



OH 8123

**An Oral History of Esther Lazarus
Conducted by Ellen Paul**

Title: An Oral History of Esther Lazarus
Interviewer: Ellen Paul
Description: Transcript, 17 pages
Interview date: June 17, 1976

Abstract: Esther Lazarus (1900-1980) was a social worker and the Director of the Baltimore Department of Welfare from 1953 until 1969. In this oral history interview, Lazarus discusses her career trajectory from its beginnings until her retirement. While speaking on her time as director, she explores her cooperation and conflict with Maryland politicians, particularly Theodore McKeldin. Lazarus also discusses the involvement of white people generally with the contemporary civil rights movement, and her personal life in Baltimore as a Jewish woman.

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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Esther Lazarus (Mrs. Albert Goldman) was interviewed on June 17, 1976, by Ellen Paul at the Lazarus residence at 1 Warrenton Road in Baltimore City.

Paul [00:00:10] This is an interview for the Maryland Historical Society McKeldin-Jackson Project, June 17th, 1976, with Mrs. Albert Goldman at Mrs. Goldman's home on Warrenton Lane, in Baltimore. The interviewer is Ellen Paul.

Paul [00:00:31] Mrs. Goldman, could you tell me a little bit about your personal background and your education, and your background in Baltimore?

Lazarus [00:00:37] Well, I'm interested that you called me Mrs. Goldman. I am Mrs. Goldman, I've been married since 1932, but I'm professionally known as Esther Lazarus because I had long working years under that name. And so that I still feel more comfortable with that (laughs).

Paul [00:00:52] Okay.

Lazarus [00:00:53] The other part I have to say for my own self because my husband's very good. He doesn't mind being referred to as Mr. Lazarus so there's no conflict. Now, what was the question that you wanted to talk about?

Paul [00:01:05] I wondered if you could tell me a little bit about your personal background and your education?

Lazarus [00:01:09] Okay. I am—Well, I am a Baltimorean and I went to school here, but I went to, um—I stopped high school after I completed two years and I went to work. And I worked as a secretary for a firm and then when I left that work, I was earning more money than I earned in social work for a long time. But I had been interested in people for a long time, too. As a young girl, I lead a club at the Jewish Education Alliance and was involved in that kind of activity. So that I think I went back to college because I really was interested in doing something with people. And, you know, I'm bringing this up because, you know, that would be something like—I stopped high school in 1915 and I decided to go back in 1922. And at that time, it was very hard for a person to get into college, you know, if you'd been out of school at that time. I went to see Goucher and even though my sister graduated from Goucher and therefore, you know, you'd think that you, you know, had some relationship there, they wouldn't touch me. And I bring that out because I think this is indicative of the difference of what's happened now. You know, all the colleges take married women and have, uh—be pregnant while you go to college and the women who are going back to school are just fantastic today, you see. And at that time it was impossible. So that what I did was I went to Hopkins because they had a teacher's college and you could take courses there in the afternoon and evening. And so I did my—I did two years there and then I went to—enrolled as a regular full-time student in the University of Chicago. When I went to the University of Chicago, from which I graduated in 1936, I was sure that I was going to go into social work. And I had already met social workers here in Baltimore, and at that point we had a very unusual woman who was running the Jewish Family Agency, Dorothy C. Kahn. And she wrote me when I was in Chicago to ask me if I was interested in, you know, being a social worker and I said I was so that—I graduated that June, and that September I went to work in the Jewish Agency. That was a family agency at that point. Then I stayed there for a little less than a year when I was approached by a woman who was working in the juvenile court, and she asked me if I would be interested in working

on the juvenile court, because at that time, our juvenile court was just a court—wasn't a court of record. It was just one of the district courts. I'm giving you all these details because I thought you'd be interested in knowing this—

Paul [00:04:03] Yes, it is—

Lazarus [00:04:03] —and this does mean that I've been involved in this—

Paul [00:04:08] (speaking at the same time) That's exactly what I wanted, yes.

Lazarus [00:04:08] —over a long period of time and through many of the changes, you know. So at that time it was a district court and probation officers were appointed on the basis of, um, well, I guess (unintelligible) on religion, but they did. They had to have—be sure to have a Catholic worker and be sure to have a Jewish worker, and then, you know, (unintelligible) for Protestants. Well, I was a Jewish worker, but we didn't have very many Jewish children brought into the court. And so that this was my first experience in beginning to work with Black people, and I'd never had any experience with that at all. And I think that—and I bring that up because, you know, one of the things that Black people have against white people is that they always say, you know, that to the white person, the Black person looks all the same. And I would have to say that when I first began to work with young Black people—this was children, you know—the thing that terrified me was that I wouldn't be able to recognize them (laughs). And so there is something, you know, in what they say about that, that, um—

Lazarus [00:05:19] Well, I stayed the—And now on the 19th—I went to the general court in 1927, and at that time it was (unintelligible) the court. And I can't remember, I think it was shortly thereafter—'27 or maybe '29—that Thomas J.S. Waxter became the judge in the juvenile court. And he changed the court a great deal, and he changed many things a great deal. I think he changed Mr. McKeldin's opinions and ideas and a lot of people—But so that I had that working relationship with him, see, when I was in the juvenile court. And then in 1935, when he became the Director of Welfare, I stayed on in the juvenile court. And then I—I don't know (unintelligible) going on—all the differences that changed in the juvenile court. But then I decided to go back to a school of social work so that I went from 19—to the University of Pennsylvania from '36 to '38. In '38, when I got my master's, I then took an examination and got a job with the Department of Welfare. So I joined the Department of Welfare in 1938 and stayed there until 1969.

