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**An Oral History of Louis Shub
Conducted by Ellen Paul**

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Abstract: Louis Shub (1912-1999) was a Baltimore-based activist and musician who worked for many years under Lillie May Carroll Jackson at the Baltimore Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In this oral history interview, Shub describes the Ford's theater protest and the desegregation of Druid Hill Park, as well as the difficulties in challenging state legislation, while also providing insight into the leadership style of Dr. Lillie May Carroll Jackson.

Note on Oral History: Oral history is a methodology of gathering, preserving, and sharing the voices and memories of individuals and communities. As primary material, it documents personal reflections, commentary, and recollections, and is not intended to present a verified or "complete" history of events.

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Louis Shub was interviewed on January 12, 1976, by Ellen Paul at Goucher College in Towson, MD. This interview was done as introductory classwork for a class in Oral History held at the Maryland Historical Society (now Maryland Center for History and Culture) in January of 1976.

Paul [00:00:01] This is an interview for the McKeldin-Jackson Project of the Maryland Historical Society with Mr. Louis Shub on January the 12th, 1976 at Goucher College. The interviewer is Ellen Paul.

Paul [00:00:18] Now, were you involved at all in any organizational activities during the period, say, from 1945 on?

Shub [00:00:31] 1945 on? Until when?

Paul [00:00:32] Until the 1965 year. Approximately, when the Black Panthers were starting—the violence really started.

Shub [00:00:38] Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. We actually—uh, what you were concerned with that—(unintelligible) anything about my political movement.

Paul [00:00:48] Well, Dr. Jackson, for example, was President of the NAACP—

Shub [00:00:49] Yeah, yeah.

Paul [00:00:51] Now, I'm curious to know what kind of organizational affiliations you had at that time in the civil rights movement.

Shub [00:01:05] The only one I can think of: we were both members of the NAACP although we weren't active in the NAACP around that time. We just (unintelligible; telephone ringing).

[00:01:08] *pause in recording*

Shub [00:01:22] You said at the beginning that you wanted to know anything about my political activities. What does that mean?

Paul [00:01:26] Well—

Shub [00:01:26] Do you mean like running for office or something like that? Do you mean that kind of political act—

Paul [00:01:31] Well, I'd certainly like to know—

Shub [00:01:31] Because civil rights is a political activity.

Paul [00:01:34] Mhm. I certainly would like to know any of the events that you yourself participated in.

Shub [00:01:37] Oh. Yeah. A rather important one that didn't have to do with—directly with Black and white relations—Or are you not interested in that?

Paul [00:01:51] No, that's fine.

Shub [00:01:52] In the 1950s, the legislature during the McCarthy era passed a law known as the Ober Law—Ober was the legislator (unintelligible)—which all state employees were required to sign a loyalty oath. Also, it had other provisions on them seeking out the "reds" who were ready to overturn the government and that was a (unintelligible). And there was a citizen's committee formed to push for a referendum on this law. And I was active in that citizen's committee and eventually I was the chairman of that citizen's committee against the Ober Law. And we got the necessary signatures for the Ober Law—for the referendum, rather—to try and vote against the Ober Law and to put it on the ballot so that the citizens of Maryland would either approve of the Ober Law or disapprove. However, it turns out, that the vote is still to maintain the Ober Law. But we pushed it through into the courts in Maryland and the first decision rendered down by, uh—I don't remember who the judge was who rendered (unintelligible). Well, I can't—I'll remember—can't remember—Anyway, his decision was that the Ober Law was unconstitutional. But the decision was appealed later on, and I can't remember exactly what happened, but the Ober Law remained on the books. It remained on the books until very, very recently. They're all the—everybody, even garbage collectors, and in addition to schoolteachers and so forth, you had to sign this loyalty oath in order to get employment or maintain your employment. So anyway, I was active—and that was the extent, as I recall, of my local activities in that regard, around that time. You know, you have to ask me some questions, because—

Paul [00:05:13] (laughs) I just want to make sure you were through. At the time of, say, the 1950s civil rights movement and especially around the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision in 1954 demanding integration of the schools—

Shub [00:05:30] Yeah.

Paul [00:05:30] What kind of reaction did people have—either in the suburbs or in the city—to these kind of movements?

Shub [00:05:38] You mean here in Baltimore—

Paul [00:05:38] (speaking at the same time) Right.

Shub [00:05:38] —as opposed to say Alabama or Mississippi?

