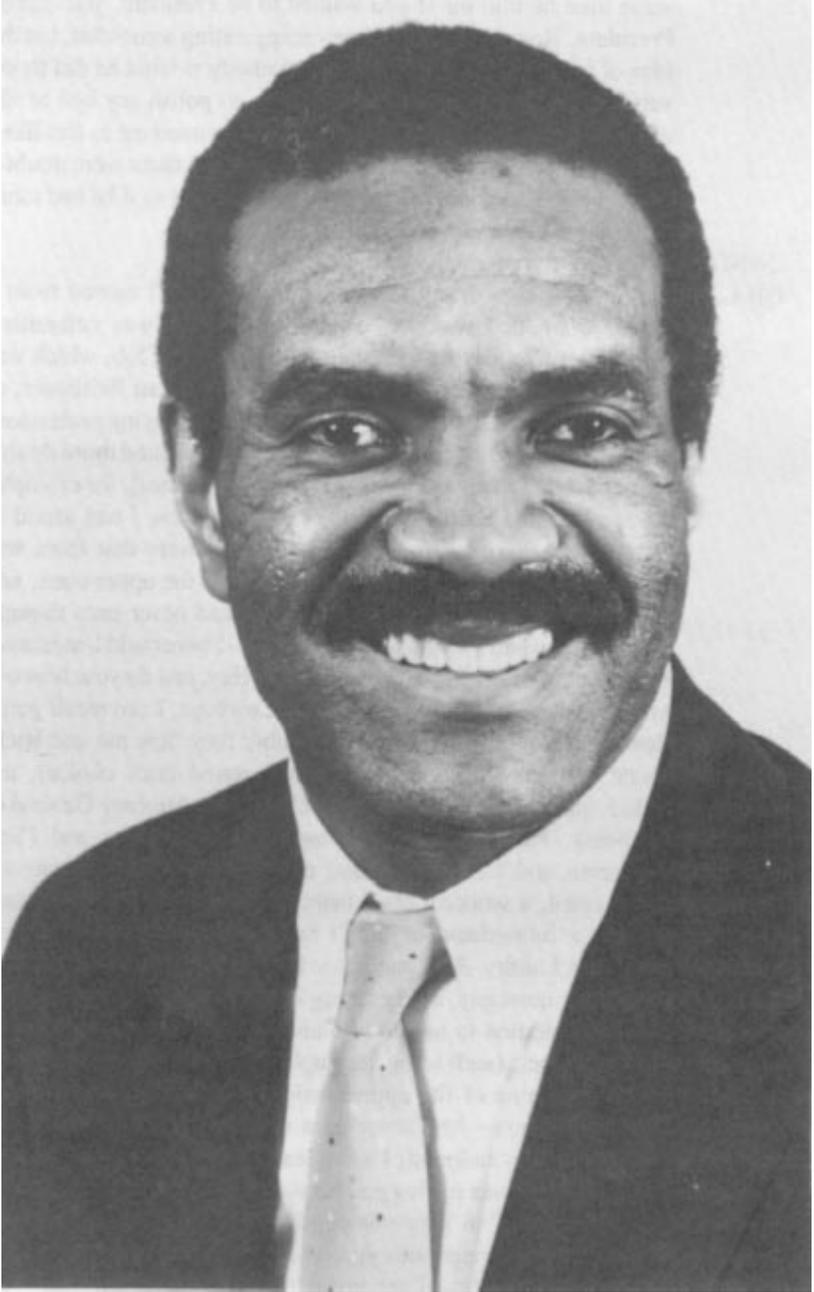
The other thing I saw growing up was a perception of a family that was nuclear, that was together. So, I had very strong feelings about the importance of a family. What I had in terms of my father should be the norm, and it isn't. And that's frightening because I know I derive a lot of my sense of self, my esteem, from my father. My father made me feel like being a Hill was important. There were certain standards that you had to meet. You had to take care of your family, you had to be a decent human being.

ZANG: Did you sense that the standards were different for your family than for the surrounding community?

HILL: Well, not really, because most of my friends also had nuclear families. Divorce was not something that I really understood until I went away to a prep school and met kids who spent time with both parents. Growing up in Turner's, if we were going to learn how to swim, or we were going to Patapsco State Park for camping or if we were going to play baseball, I could always volunteer my father-without really consulting him. That was sort of a nice feeling. He came home every day like clockwork, and, growing up, it was a part of my subconscious, that he was there. You sort of take for granted that the sun's going to come up in the morning and you don't really think about that, but what happens if it doesn't come up? Without really being aware of what was happening, I had that sense that my little world was protected. There were certain things that were guaranteed, and I can look at that now, especially when I talk to kids who've never known their father or their father isn't around, and I realize how much of what I thought I was, or what I consider myself to be, derive from my father. And although we were working class, I didn't want for anything. I had no doubts in terms of self, and my father was constantly working on my visions of the future.

ZANG: Did he encourage your participation in athletics?