Paul [00:06:42] When you were with the juvenile courts, was there also a Black social worker to take the Black children?

Lazarus [00:06:46] (speaking at the same time) Yes, there were. Mhm. There were.

Paul [00:06:48] Were there complaints in the Black community that they were being mistreated by the police and by the courts? That you can remember?

Lazarus [00:07:00] I don't remember that there were—I really, uh—No, I don't think that in all fairness—and fairness, that's the wrong word. I don't remember because I don't feel that the—you know, a lot of children weren't treated well, you see. So I don't remember in my experience—We had a very nice probation officer who was kind of fatherly type and he was well known in the community and all people liked him. But I have no record of any—Well, I had a lot of feeling myself that very often if children—if anybody comes in contact with the court, that you have to be wary of what they're going to do too you and it wasn't this question of having civil rights then, you see, that

you have now. That came much, much later. But I don't feel that there was any—and I don't remember, let's say.

Paul [00:07:55] Okay. How did you first meet Theodore McKeldin?

Lazarus [00:08:01] Well, I think I met him through Judge Waxter, you see. Although, I'm not awfully sure. I'll take time out (unintelligible)—

[00:08:09] *pause in recording*

Lazarus [00:08:09] Well, I didn't meet him through Waxter exactly, but Waxter was the judge of the juvenile court and I remember in '29 that I was interested in going to a meeting of probation officers and we had to get money from the city, and Mr. Waxter suggested that I go to see the mayor. This was very much simpler than it is now. And when I went to see the mayor, I found that Mr. Broening was his secretary so that, that was my first—

Paul [00:08:34] That Mr. McKeldin was his secretary—

Lazarus [00:08:35] (speaking at the same time) Mr. McKeldin, that Mr. McKeldin was his secretary.

Paul [00:08:38] (speaking at the same time) Right.

Lazarus [00:08:38] I think that's the first time that I met him. Now, but I don't really know—I don't think he knew me from then either, you know. But when Mr. Broening—oh, Mr. McKeldin—was a mayor, you see, this is in '43 and Mr.—well Mr. Waxter had left to go to the Department of Welfare then—anyway, the relationship between Mr. Waxter and Mr. McKeldin goes over many years. And since I worked with Mr. Waxter for many years, it was through Mr. Waxter that I got to know Mr. McKeldin.

Paul [00:09:15] Was your relationship with the McKeldins strictly business level or were you also personal friends?

Lazarus [00:09:20] No, I would say it was more business. While we were good friends, you know, and all that, but we were—it was strictly business. Now, of course, after I was the director of Welfare, I saw more of him than I saw him because then I dealt with him directly. But even when—it does go back because I remember when Mr. Waxter was in the—yes, Mr. Waxter was in the Department of Welfare for years and when I went to work there, Mr. Waxter and Mr. McKeldin formed the kind of relationship that Waxter felt and wrote—And McKeldin wanted this, to know what was going on in the community—so Mr. Waxter would take him to all the resources that were used. For instance, they went to visit the training schools for girls and for—stop tapping—for boys. And at that time, the Baltimore City Hospitals was in the Department of Welfare and Mr. Waxter took him to see that. And since I worked in the department for many years, you see, and—whereas before I was the director, I was the assistant director—on some of these occasions I was with them too. So I got to know Mr. McKeldin then.

Paul [00:10:30] Social work was primarily something that women went into, was it not?

Lazarus [00:10:35] Yes, at that time it was. Well—Yes, I think that's true. As a woman now we raised question about that, but we were always interested in getting men to go into social work.

Well, Mr. Waxter himself, you know, was not a social worker. He was a lawyer when he came, but he was interested in social problems, you see. And this is the kind of thing that I think that we later thought that we ought to get men involved in social work. And in some instances, if you want to talk about details of social work, a man is very helpful. Sometimes in working with the boys, it's much better to have men work with them than women. All the women are very good, but generally, you know—Now in seventy, you know, seventy—seventy-six, I have a lot of questions about why we were so intent on having them coming into social work, but we can deal with that again if you want to.

Paul [00:11:26] Now, how did you become appointed to be the director of the Welfare Department?

Lazarus [00:11:31] Well, Mr. Waxter became the director of the State Department of Welfare. And I had been the assistant director for some time. And Mr.—We had a very unusual chairman to Francis Davis. I don't know whether you've heard about him, he's not living anymore. Mr. Waxter himself—I'm not denigrating or taking anything away from Mr. McKeldin—but Mr. Waxter was a very unusual man. And, you know, attracted men in the community who were interested in social problems so that he got Mr. Davis, who was a wealthy person and businessman. And Mr. Davis and I got to know each other, too, so that when Mr. Waxter was ready to move to the State Department of Welfare, they recommended me. By this time, Mr. Thomas D'Alesandro was the mayor. And so I was recommended by them. And I filled out a, you know, three-year appointment, but, you know, I was really filling out Mr. Waxter's appointment.