Paul [00:05:48] (speaking at the same time) Exactly.

Shub [00:05:48] I'm trying to remember. I can't remember any specific cases. You know, my impression, you know, was that people accepted it more in the way that the—see what the implementation of the law really meant. Because most people in this country, I mean they—anything that's handed down by the government is accepted as the word of God. And they generally tended first to accept anything that, uh—that's handed down by a unit like the Supreme Court. It's something that—it's—you know, they have to obey. And I think—I think that was it. I certainly don't remember any accurate—any accurate movements here in Baltimore—in Maryland—against that 1954 decision.

Paul [00:07:03] Do you feel that people's expectations at the time of what this law would include and how large the impact would be was lesser than what we would expect today of an integration law? For example—

Shub [00:07:17] (speaking at the same time) Well, I think—Yeah.

Paul [00:07:16] It wouldn't—They might expect that it wouldn't touch their personal lives at that time.

Shub [00:07:24] Uh—I can't speak for, uh, most people. I do know that the Blacks expected much more out of this 1954 decision. I hate to be (unintelligible) of the white liberal, who decides to say what Blacks think or not. But obviously, they expected by this time, certainly, that that decision would be implemented in a much more meaningful way than it has been. About the whites—My impression was that, uh, there was no uproar in the way there was in (unintelligible) for instance, in Boston, for example, when there was busing. At least, that was my impression, my memory up to this is rather hazy, I'm not quite sure.

Paul [00:08:34] Did people in the suburbs have any direct participation in any of the civil rights movement's—For example, when something like this happened—when this law was passed, did many people begin to pull their children out of schools or move further out into the suburbs or move from the city—across city lines to the suburbs? Was that very noticeable in this area?

Shub [00:08:59] I don't think so. In the first place, there was a—In general, the first movement to the suburbs wasn't as massive as it has been recently. You know, as I recall, in the first place, the implementation of the 1954 decision wasn't made dramatically. It happened very, very gradually. As far as I can remember, Black schools still remained Black schools and white schools still remained white schools, mainly because the neighborhoods were far from integrated. And I think that's what happened. What happened was that if there were a few Black people and Black kids living within the area of the school, then they came in the classroom and the inclusion of several Black students didn't make the whites move out en masse. It certainly wasn't the school decision that made them—you know, I think it was the housing pattern that panicked a lot of them.

Paul [00:10:19] Did anyone have the reaction at that time that what was being accomplished was not through integration? Or certainly not full integration?

Shub [00:10:29] I think Blacks and liberals hoped that it would lead to full integration. If I recall the 1954 decision—At that time—1954—this was the decision and most people (unintelligible) sat back and said, "Well, let's see how this will work out." And I think that was the general feeling. Depending on what part of the political spectrum you were aligned with.

Paul [00:11:10] So there must have been some dissatisfaction with the results.

Shub [00:11:14] Yeah. Oh, definitely. Definitely.

Paul [00:11:23] You don't say.

Shub [00:11:23] Yeah.

Paul [00:11:23] And let's go to Dr. Lillie May Jackson. You said that you knew Dr. Jackson.

Shub [00:11:25] I didn't—I had met her, I didn't really know her. I knew what she was doing. And one of the first, uh, examples of the work she did and the NAACP did in civil rights—one of the first dramatic ones was the continuous decline around the now defunct Ford's Theater. Blacks were not allowed to sit anywhere but way up in the last balcony, at that time. And that picket line lasted for a long time. Tremendous. I never walked that picket line, I think that my wife did on occasion. There was a small picket line every night for as long as the theater was in operation. And it seemed as if the thing was going to be a failure. Of course, there was no way, particularly on the part of the management of Ford's Theater to give in, and if the show was good, they had pretty good audiences. It didn't seem to affect the theater. But eventually, everything that we did—that plus other things helped to break down the segregation in the theater. Another activity that—that was, uh—that we were aware of—whether we actively engaged in it, I can't remember—was the segregation in park facilities, for instance, tennis courts. In Druid Hill Park, which is even then on a boundary line, or sort of a Mason-Dixon line between the Black and white areas, Blacks couldn't play on the so-called white tennis courts. They had a few scrubby tennis courts off in the other part of the park. And there was nothing but only two there, and they were never kept in any kind of condition. And a number of people decided to test this prohibition against Blacks. They each—each white took a Black partner and started playing tennis there. They got a permit—The whites got a permit to play and the police ordered them off the tennis courts. They refused to go and they were actually carried into the—a few of them were carried into the paddy wagon and (unintelligible). What happened at that particular event I can't recall, if they were fined or what. I think they were fined and given probation. I don't know if they were found guilty of violating the law, but I think that they were put on probation for helping to break down segregation in the parks. You have to remember that Baltimore was, and I guess still is, a southern city in sentiment, although that distinction no longer (unintelligible) the Civil War, because Boston now is a southern city in sentiment also. But in those days, there was a definite difference between the feeling in a city like Baltimore and the feeling in some Northern cities. Northern cities were considered more liberal towards the Blacks.