HILL: Yeah, he did. It was something that I wanted to do, and my participation initially was not very successful, at least it wasn't in joining a Little League. Even (at) six or seven, a lot of it was political, and I wasn't playing very much early on. So my father started coming to a lot of the games to make sure the manager of the team (who was another father) was equitable in giving us playing time. And he'd go out and catch the ball with me and I can think how many times I came here [Memorial Stadium] to see games. So I always felt good about myself and that was encouraged. I remember my second grade teacher was asking people what they wanted to be, and I said I wanted to be President, not because I was political, but I read where the President made \$100,000 a year and had a big old house. I didn't know anything



Calvin Hill (Courtesy of the Baltimore Orioles Public Relations Office)

about it, and my teacher told me I couldn't be President because I was black. That was very upsetting to me, and I told my father about it. He tried to explain to me the way the world was, but at the same time he told me if you wanted to be President, you can be President. Now, he may have been exaggerating somewhat, but the idea of telling people they can be somebody is what he did to me very early on. He was very careful not to polish my ego to the extent that I became selfish, (but) he never wanted me to feel like I couldn't. There were times as I matured where there were doubts, yet he never had doubts about me. It was almost as if he had more confidence in me sometimes than I do.

ZANG: What was the source of your doubts?

HILL: Well, the source of my doubts were whenever I moved from a situation where I was comfortable to one that was unfamiliar. Whether it was playing for the Red Shield Boys Club, which was an integrated baseball team in the early '60s in East Baltimore, or going to a prep school or going to Yale or even playing professionally, he never had any doubts or never communicated those doubts to me. When I first went away to Riverdale [School], for example, I was miserable for the first two or three months. I was afraid of failing, and there I was in 1961 suddenly aware that there was something called the upper middle class and the upper class, and these kids took for granted things that I had never even thought about. And when I would tell him things—I never said I'm scared, but he could detect it—he always said, "Hey, just do your best and you'll be okay." (When) I went to the Cowboys, I can recall going down to meet Tom Landry. I remember they flew me and Richmond Flowers (who was the second round draft choice), my father, and his father. His father had been the Attorney General of Alabama. We went to Dallas and we met Landry and [Tex] Schramm and Gil Brandt, and my father, who was relatively uneducated, a working class man, fell right in. He was not surprised or intimidated or didn't feel that he shouldn't be there talking to Landry. And you know Landry was like God—I mean he's a very quiet guy, a very strong kind of presence, and my father had no hesitation to talk to him about football, which (he) knew nothing about, (and) to be very upbeat in talking about me. This got rid of some of the apprehension on my part because if he believed it, then—he'd never been wrong before. When he died, from a selfish standpoint, I had a real sense of loss because it was almost like he was my biggest booster. And there are times when you really need to have somebody to really believe in you so strongly that it invigorates you, and he was that. I'm sure he was reasonable and rational and understood that perhaps there're cer-

tain things that he-but he could really . . .

ZANG: Sounds as though he was an enormous influence-it must have been difficult to leave him behind when you went to Riverdale. How did that whole situation come about, with the Scheneley scholarship and your decision to leave?

HILL: There was a man (in Baltimore) who was on the Board of Riverdale, and at the time he was president of Scheneley [Distillery]. My family doctor wanted to get his son out of the public schools in Baltimore (there were remnants of segregation still). They sent (him) to Riverdale, and it was a positive experience for him. Evidently, in talking with the headmaster one day, he mentioned that he knew other kids who could really benefit from that kind of experience. He (the headmaster) told Dr. Wade: If there are some good kids in Baltimore, we'd like to have more blacks obviously, because there weren't very many blacks, and I think if you can find the right people, we can get money for them. So, Dr. Wade told my father and mother about Riverdale and about the scholarship. They had, in talking with Dr. Wade, echoed some of the same feelings he had about the school system and whether or not I was going to be able to tap my full potential. And so—I'll never forget—I came home one night, and it came time to ask me if I were interested. I wasn't really interested in leaving a comfortable sort of existence, but they made the decision for me, and once they made it, it became a challenge. I realized that, although it wasn't something I necessarily wanted to do, it probably was the best thing—there was no reason otherwise for them to send me away to ninth grade. So it became a challenge to try to pass these tests and to do good.

ZANG: Was there an expectation that you participate in athletics there also?

HILL: It was a scholarship essentially for me. I never played football before. I had been a good athlete, but a good friend of mine and I were sort of the top two kids in the eighth grade academically. But when I got there and met the football coach, he was not even aware that I was coming. But, it was a challenge, and, as much as meet the challenge, I wanted to do good for my parents because obviously I was representative of a lot of things. I was representing my father and I was a Hill and a lot of things became a part of trying to make sure that I succeeded. It was an interesting experience.

ZANG: What was it like?

HILL: Well, it was a culture shock because I had gone from an all black area with very limited exposure to white people to a white environment. I don't think I had any exposure with the exception of playing some baseball games—I doubt very seriously if I'd ever

even talked or met anybody white, with the possible exception of the ice cream man who came through our neighborhood and the guy who owned the drugstore. Suddenly there I was at the age of fourteen, not only in an environment that was predominantly white, but one that was upper middle class to upper class—one that was totally different than what I was accustomed to. It was scary, frightening initially. But, although I was away from home for four years, the people that my parents sent me to became surrogate parents, not just for me but for most of the kids in that school. So I was again in a very caring environment, and after awhile the visualization became concise. I remember the first day, September 19th, 1961 when I got to Riverdale. I met a kid named Peter Loeb who was also a freshman and he was showing me around, and he asked me where I was thinking about going to school. I hadn't really even thought about where I would go to college. My father had stressed the idea of going to college, but the only colleges I was aware of were Morgan State (in Baltimore) and Maryland State. And to be quite candid, I don't think I'd ever been to either campus. But that's where kids who went to college in Turner's went, and that was a decision you made when you were a senior getting ready to graduate. I told Peter I hadn't thought about it and he said: "Well, I'm going to Brown," That was the first time I'd ever heard of Brown. The more time I spent at Riverdale, the more I started thinking in terms of where I would go.