Paul [00:12:29] I see. And—

[00:12:30] *pause in recording*

Paul [00:12:31] What I was going to ask you just then, when the phone rang, was if you could give me some sort of comparison of what it was like to work with Mayor D'Alesandro and Mayor McKeldin. Was there any difference in their styles?

Lazarus [00:12:45] They're very different. Um—I'm trying to see how I could (unintelligible)—Well, I think—it's very—I'd have to think about that, you know—(unintelligible) on?

Paul [00:13:13] Sure, we'll go on—

Lazarus [00:13:14] (laughs)

Paul [00:13:14] Okay, sure, we'll go on. Did—

Lazarus [00:13:18] And, uh—

Paul [00:13:18] Did McKeldin ever try and tell you how to run the Welfare Department? Did he have suggestions for you or did you really get to do it all by yourself?

Lazarus [00:13:25] Well, McKeldin didn't tell me how to run the Welfare Department and D'Alesandro didn't tell me how to run the Welfare Department. It wasn't that. It was just that in some ways, McKeldin was much more accessible. Mr. D'Alesandro was a very busy person. He was a fantastic person in his own right, but their style was very different, you know. McKeldin's warmth and humanness came across in a very different way. You could get to him—I'll give you an

illustration of the kind of thing. You know, as—Baltimore being near Washington, a lot of people from Washington were always coming to us, you know, and we used to help them in very different ways. But one of the things that they liked was that there is a department in Washington that trains people from other countries. I can't remember the technical name, you know. So they would always have people from foreign countries and—South America and European countries—and Baltimore would be one of the places. Well, when I brought him over to McKeldin, he was the best ambassador to the United States that you ever could know. He was the kind of person that always remembered his beginnings, you know, and he would tell about his own situation: what it was like to be poor in Baltimore and what it was like to have to be concerned about taking care of your parents. And the people from foreign countries got a sense of what this United States of America stands for and through him—that was just fantastic, you know, it was—We had always planned, of course, you know, that we would tell them what we did as an agency—a social agency: care for people, you know, that was the whole—But he would explain it in his own inimitable way, you know, that they really got a feel there was a living, you know, example of this.

Lazarus [00:15:08] Well, now Mr. D'Alesandro—it wasn't that he wouldn't—I don't know enough about his beginnings—but he never shared that kind of thing with you. So that was the basic difference. He was a fantastic (unintelligible; laughs), you know, he'd have all these people—There were always a lot of people in D'Alesandro's office, and he'd see them and see them and he'd make a decision very quickly, but you'd find made it on your feet. Whereas with Mr. D'Alesandro—uh, Mr. McKeldin—you sat down and, you know, he took time with the things of this kind, you see. And when in his last administration, for example, when we were concerned about building the Waxter Center—you know that there is a Waxter Center for older people—and we never would have had it, if it hadn't been for Mr. McKeldin. Mr. McKeldin was devoted to Mr. Waxter, but he had a real feel and appreciation for what Mr. Waxter did and had a lot of feeling himself for older people. Well, you know, I had a lot of trouble getting that money for that—to, you know, have it put on the bond issue. Well, Mr.—It was never too much trouble for Mr. McKeldin to see me and it was never too much trouble for Mr. McKeldin to pick up the phone and talk to the city budget director or people like that. Now, that's a kind of thing that, you know, you don't really—after all, he's a very busy person—but if you went to him with a problem that he was interested in, he would stay with it, you know, in a very unusual way.

Paul [00:16:31] Yeah. Could you tell me about some of the specific civil rights events that you were personally involved in? Anything—

Lazarus [00:16:35] Specifically what?

Paul [00:16:36] Civil rights events that you were involved in.

Lazarus [00:16:40] Civil rights. Identify what you mean by civil rights.

Paul [00:16:46] Well, anything—say, for example, the picketing of the Ford's Theater or the Lyric Theater.

Lazarus [00:16:50] Now, Mr. McKeldin I know was involved in seeing that Black people were admitted to the theaters. That he did a great deal—I was not involved in that. I was always the—I mean, I don't know about picketing, I don't know that I ever picketed. I was involved in supporting it. I think the Black people knew that I was with them and supported their organizations and in my own—in the Welfare I did a lot of things in relation to Black people. No, the only thing I think that I

was involved in, was—I regret to this day that I wasn't involved in the first march under Martin Luther King—but I did go to the march they had for the welfare rights people. And that I was in—

Paul [00:17:35] To Washington?

Lazarus [00:17:35] Yes.

Paul [00:17:36] And do remember what year that was?

Lazarus [00:17:38] That was something like '69.

Paul [00:17:41] Okay. Would you consider that civil rights was McKeldin's primary concern when he was in office?