Paul [00:15:30] Mhm. Okay. What kind of method or effect would you say that Dr. Jackson had on people that she was speaking to? She began her career as a religious singer—

Shub [00:15:41] Yeah.

Paul [00:15:41] —and speaker. Did she have that type of effect on people, that type of mannerism?

Shub [00:15:45] Oh, yes. She was a very powerful personality. When she spoke, it was really—she was very eloquent. Extremely so. You don't have any tapes or—?

Paul [00:15:59] Not of Dr. Jackson.

Shub [00:16:05] No. Some must exist because you had to hear her to realize what a personality she was. It was really—She had this combination of a political leader and a gospel preacher. And she moved audiences, there's no question about it. Not only the Blacks in the audience but the whites also. So her very personality, I think, had a big effect on the civil rights movement in Baltimore.

Paul [00:16:39] Do you think that she was very effective in changing the opinionmaker's opinions and the policymaker's opinions—any of the people who were in the official government positions or

in positions of power in the city. Do you think she really had an effect on them or was her primary effect on the people that would be affected by any law?

Shub [00:17:01] Yeah, it's pretty hard to measure what effect she had. I'm certain she had an effect in the first place. She also—the NAACP was involved in getting more Blacks to register to vote. And when she came with—I believe, when she came with a number of votes behind her, I think that the—definitely that the (unintelligible). And I'm sure. Without her, I think it would have been a little bit slower. But there's no real—How do you gauge such a thing, you know, unless you were in the city council, unless you were in the legislature, and you saw how the votes went after she spoke. This, I have no idea.

Paul [00:17:50] You mentioned that in some cases, such as the Park incident, there were encounters with the police. To what do you attribute the fact that there were no violent encounters as we've come to know them in the late '60s?

Shub [00:18:07] I don't know, I think the whole movement—I think it was because of the—I can only guess it was because the hope that the Blacks and liberals had, that the change would be effected through the courts the way that the 1954 decision to us, meant that this was a landmark in this (unintelligible). I think the frustration that the city felt was sparking a more violent approach. I don't know how widespread this violent approach was. Recent revelations showed that there were lots of people who were infiltrated in some of these organizations who were—who sparked or at least began some of these violations in order to cripple the civil rights movement. You know, again, I don't really (unintelligible) know such things did happen, but I think it's a combination of both. I think there were fewer people who tried a violent approach, who would do something that the orderly approach couldn't accomplish, you know—so many others who became, sort of, agent provocateurs, you know, to arouse people against the civil rights movement.

Paul [00:19:44] Just how would you place Baltimore in the spectrum of civil rights movements? You know, for example, you said now that, you know, Boston is pretty much a southern city, how would you rank Baltimore in that kind of spectrum? Do you feel that resistance here was particularly great or that the change came pretty much along the lines of the national movement?

Shub [00:20:06] I have no way of knowing. I know that the civil rights movement in Baltimore was pretty strong.

Paul [00:20:17] But this is basically Baltimore City.

Shub [00:20:19] Yeah, Baltimore City. Outside of Baltimore, in Maryland—I don't remember any of the particular activities (unintelligible). Yeah, I think it was true of all over the country at that time, that in the larger cities—the larger the city the bigger the movements. But you have to remember that being involved in the civil rights movement—In many cases when you didn't have support of a substantial number of people with you—as you wouldn't, for instance, if you tried something in a small town in Maryland—you'd be immediately ostracized. You'd lose your job, if you were at any kind of business, you would lose your business—all these things. So, it had a definite effect. In Baltimore, it was a little easier in a way. Of course, you may have organizations like NAACP behind the curtain. Other civil rights organizations, they were active in the larger cities and they weren't active in the smaller towns.

Paul [00:21:31] So with Southern Maryland or the Eastern Shore, perhaps events change a little bit slower than in the city?