I got there [to Riverdale] and I suddenly became aware that in my little world in Turner's there were black people and there were white people, and although I knew there were Jews and Italians and other ethnic groups, I didn't realize it was as big a thing. I became aware that white people tended to discriminate among themselves. I suddenly became aware that the Jewish people suffered some discrimination because they were Jewish. I remember one day an Italian kid and a Jewish kid were having an argument, and the Italian kid told the Jewish kid: "You guys killed Christ." And it was shocking to me. I became aware that Jews did not recognize the divinity of Christ. All the things that I hadn't been exposed to, I was exposed to them at Riverdale. I think the one thing that Riverdale taught me was, although there are a lot of superficial differences among people, and a lot of it manifests itself in cultural or ethnic food or traditions, that people are people. Essentially they all have the same insecurities and hopes and dreams. So my four years at Riverdale were a period where I really felt a kinship with a lot of the people who were totally different from me. It was tough being away from home, and I missed that, but I was the only one growing up in Baltimore, and

now I lived in a dormitory with eighty or eighty-five other kids, and so suddenly I had brothers. I enjoyed it.

ZANG: Why did you pick Yale, then?

HILL: My senior year in high school I made *Parade* magazine's All-America team as a football player. Suddenly I was a pretty hot commodity as a football player to be recruited. And really I was thinking about going to bigger schools-someplace where they had a big stadium-where football was—

ZANG: Where they filled the big stadium.

HILL: Yeah. One Monday it was senior visitation day which meant that seniors were excused from classes if they visited a college. Me and a couple friends decided we'd go down to Columbia to visit. The idea was to stop in and say hello for an hour and then we'd spend the rest of the day just sort of bumming around New York—exercising our independence. We had a good time, walked around and did all the things that showed we were grown up. When I came back to Riverdale, it was toward the tail end of football practice. That was by design, but I had to explain it to one of the assistant coaches. He asked me why I missed practice and where I'd been, and I told him that it was college visitation day and I'd gone down to visit Columbia. He was a graduate of Yale, and he said: "Well, I didn't realize you were interested in Ivy League." And so, I got this long spiel about the Ivy League. He said: "If you're thinking about Ivy League and football, I think there are four schools you ought to consider: Harvard, Yale and Princeton, because, in terms of football, one of those schools is always going to be there, and Dartmouth." I hadn't really thought about Yale, (but) he arranged a visit, and when I got up there I absolutely loved the place. They were playing Dartmouth that weekend and the Yale Bowl had about 63,000 people. I had a beautiful weekend, and the next day the Director of Admissions was visiting Riverdale, conducting interviews for prospective applicants. My class was about a hundred guys, and I was about number twelve or thirteen, but it seemed like everybody ahead of me was applying. And I knew Yale only took three or four guys from Riverdale. But I said what the heck, I might as well see this whole thing through, and I signed up. And I got an A rating, which meant that all I had to do was apply and I was in. I then applied to most of the other schools in the Ivy League just, I guess, almost for ego. I was still thinking big-time, but the peer pressure at Riverdale—because Riverdale existed to be a feeder for schools like Yale-(made) it a "no-decision" as far as most of my instructors and my peers were concerned. I remember I called my father and told him I'd gotten into Yale, and I think he had vaguely heard of Yale, but his

question was: "Is that a good school?" And I said "Yeah, it's gotta be one of the tops." And he said: "Well if it is," he said, "you gotta go for it."

ZANG: How were you treated at Yale?

HILL: Well, Yale was a shock too, although I was prepared for it having gone to Riverdale. I guess the big shock at Yale was that everybody is number 1 or 2 in the class, everybody has something that highly recommends them. It was like going from the Chesapeake Bay to the Atlantic. I was used to sailing in a big ocean, but the ocean just got bigger, and there were more good sailors out there with me.

You know I was a quarterback in high school and fully expected to be a Yale quarterback, and I was shifted from quarterback to linebacker on the freshman team. And I was working as hard as I'd ever worked in my life, (but) I felt like a piece of plankton-I was just going with the drift. The B's and A's that I'd gotten were C's initially, and that was very traumatic. It was like nothing was balancing anything else the first month or so.

ZANG: Tell me more about expecting to be the quarterback.

HILL: I think I was shifted from quarterback the second day of practice—which was shocking-to linebacker, and I was third team fullback. You talk about being in a big sea. For the first four games of the freshman team schedule, I didn't play. I think I played some the fourth game on offense, and I seriously considered transferring. And I considered quitting. Then we played Princeton the fifth game, and I started at fullback, and ended up having a really good game. And, although I guess I would have rather still been the quarterback, suddenly I was important on the football team. Prior to that I didn't feel like I mattered. A good friend of mine (Ed Franklin from Massillon [Ohio]) and I one day decided to quit. We were walking to catch the bus to take us out to the field, and we adopted the attitude: "Well, if we get there on time, fine, if we don't get there on time, fine." We were walking toward the gym, wandering in and out of stores, looking at records, looking at clothes, just sort of taking our time getting to the bus. And when we got there, it wasn't there. So we said: "Well, they don't need us anyhow, we're not going to play." We were actually walking back to the old campus where freshmen lived and Bob Kiphuth, who had retired as athletic director but was still a very big presence on the Yale campus, yelled out of the office: "You guys missed the bus?" And we said: "Yeah," and he said: "Well, meet me downstairs, I'm on my way out there myself." I think we were too embarrassed to tell him that we didn't really care, and so he took us out to the game. So we played another week, and then the next week I started, and I think Franklin started too.