Lazarus [00:17:50] Well, if you—if you, you know, say civil rights and concerned people are the same—

Paul [00:17:57] Human rights.

Lazarus [00:17:57] Human rights—

Paul [00:17:58] Okay.

Lazarus [00:17:59] That was his primary concern. He was always concerned with a person's rights—human rights, you'd say.

Paul [00:18:03] Not just Black people or any specific group—

Lazarus [00:18:05] (speaking at the same time) Never. No.

Paul [00:18:06] But all the people.

Lazarus [00:18:07] That's right.

Paul [00:18:07] Okay.

Lazarus [00:18:09] There was no—See, this is the quality that I wanted to, you know—they brought out when he talked to these foreigners: that this man really, you know, believed in people and did all he could for people. That was his whole thrust.

Paul [00:18:23] Did the Welfare Department have any racial problems that you can remember?

Lazarus [00:18:29] Well, now, the Welfare problems have been racial. When I came to the Welfare Department (laughs) in 1938 that—you know, it's interesting how different it was. At that time we had people sitting in a big office waiting to be seen, and we distinguished between white and Black people, you know. We'd call you "miss" and so on; Black people you'd call by their—yell out their first name, you know. Now, I don't know that it was conscious, you know, antagonism towards Black people, but they weren't conscious enough of seeing that Black people were treated the way other people did. So that's the first thing we did, was to insist that you could not yell a person's name out "Sally Jones," you had to say "Mrs. Jones," you see. And that's the—The other piece is

that, of course, you know, I was in the Welfare Department long enough to know that calling people by "Mrs." wasn't the thing to do, the thing was to call you (unintelligible; laughs) Sally. And of course, that's a difference with that, but let's stay with it in time. The other was that I think that we—I don't believe the Welfare Department was ever against Black people. The Welfare Department always had a lot of problems because in some of the categories, except for old age, we always had more Black people than we had white people who were in need of assistance and needed help, you see. So that we were a target to that extent, you know, because there has been this feeling in the community, you know, against Black people for a long time. But I think that the other thing about Black people—and this is my own experience—we were the first ones to have the Black supervisors, for example, you know, so that no other department had Black supervisors. But I have to admit that when we first had Black supervisors, then they only had Black workers, you see. So that here was a Black—here was the Welfare Department strong for seeing that people got their rights, you know, there wasn't any question about that. Strong for seeing that people were treated, you know, equitably. That was the whole thing. And while at the time we thought we were very forward, you know, because we had Black supervisors and all that, but we were still forward in the conforming set, you know. But I don't feel that—we're trying to think whether there was any anti-Black feeling, cause that's what you're asking, in the department.

Paul [00:21:01] Yeah, mhm.

Lazarus [00:21:02] I would say that—you see, you have to kind of see it in its frame of reference, you know. That we are told—are (unintelligible) ourselves, you see. That when we had a Black supervisor, we didn't say right away, you know, "Black supervisor is going to supervise white or, you know, Black people." But we still conformed. And I know that when we began to have Black workers carry white caseloads—You know what a caseload is?

Paul [00:21:31] Yes.

Lazarus [00:21:33] (unintelligible) And, uh—But when some of our foster mothers refused, you see, they did not want—Well, the white foster mothers, when they didn't want the Black worker, we didn't say, "Okay, then if you don't want a Black worker, then we don't know whether we want you as a foster mother." You see that's the kind of thing—I have to admit that, you know, while we thought we were very forward and, you know, ahead of our time, but we were real conforming in many ways.

Paul [00:21:54] For the time, that is really quite far advanced. That really is.

Lazarus [00:21:57] But now, you know, you look back at it, I think we really should have said—question—Now, I would question, you know, that if a woman doesn't want to work with a Black worker, I have a lot of questions about what she could give a foster child, because she's going to carry on her same prejudice, you see. So to that extent, we weren't forward enough.

Paul [00:22:13] Could you describe the clashes that you had with the city comptroller, Mr. Pressman, when you were the director of the agency?

Lazarus [00:22:21] Well, Mr. Pressman was always against me, and—I think Mr. Pressman really didn't understand the program, you know. He questioned our spending so much money and he didn't understand how we were held accountable for everything we spent. We were really—You know, in the early days, we spent mostly city money and that became increasingly less and less. Then we spent state and city money and then federal and city money. And we were audited by all