Shub [00:21:37] I'd say the change didn't occur at all for many years. Except through—in this case, through the—certainly not through the state lawmakers, through the state politicians. The federal I think helped (unintelligible). The Eastern Shore was very much like the Deep South was, as I recall it.

Paul [00:22:08] The movement in the city of Baltimore had definitely, then, some effect from people such as Dr. Jackson. Do you feel that when the movement lost leaders like this, it simply floundered and had no direction, or do you feel that it's an ongoing movement still?

Shub [00:22:22] I'm not sure I really know. In Baltimore, you certainly don't have a personality like Lillie Jackson, but you have a number of other people: Black leaders, who have quite a following or are very vocal and are very strong leaders. What direction they take, I'm not quite sure. For instance, Parren Mitchell and the whole Mitchell family, who, of course, are related to Lillie Jackson, still carry on that sort of thing. As a matter of fact, Parren Mitchell is in a stronger position to influence things (unintelligible) than Lillie Jackson was. Lillie Jackson wasn't a member of any law-making body the way Parren Mitchell is. And the other members of the Mitchell family like Clarence Mitchell, who's—I think he's a (unintelligible). You know, what you have now are Blacks who are in the legislature or in Congress. That makes a big difference. Before that, you know, I don't think—I don't remember who—As a matter of fact, I think I remember—coming back to the early days—we were involved in a campaign to elect a Black member to the Maryland legislature. Name was Cole: C-O-L-E. And he ran against—As a matter of fact, he ran against a man named Marvin Mandel, who was then our governor. And he beat him, even though Mandel, at that time, had powerful political backing from Jack Pollack, who was one of the big political leaders in that day in Northwest Baltimore. As a matter of fact, he was considered the most powerful political boss in Baltimore. And Cole was elected. He was one of the first Blacks in those times to be elected to a law-making body. And after that, of course, we worked with many others, naturally. So your original question as to are there any people who can compare with Lillie Jackson, well, I think there still are.

Paul [00:25:32] And now it's in a more official, more efficacious way?

Shub [00:25:34] That's right, yeah. That's right, yeah. It's not a matter of just a personality.

Paul [00:25:42] Down in areas—traditional blue-collar working areas of Baltimore City—was there any hostility to this kind of movement, especially as far as job action is concerned?

Shub [00:25:58] I'm not—I don't know about that. I know that in areas such as Woodberry and Hampden, these pockets of—they always remained pockets of resistance (unintelligible). I don't know how it is now, but back in those days, definitely. I remember canvassing against the Ober Law in those areas. It was much more difficult when we canvassed in that area in Baltimore. That didn't have anything to do directly with Black and white relationships, but they were always much more conservative—or reactionary, whichever term they would use—than almost any other part of Baltimore.

Paul [00:26:51] I think you can you can safely say that there's still a good deal of work to be done. Do you think or would you like to see a civil rights movement of the nature led by Dr. Lillie May Jackson reinstated in Baltimore? Do you think that would have any effect? And what kind of future do you see for furthering civil rights in this area?

Shub [00:27:11] Well, I always thought that the 1954 decision was only a (unintelligible), and—It was only one decision that would make only part of a, you know, integration (unintelligible) movement possible. The one that has remained pretty much the stumbling block, I think, in Black and white relationships, is the housing problem. It still remains—We can all see Black areas near white areas. And in most cases when Blacks move in whites move out. And the reasons for it are various. Some are economic, some are the result of fear on the part of white property owners that their property would decrease in value. And in many cases, these fears are unfounded because what the pattern is, that has been happening, was that the Blacks moved in, and the Blacks, generally, move in, uh—Those that move in are not all property owners. Those that moved in are looking for places with more space, but what many have been getting into are houses that have been converted into little apartments. The result is much greater value than they would've had before. And those houses have been converted into apartments by absentee landlords, and so they don't maintain them, they become slums. And they do depress property values, and the whites move out. The other is, I think, the fear of the unknown. You know, there's not much—there's quite a gap, a gulf between communication between Blacks and whites. There's different feels about, uh, issues. Almost a different way of speaking. In other words, they've never lived together. And until they live together, they can't possibly—full integration, I don't think, is even possible. Or trust. Certainly, Blacks don't trust whites, because they've been deceived too often. Whites don't trust Blacks because they fear violence. I mean, clearly, the housing situation really, really (unintelligible) real integration is possible (unintelligible).

[00:30:15] *end of recording*