ZANG: I guess the coaches never even knew.

HILL: I think I mentioned it to some of the varsity coaches. I was working awfully hard academically, and I think my first set of grades I had a 76 average. Geeze, it was very frustrating to be working as hard as I was to end up with a 76. Then I'd go to the football field, and had gone from the center of it all to a linebacking position, so it wasn't like I was getting a lot of satisfaction either place. The one thing that kept me from transferring was the thought of having to be ineligible for a year. But, I was at a period where had something big happened, had somebody pushed me in a direction, I probably would have gone. The one day I was saying: "Hang in there, don't worry, just stick it out"-for my father. But I was so low at that period that I was just looking for some positive reinforcement I think from somebody-an authority figure. But things turned around. I started playing, and I met a history instructor who took an interest in me. He was getting ready to run a program called the "Transitional Year." I got involved in that as a counselor, so I started feeling a lot better about the place and then football started going a little better.

ZANG: There were some big movements that were taking place both in athletics and within black culture during the years you were at Yale: separation into black studies, etc. Were you drawn into that?

HILL: Well, my class was one of the first big classes of black students. We had eighteen or nineteen students, and prior to that classes had always been two or three or four. We started a group my freshman year. The initial thrust was social. A lot of guys were not meeting women. There were women in the town of New Haven, but you couldn't meet women at any of the other Eastern schools or the "Seven Sisters" or the other Ivy League schools. So we initially planned a social weekend where there would be some cultural activities, but the big thing was social my freshman year. Now a change occurred between my freshman year and sophomore year: the thrust became more cultural. In my sophomore year (1966-67), guys came back with Afros and dashikis and those kinds of things. When I was shifted from quarterback there were some black students on campus who approached me and asked me if I wanted to make an issue of the fact that as a black I had been shifted. I remember meeting an upperclassman, had lunch with him, I guess my second week there, and he asked me: "How would you feel about us picketing the offices because they shifted you from quarterback?" I'd been there four or five days. The last thing I wanted to do was to cause any controversy, you know? I mean I was trying to figure out what the hell was happening at Yale.

But, in terms of our seeking as a group of black students things

that were relevant to us, I really think that Yale aided us. The lines of communication were open between the black students and the administration. Yale was the first school to offer an Afro-American studies [program]. I went from an American history major with a minor in Russian history to a guy specializing almost in Afro-American history. Eugene Genovese taught me in courses. We didn't feel the sense of alienation from the administration. They were there, they listened, and while they didn't always agree, the lines of communication were open.

ZANG: Did you feel any sense of unity with those in the New Haven community—with all the race riots—was that a difficult position to be—

HILL: Yeah. As black students we got very involved with the black community. From a social standpoint, we got involved because the town-gown relationship among the blacks had always been there, or at least it was there when I was there. As a black Yale going out into the hill district or going out into Pickswell, people applauded what we were trying to do in terms of getting an education and there was no problem—at least I didn't feel any problem. When things started to happen in terms of riots, the black student group sort of split. We still communicated, (but) within the Black Student Alliance there were people who subscribed to the Panther philosophy; there were people who subscribed to Ron Karenga; there were people who were supporting Martin Luther King, [Jr.]. We never as a group let that affect us to the extent that we split. We always tried to stick together and compromise within our group, in terms of what we wanted. As the Black Student Alliance evolved from a purely social kind of group to a more cultural group, our weekends started to include representatives from the Black Panthers who would make presentations, or one weekend Ron Karenga. The weekend that a guy was killed up in New Haven was actually during one of the weekends that Bobby Seale happened to be in New Haven, ostensibly to participate in the symposium that we put together. I can remember escorting Ron Karenga and a bodyguard from a party. We were walking across the old campus and a couple of white students threw water balloons at him, and although Karenga emphasized a cultural sort of revolution as opposed to an economic (one), still he wasn't a turn-the-cheek kind of guy, and for a moment there I said: "God, if he'd of hit Ron Karenga, who knows what this bodyguard—whether he's carrying a gun—(might do)." It was a fascinating time to be at Yale. I went down when they were selecting a jury for the Panther trial which was a prelude for the May Day or May Week when Kingman Brewster opened the campus to militants who came to support

Bobby Seale. They were having jury selection, and I walked in just to observe. The place was packed with Black Panthers and militants. They'd bring the defendants out, and people on both sides of us were putting their fists up, and it was "Power to the People." The judge recesses the proceedings for lunch. So we're sort of standing up and mingling around, and a guy comes out of the judge's quarters and walks over to me and says: "Hi, Calvin. How are you doing?" It's the judge! Turns out, he had met me at a football picnic, and he was a big booster of Yale football. I'm shocked. Here I am surrounded by black militants and they're getting ready to try these Panthers because they killed an informant, and I said: "Oh, my God, why me?" I'm trying to be cool-and I said: "Gee, where did we meet?" And he said: "Oh, I met you at the football banquet." I said: "Oh, yeah," and I said it real loud so everybody could hear that he was a football fan and he recognized me because of football and not because I was some sort of informant. That was a very frightening time for me. I kept my head on a swivel that particular day.

ZANG: Did you get any sense of white Yale students being physically afraid of the whole Panther movement and militancy?