three levels of government, you know, and so that there wasn't any way that—and I think that's the part that Mr. Pressman didn't understand. I know that he came in one day with the photographers and newspeople, you know, and his whole entourage. And he was floored to see how, you know—He just has the (unintelligible) auditor, you know, to see how closely we were audited, you see. And in my lifetime, when I was there, there weren't any evidences of any fraud on part of our workers. You always have some fraud on part of your clientele, you know, some people who got—So basically I think it was that he didn't understand the program. The other thing that I—where I had trouble with the City Council and people like Mr. Pressman was that they didn't understand the whole basis of welfare. Welfare does not create the problem, welfare has to pick up the problem that society creates. And somehow or other they thought that if I really put my mind to it, you know, that I could do something about changing that. So what Mr. Pressman himself always held against me is that when they're struggling like now to do something about the budget and Mr. Pressman felt that, you know, he talked to other departments and they would be willing to reduce their budget, I said, "I can't reduce the budget, you know, because I don't really control the size of the caseload. I don't make it and I don't—you can't control it, and therefore, you have to take responsibility for that." That's, you know, what is never understood. The other that we had the biggest quarrel about was the amount of personnel that I needed. Because at one point when I was first in the department, the city paid for most of the personnel, and again, they would say, "Alright, we'll give you the personnel, if you will promise to reduce the caseload." Well, you know, we could have all the personnel, we might be a better service to the people and in some instance help them to live better on the meager money that we gave them, but we did not control with—we have a recession, you see—You can have plenty of personnel, but you can't cut off the caseload (unintelligible; speaking at the same time).

Paul [00:25:09] And if you don't have that many cases, you don't need as many personnel either, right? (laughs)

Lazarus [00:25:12] Well, no, but we were never under—We were always understaffed. But they thought that if they gave us more people, we could—if they gave us more—they would give us more staff if we could cut the people off. And this is what they said: "Will you assure us that you'll reduce the caseload?" And I said, "No, if we have an upturn in, you know, um, unemployment or anything like that, we can't reduce the caseload. That will inevitably—You have to understand that welfare just picks up the residue, welfare doesn't create it. We do not create the problem. We have to deal with the problem."

Paul [00:25:50] And how to did McKeldin react to the situation—these conflicts?

Lazarus [00:25:55] Well, McKeldin was always—you know, he always understood what the problem was so that if it, you know—If I was personally criticized, he would come to my defense. But he always understood what it meant to be poor and he always understood. And I think he understood the basic problem: that we didn't create the problem, but that problem was created by—

Paul [00:26:16] And did he speak out in that nature?

Lazarus [00:26:17] Yes, he did. Mhm. Yeah, he did.

Paul [00:26:19] Okay. Let's go a little bit forward in time to the 1960s and ask about—I'd like to ask a little bit about the more militant years. How did white liberals react to the Black Power

movement? People like Theodore McKeldin, how did they react to that? They'd always worked with Black people, and now there were some Black people who didn't want their help.

Lazarus [00:26:44] Well, you know, one of the things that I think was hard for a lot of white people was that they—not so much for Mr. McKeldin perhaps—but there were a lot of white liberals—this is the (unintelligible), you see—had been forward in being concerned about what was happening to Black people, but they were living through the period of what I say "doing for." And when it had to be reversed, you see, that the other persons were going to be enabled to do for themselves and they hadn't had as much experience of doing for themselves, so that some of the ways that they did, the white liberals didn't like that. But Mr. McKeldin, you know, long before people started walking the streets to know what was going on, McKeldin knew what was going on, you see. And that while he did live in the period that, you know, when he was "doing for," for example, I categorize "doing for" that he thought that, you know, you ought to let Black people go to the theater. That's a "doing for." Maybe the way the Black people would go about it would be different than it is now, but still, he knew what it was like, you see, when you couldn't have all the opportunities that you wanted. As far as I know, he never resented the fact that the people—you know, the white liberal has to be worried that the other people aren't thankful to you. This was never a problem as far as Mr. McKeldin. This was just a—you know, you ought to have it, you ought to be able to do with it what you want to.

Paul [00:28:13] I see. How did the Black Power movement affect your department?

Lazarus [00:28:16] How the Black Pow—Well, the Black Power—The way is that—with the welfare rights people. That's where Black people were first, um, most evident. And while—You know, when—And I think that some of our workers resented that, you know. I didn't have any problem with it myself. I think that the problem for me—since (unintelligible) with myself—is that while I thought that they were, you know—Well, I did everything I could to be helpful or to let them stay. I had no problem. We never got into any confrontations and when they sat in, it was okay with me—if they sat in, you know, and things like that. But I look back on it, you know. I don't know that I did enough to make it possible for them to do something. Because as I look back, I always thought of myself as a very liberal, you know, director of welfare: concerned with people that I was dealing with. But as I look upon what actually happened, I think the welfare rights movement, you know, they did more for themselves than I ever did for them, you see. And I would question now, whether all during those years I could have made it more possible for them to do something themselves.

Paul [00:29:32] We talked a little bit about the role of women in social work and I'd like to ask about the role of women in civil rights: do you think that any of the women who were concerned with civil rights—for example, Lillie May Jackson—were ever concerned with civil rights for women?

Lazarus [00:29:52] Well, I knew Lillie May Jackson very well, and I think she was concerned for civil rights. But I don't know that—I didn't know her that intimately, that it was focused on women or civil rights for women. It was civil rights for people, you see, and civil rights for Black people, particularly because they had been denied them. And I can't say that I thought she did anything about—I don't know anything.

Paul [00:30:20] But it was always Black women and white women at the forefront of civil rights movements, was it not?

Lazarus [00:30:24] Yes, I think so. I think that—Well her—Yes, indeed. She and her—What's her daughter—Jackson?

Paul [00:30:30] Juanita Jackson Mitchell.