HILL: I don't think so. Perhaps there was a fear of outsiders. But in terms of the students at Yale, there were enough of us who were members of the Black Students at Yale who were also members of white fraternities and white societies and lived in the colleges where we didn't necessarily segregate ourselves. I think a lot of times you have fear because you don't know what the other guy is thinking. It's the unknown that causes the fear. In my mind, Yale was like one constant dialogue. I think in some respects Yale may have been a bad place for me (before) going down to Texas because at least some of my teammates didn't understand that I'd come from a place where you were encouraged to speak your mind. I had teammates at Dallas from southern schools who might view me as a militant because I objected or I stood up for certain things, but Yale was an interesting place in that sense. I think in some respects when I get out and I see people in the real world, I realize how things could be if people would be willing to communicate, to put aside their petty differences and get to the substance because it is an integrated sort of world that works in which people are given their dignity-not have it taken away from them.

ZANG: When you got to Dallas, how were your pro football experiences different from the athletic involvement at Yale?

HILL: Well, very obviously it was more intense. I went from an environment where football was important to an environment where football was extremely important, not only because it was professional in nature, but also Texas football was much more important.

It was part of the ethos, I thought. I figured out in that initial training camp I was spending almost 20 hours a week in the classroom in addition to the six hours a day the first two or three weeks on the field. On a weekly basis, I was spending more time in the classroom looking at films and talking over strategy than I had spent in the classroom my last year at Yale. (At) Yale, the fact that you were a football player meant that people might know your name because football had some importance on the campus, but it didn't differentiate you, it didn't entitle you to anything other than a banquet or a letter. As a professional football player, I realized there were entitlements. That was kind of shocking.

ZANG: How did you deal with that?

HILL: Well, I got swept up by it. It was very seductive. There were kids from time to time at Yale who might have asked me for my autograph, but suddenly grownups were asking me and it was amazing. People would give you things because of who you were, because you'd had a good game—you'd get a prize, you might get a car for a week or a car for a month. My first contract I was making \$22,000 a year which is a game check for a lot of these guys now. To me, it was all the money in the world. That was amazing that somebody would pay me that kind of money to play—something I'd done for free in college. To see how people defer to you, it was incredible.

ZANG: Did you enjoy the competition?

HILL: I enjoyed the playing, and—I enjoyed all of it. But the thing that was fascinating to me was how this society really treats athletes special. In Dallas, you get stopped by the policeman and (when he) finds out who you are the ticket goes in the pocket; this fellow's asking you about the game. Or you go into a restaurant and they give you a free meal. People would want your autograph all the time. You'd go someplace where you could sign autographs for a couple hours and make a couple of hundred bucks. It got to the point in Dallas where, at dinner, there was always somebody sitting down at the table just talking. And that was tough, that was tough. I got a real sense of what the athlete means, the importance of sports. I saw that at Yale, but, as a professional, the power of the athlete increases almost exponentially. I see what the Orioles mean to this town—on Fantastic Fan Night when Governor Schaefer announced that the Orioles would be here for fifteen more years, people went crazy. And as a member of the Cowboys, people couldn't do enough for you—like being a member of royalty or something. The key is not to be seduced by it.

ZANG: What led you to an interest in theology school?

HILL: Well, two of the most dynamic people—role models, heroes—(for me) were Martin Luther King, Jr., and William Sloan Coffin. I

didn't want to be a Willie Mays. I wanted to be like them. From a spiritual standpoint; also in terms of their ability to effect change and to lead people. And, because I was a part of this whole black thing, I thought the church was the most viable institution in the black community. In terms of battling racism, I thought the theology of Christ was relevant. I didn't quite understand that the church sometimes is more resistant to change than perhaps General Motors or Chrysler. But I had a lot of idealism and that's what I wanted to do. I saw Christianity as a theology of liberation. Had I gone some place other than S.M.U. I may have carried that forward. (But) Dallas was more conservative. It was too radical a shift from a Yale with Panthers and William Sloan Coffin and the whole civil rights thing. People at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference asked me to publicize a fundraiser for them called "Martin Luther King, Jr.: From Montgomery to Memphis." I agreed-King was one of my heroes-and I went on the television in Dallas to do it, and they agreed because I was a Cowboy and Cowboys were important. In the preliminary talks a very respected anchorman who was going to conduct this interview asked me how I could support King when King was a rabble-rouser. I realized that I was in a different kind of place. Dallas, Texas was not New Haven. Dallas was like going back to the '50s—there wasn't a ferment in the air. In retrospect I realize I was sort of wild-eyed and bushy-tailed and full of fire and that sort of colored my perspective of Dallas for a while. I overlooked a lot of other redeeming things. The people, while they were conservative, were very open and friendly.

ZANG: What was the impact that Coffin had on you at Yale?

HILL: I was a deacon at Yale and got to know him extremely well. I just saw how he handled his ministry at Yale. To me, (he) had led a very exciting life. I saw the person of a Bill Coffin and the person of a Martin Luther King and I said: "Those are the sexy guys as far as I'm concerned. That's what I'd like to be." Many are called, but few are chosen, right?

ZANG: At what point in your life did you begin to develop your sense of the difference between the black and the white athlete?

HILL: Probably it's occurred more as a fan. I can be more objective, I suppose, and see certain trends. As an athlete, I knew lots of blacks who were terrible athletes. At Riverdale the best basketball players were not the black players. There were a couple guys who were good, but there were more guys who were bad. The fastest guy at Yale when I was there was not a black guy. Probably it's been more recent. There seem to be more blacks playing sports now than when I was coming through high school and college and even for the first part of my professional career, there weren't as

many blacks playing professional sports. I guess I'd been around enough white players to know that there were good white athletes.