Lazarus [00:30:35] (speaking at the same time) Jackson Mitchell, you see. That they really— (doorbell rings) oh, they have a long history.

[00:30:39] *pause in recording*

Paul [00:30:40] Well, why don't you just recount to me what you were telling me about Lillie May Jackson and the way that she worked with you?

Lazarus [00:30:45] Well, I think Lily May Jackson worked—Well, she worked with us. But I feel this way about—What Lillie May Jackson did was that if a person came to the Welfare Department and the person was denied assistance, let us say—

[00:30:58] *pause in recording*

Lazarus [00:30:58] —but we didn't, uh—you know, maybe scold us if we didn't understand, you know, what the situation was, and fought desperately for the families. But I call that kind of "doing for." I don't remember that she organized any groups to fight us in the way that the welfare rights people did afterwards. So that, um—This isn't denigrating Mrs. Jackson's activities, but I think she was caught in the same thing that white people were caught in, that they were doing—she was doing for Black people, whereas white people were doing for Black people, which does have a different quality, you know. She was doing for her people that she really had a real feel for, whereas maybe for the white person was doing for—kind of underscored for. But there's a very real difference for doing for a person, than helping them to do for themselves, you see. And I may be wrong in my assessment, but I think that Mrs. Jackson, as a Black woman, got in the same thing that the white liberals got caught in, in that respect.

Paul [00:32:03] How did Mrs. Jackson feel about people who would not help themselves?

Lazarus [00:32:07] Well, it wasn't that they were—She saw these people—They were handicapped. They couldn't help themselves. But I'm using "help themselves" in terms of they themselves becoming agents for change, you see. She was constantly fighting for change, but she was helping this person—get something for this person to change his immediate situation, whereas for a change agent, you know, you really try to—And this whole civil rights movement, you know, you try to change the basis for everybody, not just for the specific individual.

Paul [00:32:38] (speaking at the same time) I see. Would you say that she was a good administrator of the NAACP? That she was very effective?

Lazarus [00:32:44] I think she was effective because she was the one—As far as I know, this was one of the best chapters the NAACP had, in Baltimore. She was a very effective person. I don't know enough about the intimate administration, but I think she was a very effective person.

Paul [00:33:03] They had so many members. Did the white people go to the meetings as well, or mostly just the leadership and the Black people go to the meetings?

Lazarus [00:33:10] Well, I'm ashamed to say it, but I never went to many of their meetings except public meetings, so that I really don't know how—The other quality that I think Mrs. Jackson had was—She was a minister, wasn't she?

Paul [00:33:25] Well, her husband did some preaching and she was very involved with churches and religion.

Lazarus [00:33:29] Yes, and that's what I think she had, which is a very unusual quality. She had kind of a religious, you know, quality to her activities. And that came through very well. It came through for people that, you know, she worked for and came through with people that she worked with.

Paul [00:33:48] And, of course, various religious organizations, especially the Black churches, were very active in the civil rights—

Lazarus [00:33:53] (speaking at the same time) That's right.

Paul [00:33:53] Mhm.

Lazarus [00:33:55] Well, and I think that she was the kind of person who stimulated them to do that, you see. She really was a very unusual person and I've had a great deal of admiration for her.

Paul [00:34:06] What kind of activities did Jewish groups at the time undertake? Were they also active?

Lazarus [00:34:11] Jewish groups. Jewish groups and welfare. As far as I know about Jewish groups, you know, when the Welfare Department first started, they were the agencies that helped us get decent standards and they fought for decent allowances for welfare—you know, welfare was always given on a family basis and—but decent amounts for welfare. That this is what their contribution in Baltimore was. Also, in the area of foster care—they always do it for good standards in foster care. And you know that you had to pay for foster care, because Baltimore had a tradition of—you know, where the welfare department that we took over where the supervisor said to charities and the children were placed in free homes and indentured. So their greatest contribution, I think, was in standard setting, you know, both in what you give for people, and also the standards—the kind of workers that you had to have. I don't have any recollection of the Jewish—even though I'm a Jew and been involved in a lot of Jewish organizations—of what the Jews did in the civil rights movement as far as the Black person is concerned. Maybe I'm just ignorant.

Paul [00:35:23] (laughs) Let's go back—Just, I want—I just have another question about Lillie May Jackson. Do you think that her efforts—Let me put it this way: would she rather have worked without white people helping her if she could have?

Lazarus [00:35:40] No, I think she worked with—She was for the whole community. I don't think that this—With her it wasn't Black against white or anything like that. I don't think that was it, you know, that she would rather work with all Black—at the time that I knew her. But it's just that if they level against the white person, that the white person, you know, didn't—I'm leveling against myself, I'll say with myself.

Paul [00:36:05] Sure, fine.

Lazarus [00:36:05] I feel very strongly that I didn't do enough to help Black people do for themselves. I don't think Mrs. Jackson did in her time, you know, she—In many instances where I was concerned with the welfare, that she too settled for doing for that person to get his immediate situation set—straightened out.

Paul [00:36:24] Did she have many white people for close personal friends?