ZANG: Well, your ideas with the middle passage (in slave ships), were they things you became aware of at Yale or more recently as a fan?

HILL: That's something that I've been aware of for awhile. When you think about the harshness of slavery and the fact that so many who died, if in fact forty million died, then why didn't these people die? It had to be natural selection-what you have remaining are the hardest physically or mentally or whatever. You add to that this whole visualization thing. When you expect to achieve or to be somewhere, come hell or high water that's what you're going to do-because you can visualize it.

ZANG: You had mentioned the first time that we met that there were some black cornerbacks that you had played with in professional football who would remark that they wouldn't let a white beat them, and there was certainly a disproportionate number of blacks who were successful in the NFL compared to the distribution of blacks in the population. What were the reasons that you felt as a pro football player explained that disproportionate number?

HILL: I think a lot of it has to do with where the energies are. One finds in the athletic programs of any inner city high school a prioritizing of the sports. Usually it's basketball, football, and then baseball. And if you look at the major sports and the participation of minorities, basketball is the highest, football is second. What happens-and certainly Nike realized this when they signed Michael Jordan-is it's very easy for a kid to buy a \$50 pair of sneakers and suddenly he feels like he's transformed. Kids want to be like Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and Dr. J. I think the visualization process is much slower or not as intense when it comes to baseball. They don't identify with baseball players like they do football players and most certainly like they do with basketball players.

ZANG: Okay, so there's a hierarchy in the visualization process within sports? What explains the visualization of athletics as having a higher priority than that of doctor or lawyer?

HILL: I think it's because they see, via the media, success stories in sports, and they don't see that many black success stories in law and medicine. Consequently, to a lot of young black kids, it's not going against the odds to think in terms of becoming an NBA player or an NFL player because they see a lot of blacks doing it. They lose sight of the fact that for every one you see, there are maybe a thousand who don't make it. But they don't see the down side, they see the up side. And these sports do a good job of using their athletes to market the sport, especially basketball. They see the black stars and they can identify with the fact that that person is

from the ghetto or he's from an environment a lot like theirs. And the problem is that they put too much energy into trying to emulate those people, not understanding the odds. In Baltimore, for example, one of the medical doctors who helped perform the separation of the German Siamese twins was a black guy, and yet I doubt very seriously if you went down into that black area right around Johns Hopkins Hospital that you would find very many young black kids cognizant of that. But they all know that James Worthy was the MVP in the NBA finals. So it's a question of what they see around them and what they perceive as the logical ways to achieve success. They all know that Moses Malone makes two million dollars and Magic Johnson makes three million dollars, and the various periodicals—*Ebony* and *Life* and all the others—will take you to their homes and show you the lifestyle of the rich and famous. They concentrate solely on athletes and entertainers, and you don't see a lot of the other success stories in our society. Jesse (Jackson) is trying to tell people that they can achieve, but he's battling a mindset. Hopefully, the visualization process for politics will now be more intense as people see what he has accomplished. He's there in living color, and television plays a very big role, I think, in formulating the hopes and desires of a lot of black people.

ZANG: Well, the visualization process has been narrowly limited to athletics. The flip side is that it has maybe resulted in what you have termed a positive “enabling” attitude, at least within sports. Is that balanced or is it too far out of whack?

HILL: I think it's too far out of whack because you have too many young kids putting all their energies (into) trying to emulate the stars. A lot of them have nothing to fall back on. They don't use the sport to get an education, they use the sport to get them closer to their dream of becoming a professional sport player. The visualization allows them to get in a position where they are exploited and they don't have anything to show for it. And so, what Harry Edwards says is true—we have too many kids trying to be Dr. J. or Magic J. or Kareem Abdul J. or Reggie J. and probably are going to end up uneducated and unemployable and faced with a lifetime of having no J., and that's so true, that's so true. I'd like to see kids visualize themselves as doctors or lawyers or teachers. And that's not happening. You find a lot of energy going toward trying to do the things that are long shots. Or you sometimes see them going into the drug culture which has been glamorized and romanticized. And that's unfortunate, too, because it may be more attainable than becoming an NFL player, but it's a very short life. What I'd like to see are situations where blacks can visualize themselves as

politicians and the kinds of things that the black community really needs if it's going to succeed.

ZANG: Are there things within the black community that are resistant to that sort of visualization?

HILL: There's a real sense of urgency. If you've gone without for so long, (there's) almost an ethos of instant gratification. I suppose there are a lot of things in the black community that allow this to happen. Certainly I think you have to look at the dissolution of the family, the very thing that [Daniel] Moynihan talked about in the early sixties-the creation of a matriarchy and his warnings about the effects on the self-esteem of a young black male growing up in a matriarchy in a patriarchal society. A lot of people criticized that report and yet what he predicted has come true. There are a lot of young blacks out there who don't feel very good about themselves, and so they're searching for other things that make them feel good. Certainly sports is one area where they feel good about themselves. You find it happening in terms of drugs where the lack of self-esteem and drug abuse go hand-in-hand. The California gang phenomenon addresses the problem of self-esteem. You see it in terms of females in teenage pregnancy-suddenly they have somebody who can love them. A lot of kids are growing up without that nurturing love, that sense of "I am important" being given to them by a father or mother. If a kid has nothing else going for him except a jump shot, and that's the thing that distinguishes him and gets him pats on the back, and there's nobody else counteracting that, encouraging him to go to school, all the other negative reinforcers are too much. Because he'll practice that jump shot to the neglect of the rest of his life. I've seen guys from my old neighborhood who had great jump shots and even now twenty or thirty years later, that jump shot is all they have.

ZANG: If you grow up seeing the Dr. J's, the Magics and so many blacks succeeding in this one arena, I would think that that would instill an idea that maybe this is the area where I'm better and this is where I should put my energies. Is there a feeling among black athletes that there is that superiority?

HILL: Well, I always tell people that I used to feel that way until I saw Bob Lilly in the shower. Whatever feelings I had of black power went out the window when I saw this big, massive pale guy walk in. But I think there is a feeling that you have to be better. It's not just you are better-you have to be better. I think most blacks understand this. If you're equal to a white in sports, then that person is going to get the job. So you have to be better, and that's honed into most black athletes. Whether or not that actually makes them feel they are better, I don't know. But I don't think that there

are very many black athletes who feel that, all things being equal, they will get a fair shot. You have to be better, you have to work harder.

ZANG: Is there a sense that it's easier to get a fair shot in sports than in other places in society?

HILL: Probably. There's a feeling that things in sports are more empirical, are more concrete. The methods of measuring achievement are black and white in most things. You can measure speed, jumping ability, accuracy, and quickness. Even things like quickness and lateral quickness, they've created methods of measuring. Perhaps that creates a sense that this is an avenue that I should go to. There are some politics obviously, but I think there's a feeling that you can minimize the impact of the effect of politics just by what you do wherever you're performing. The other thing is the instant gratification. Willie Mays is on a farm, poor, and then suddenly he's in New York riding around in Cadillacs. To a kid who's on a farm or a kid who's poor, he can visualize that. The psychological power of a Willie Mays or a Magic Johnson is almost like the psychology of a casino where lots of people are playing the slot machines and suddenly one person wins. The other people realize: "Hey, I'm that close, that could be me." And so there's always: "That could be me," and in sports, kids are saying that. Even when the odds are great, they feel they have as good a shot as anybody else. Growing up in Turner's, I only saw two black doctors so I didn't see that as "that could be me." Now I had other things in my life that made me feel good about Calvin Hill and so, although I spent a lot of time playing baseball, the energies that I may have put in sports was counterbalanced by other things. And I think maybe that's what we need: somebody to create balance, somebody to tell them that in fact, the odds of becoming a doctor are much more in your favor than the odds of becoming a professional basketball player.

ZANG: You had a strong male role model, and you had extraordinary circumstances in going to Riverdale and Yale. Did other black teammates at Yale and in professional football have similar experiences?

HILL: There were some who had similar experiences, there were some who had no balance and couldn't accept the fact that it'd ended. I was coming back through Dallas on my way from Honolulu and a couple of us (ex-Cowboys) went out to a club. A former teammate said: "You know, we ought to go out like this more often," which I thought was a good idea. He said: "What we ought to do is put our Cowboy jerseys on and go out." And I looked at a couple of other guys as if to say "is he kidding?" And he was serious. He wanted to

walk into a club in his Cowboy jersey with his name on the back. I thought the guy was crazy. It was the most incredible thing I'd ever heard in my life. We finally realized that this guy was trying to hold on to that which made him unique, which gave him a sense of achievement. He'd never had anything else to feel good about except the fact that he was a Cowboy. This player went on to have marital and drug problems. And it's only recently that he's gotten himself back together-after running afoul of the law-and, through counseling, understood that he's O.K.

ZANG: Where does the prescription for getting balance get started though? Is it going to have to take political pressure?

HILL: It's funny. I find myself sometimes thinking "Is it hopeless?" I spoke at an all-star football banquet last week, and I feel so sorry for some of these coaches because they're outmanned. The streets are an opponent. To a certain extent, the school system is an opponent. But I think somehow black people are going to have to go back to basics, and it starts with the family. We have to create some sort of pressure to keep the family intact. The subscription in the black community to the lifestyle of divorce and out-of-wedlock babies is devastating to us. We've gotten into a vicious cycle: both male and female babies having babies, and it's devastating-the psychological damage, the economic damage, the social damage. We have to figure out some way to restore the nuclear family. And until we can do that, we're really going to be behind the eight ball. It's not a question of being smart, it's a question of where the priorities are. And education is the key.

ZANG: Well, all of American culture seems to be getting away from the nuclear family. Is it particularly devastating though in the classes that are already disenfranchised?

HILL: Yeah, because you're trying to get from being underprivileged to privileged. To look at it in the broader perspective, I'm one who believes the dissolution of the American family is a tremendous problem. When you add the transient nature of society and the changing economic scene in American society, this is why drugs have become a problem not just in the ghetto but in society at large. When you look at it from a black perspective, we're never going to participate in the dream as equal partners until we get ourselves together. So, it exacerbates an already bad situation. And every other group has looked at education as the key, the most recent of which are the Vietnamese and the Southeast Asians who have come here.

ZANG: In that sense, then, if in fact the whole process of slavery and selection of the hardiest has some validity, it's almost like a double-edged sword, creating an area in which there's enormous

pride in success-athletics-but also making it difficult to stress that other side to get the balance.

HILL: The problem is there's no balance. The equal opportunity in education, what we saw after *Brown v. The Board of Education*—that momentum has been lost. My father, who didn't have an education when he migrated up from South Carolina, saw education as the key. But a generation later, education is no longer seen to be that important. It could be a reflection on people thinking things were going to move a lot faster. It could be a function of the general hopelessness that occurred after the sixties when there was so much expectation and the dream sort of died (with) King's death, and the Kennedys (being) killed. Somehow we're going to have to get that hope back and we're going to have to start emphasizing the importance of the family. Doug Williams is a classic case. Here's a guy who has overcome a lot of adversity and hasn't changed. You think about what is it that sustained him through all of these highs and lows and made him the same? And it has to be what he got in the little town he's from in Louisiana. And why does he go back there? It's like the source. When I see him in Washington, he says: "Well, I'm getting ready to go back home to replenish myself."