Lazarus [00:36:26] Oh, yes, she really did. All the, um—She had a lot of white people. I think all the white liberals were friends of Lillie May Jackson's. And as far as I know Mr. McKeldin and Mrs. Lillie May Jackson are very good friends and—Oh, well, you know, the Jews. There were some Jews that—I have to backtrack, I said that—

Paul [00:36:45] Okay.

Lazarus [00:36:47] Well, anybody told you about the Sidney Hollanders? I think that Sidney Hollander was very much involved and he was a member of the Urban League long before a lot of white people ever heard of the Urban League. I'm sure he was a member of the NAACP and he fought for, you know, Black people and was very good. But I would, you know, categorize him the same way I categorize myself: that he was in that era when you were doing for, you see, and that when the Black people affirmed themselves and, you know, wanted take over the leadership, it was kind of hard for him.

Paul [00:37:23] Do you happen to know anything about Mayor McKeldin being awarded the Sidney Hollander Award?

Lazarus [00:37:28] Yes, I do.

Paul [00:37:29] Could you tell me about that?

Lazarus [00:37:30] Well, because that was where the basis of what Mr. McKeldin was awarded it and his director was awarded it. It was a special award for people who had done things in the community for civil rights, for the community let us say. But it was in that era when you were distinguished—I don't know whether any Black person ever got it, you see—you were distinguished for what you did for people, you see, that's the—

Paul [00:37:54] And who chose McKeldin? Was there a committee or—?

Lazarus [00:37:56] They always had a committee of the—Mhm.

Paul [00:37:57] A committee. I see.

Lazarus [00:38:01] The Hollander Award—the Hollander family administrated. Have you interviewed anybody yet?

Paul [00:38:06] Tomorrow, I'm going to look at the papers of the Hollander Foundation (laughs).

Lazarus [00:38:12] Oh.

Paul [00:38:12] So that's very appropriate. No, we haven't interviewed them yet.

Lazarus [00:38:14] You will, probably.

Paul [00:38:15] I hope so. How would you say that—Or would you—Do you think, in your own personal opinion, that Lillie May Jackson and McKeldin were able to change people's attitudes? Especially white people's attitudes, but everyone's?

Lazarus [00:38:30] Well, I have no question that McKeldin was. I think he was very, very helpful and persuasive and helped change. Now, I think Lillie May Jackson was a very interesting woman, you know. I think that she, you know, she—did you ever hear—you didn't old enough—did you ever hear her talk? She talked—

Paul [00:38:49] In a record.

Lazarus [00:38:50] You heard a rec—You know how she had that quality of, kind of, religious fervor. And I think that everybody who had anything to do with her, got a real sense of the integrity of the woman and how much, you know, this really was something that she believed in and fought for. Now, to that extent, I think she got people interested. You know, we probably had one the first early chapters of the NAACP and they were very heavily supported by white people, as far as I know. And I think that she was responsible for that.

Paul [00:39:21] When you moved into this neighborhood, were you aware of any restrictive covenants?

Lazarus [00:39:24] When I moved here—

Paul [00:39:27] Against certain people living here?

Lazarus [00:39:27] Jews (laughs)!

Paul [00:39:27] Did you have trouble when you moved in?

Lazarus [00:39:29] Yes, when we moved into this neighborhood, we tried to rent—We'd been here since '55 and we tried to rent places and we were told that it would not be possible to get in there. And I think we bought the piece of land here and built our house ourselves. And we were the first Jews—I think we're still the only Jews around this—on this block. And I know a lot of people watched this house and wondered what kind of people we were and things of that kind. So I have, you know—and I've lived through, as a Jewish person, some discrimination, you know. The Jews are not wanted and, uh—But I think it's not fair to equate the Jewish and the Black problem, I think that, uh—

Paul [00:40:18] What do you think would happen if you tried to sell this house to Black people? Do you think your neighbors would be upset?

Lazarus [00:40:23] Oh, I'm sure they would. And I think that's one of the things that worries this neighborhood. This is a changing neighborhood and—This neighborhood is no different from a lot of people. We've lived here fifty-five years. We get along very well, but we're not intimate with anybody, you know, and—

Paul [00:40:41] This is considered part of Roland Park, is it not?

Lazarus [00:40:43] Is this is Guilford.

Paul [00:40:45] Guilford, okay.

Lazarus [00:40:46] And oh, I'm sure that—Well, now—After we got here and I asked them, you know, what was the, you know, and, uh—My husband at that time was in the building business, so he kind of built it himself, you know, from—And they say what they were afraid of was that it was not going to become just a home where the builder was going to live in, you know. And they were thinking that we were just building for, you know, development purposes, that'll say, and that's why they were curious. But I think it was all tied up with (unintelligible).

Paul [00:41:24] What would you consider—this is getting back to Mayor McKeldin—What would you consider to be his greatest strength as a public figure, as an elected official?

Lazarus [00:41:34] His greatest strength—

Paul [00:41:35] Or even as a private person too.