ZANG: How far back have you traced the Hill family?

HILL: I've never traced the Hills-only back to my father's father. On my mother's side, I've traced them back to, I think, my great-great-grandfather. My great-grandfather was born in slavery in 1847—exactly a hundred years before me—and he was a slave for fourteen or fifteen years. It seems that after slavery some of the brothers took different names. They had been sold and some were Grants and some were Denbys. My parents came up in the thirties; they were part of the massive migration from the South to the cities. And for a while, I guess it was sort of a heaven, so to speak. There seemed to be opportunities in the North, but somehow a lot of that's been lost. Filtering from the cities are horror stories worse than what those people encountered in the South. In fact, a lot of people are now going back to the South. But what I was saying is there has to be the hope, and I don't think there's a lot of hope. The other thing that's important, I think, to look at is the role of television because now people see what it can be like and yet it's not attainable to them. A kid can see the things that he should have, and it has to be very frustrating. It becomes a question: "Well, how can I get these things?" Obviously, the guy next door is riding a BMW and has a lot of cash, that's [drug-dealing] one way to get it. When you look and see, well, which blacks are getting these things, you see on television, there's an athlete that's getting

these things. I think we as athletes ought to emphasize all of the other things that black athletes do or can do other than just the athletic prowess.

ZANG: But the media naturally are going to focus on the touchdown pass. The postgame interview is not going to be about the family and sustaining values. How much of an influence do you think black athletes could be if they went out into the communities to do "hands on" stuff?

HILL: Unfortunately a lot of the black athletes are kids themselves. If you took the right ones and sent them out, there's no question that they could be very effective. But it would have to be continual, it just couldn't be a one time thing. And that's the problem. The best thing, I think, for athletes to do is maybe just go back to their own neighborhoods and spend time. You wouldn't have to necessarily be in a program. Just talk to the kids about what it's really like beyond the television and how tough it is and mentally how frustrating it is. The best thing I can do is not to go and speak to kids but just spend time with them. They find out that I'm human too; they understand that a lot of what's happened to me wasn't the result of some plan but just has been being in the right place at the right time. They also find out that I've always tried to make sure I had an extra parachute. I hurt my knee my third year; my first year, a guy told me I might never run again because of my foot. It was kind of disconcerting but at least I had a college degree, and that meant a lot. I didn't feel as if I were hopeless, that I couldn't do it all over again. And I always tried to live a lifestyle that was sustainable without football, so I never got too caught up in the seduction of the whole thing.

ZANG: As you look back over all the circumstances that took you to Yale and had you gain a successful career in athletics, what are the changes that you have seen that have brought things to the point that they are now?

HILL: I was thinking this in terms of my own son, because economically at least he has advantages that I didn't enjoy. On the one hand, it looks like he has-a generation later-a greater chance to succeed. But I wonder if society is better now than it was when I was in Turner's Station in terms of people caring for one another. I wonder sometimes if, as we have leapfrogged in terms of knowledge and technological innovations, we haven't lost some of the basics. So I wonder who's better off-me growing up poor in Turner's Station or my son growing up upper middle class in Reston, Virginia. The world's gotten so small and so transient and people are here today and gone someplace else tomorrow. I honestly feel that society with all of its incessant activity is not

necessarily all that nurturing and all that good. I don't think there are a lot of people who feel as grounded as I felt growing up. People (now) can't establish roots. And that's bad, I think. The family is not there. People are transient, so your community is not there. Your values are not there. I see this every morning coming from Virginia to Baltimore. It seems like Baltimore gets closer to Washington and Washington gets closer to Baltimore. There's more and more traffic and everybody's in his own little space, nobody's looking left or right, nobody's communicating. Are we getting better? I don't think so.

ZANG: If you were raising your son now in Turner's Station, would you consider there to be more opportunities available to a working class black in 1988 or fewer than there would have been in your childhood?

HILL: Probably there are more opportunities. The atmosphere is different now. One of the things that I certainly felt when I was growing up in Turner's Station is that people cared about one another. Maybe it was just growing up in Turner's Station in the fifties and then (going through) the sixties-that whole period of civil rights and brotherhood. I don't see that atmosphere anymore. Somehow that bubble burst and so, to answer your question, there may be more opportunities in terms of quantity of life; I don't think there are more opportunities in terms of quality of life. There used to be that quality of life in Turner's Station. In some ways it's better the way it is now, but in some ways it may have been even better then because everybody needs to feel that they are a part of something. That's part of feeling good about oneself, knowing that you have come from something.

ZANG: It's not surprising, then, I guess that as it's so tough to find an identity, that if you can find one anywhere, even on the playground-

HILL: Sure. People want to feel good about themselves. I'm sure that's what you see with these drug dealers-suddenly they have some money -in their pockets and they can go downtown with their girlfriends and buy them something. I remember when my father and I would go out to dinner. They'd ask us what we wanted and they always said "mister." He said they always call you mister when you have got some money in your pocket. Money is a symbol of a person's worth in our society. So a lot of those kids who either are getting money or dreaming of making money, they are putting their energies toward something that's going to give them more—doing what it takes to feel good about oneself.