Lazarus [00:41:36] Mhm. Well I think his greatest strength was this feeling that came through for his—of the other person. You know, Mr. McKeldin did a lot of things with Jews. He was very much interested in the Jewish people, he always surrounded himself by Jews. Now, there's a difference between people who do things with Jews and people who make you feel that, you know, they're doing it consciously. With him it was kind of natural; he admired people who were brainy and feeling for people and I think that's why he had a lot of Jews (unintelligible; both laugh).

Paul [00:42:12] It's okay (laughs).

Lazarus [00:42:20] Definitely. But I think he was sincere, you know. And he had—as an orator, he was fantastic, you know, and I think his greatest contribution is to—So, he raised a lot of money for Israel. Now this shows, you know, what he was able to do. He was able to translate to other people what he saw as the basic thing that you strive for.

Paul [00:42:43] He could really make them understand.

Lazarus [00:42:44] Yes, he could. Uh-huh.

Paul [00:42:45] And how about his appointments of Jews and Black people? Do you think they were there at all politically motivated or were these people that he really felt deserved the positions?

Lazarus [00:42:54] Well, I don't think that—I don't know about felt deserved positions, I never thought that, but I think he had a natural feel for a person who would be on the right side of things, you know? So this is what attracted him to Waxter, you know, because Waxter, he sensed at once, was interested in people and that's what he was interested in. And—oh, you know, Simon _____ (??) was his advisor—I think that it wasn't that they deserved it, it's just that he recognized their talents and, you know, was able to use them to vote the things that he was interested in.

Paul [00:43:30] What kind of reaction did McKeldin get from the conservative white community? For example, as fellow Republicans?

Lazarus [00:43:42] Well, I thought that he always got, uh—was well-recognized by the Republicans. I don't really know enough about the politics of the thing, but I think that each time, you know—after all, it was very unusual for a man like Mr. McKeldin to become a mayor and then to become a governor twice and then to come back and be a mayor again. And, you know, even though—We're politically oriented in a different way now, but the fact he got the backing of the— And Maryland was never a Republican state so that he's one of the few Republicans that we've had who has been both at the state and the local level. I think in both—the reaction that he got is the kind of sincerity, you know. You never felt that there was anything, you know, motivating him for his own financial or other success. And this is what the lasting impression that he made on people— everybody that he came in contact with.

Paul [00:44:44] Do you have any sort of stories about McKeldin or Lillie May Jackson that you'd like to discuss?

Lazarus [00:44:50] I don't have—No. A friend of mine told me a story about McKeldin. I can't think of it now. If I can get it pieced together I'll call you up and—

Paul [00:44:59] Okay.

Lazarus [00:44:59] (laughs) But I don't have any—and I don't have any about Lillie May Jackson, sorry.

Paul [00:45:01] We can always add it on.

Lazarus [00:45:03] Mhm.

Paul [00:45:03] Have I left out anything that you'd like to add? Any of your own opinions?

Lazarus [00:45:05] But you asked me about a woman! I want to talk about myself and women (laughs).

Paul [00:45:08] Oh! Okay, sure.

Lazarus [00:45:09] (laughs).

Paul [00:45:09] On. That's great.

Lazarus [00:45:10] Well, now I was—You know, I told you, I'm more comfortable (unintelligible). I've been a feminist for a long time so that I would say that I'm a Lucy Stoner. You know, Lucy Stone was an early feminist who believed in, you know, using her own name. And so this is—I had real feeling for that, you know. I used to—I kind of said at first that—I was working with the juvenile court when I got married, and I said, "Oh, all those kids (unintelligible) to know my name and their families know my name, I'm not going to impose a new name on them." Although my married name is easier than my maiden name. But I think that—I'm interested in myself now, that as—That's one thing to be a feminist, it's another thing to be involved in the women's movement and be aware of yourself as a woman. Now, as a woman, when I was in the welfare department, I, you know, had many troubles. You know, I was infamous Ms. Lazarus, and everybody thought I—oh, Mr.—um, you know, the controller—

Paul [00:46:15] Mr. Preston.

Lazarus [00:46:16] Preston—He thought I should've been out and solace was (unintelligible). And Mr. Angelos ran for mayor one time, you know, and I thought the greatest compliment he paid me—this is tangential, it has nothing to do with what I would say—is that he fought me, whereas he should have fought what I was stood for, you see, so that—That's why I think a lot of people, you know, they—instead of—they really were against the program, but, you see, I was synonymous with the program. But on the other hand, even though I was head of a program that took a beating, because of Blackness too, I remember seeing the shift in relation to the school department, you know, and the school population to a Black—but, um—And there was confusion between, you know, Lazarus and the program. But I thought being a woman and being Jewish, as a matter of fact, helped me, you know, because they thought if I—I had the feeling that they knew that if they really were hard on me as an individual, that the women would come to my defense and the Jews would come to my defense, so those would—

Paul [00:47:17] And McKeldin would come to your defense (laughs).

Lazarus [00:47:21] (laughs) That's right.

Paul [00:47:21] A little bit from everybody.

Lazarus [00:47:23] But, uh—So at that point, you know—But I think that where I would do differently now is that I really would affirm myself as a woman in a different way. When I started out at the welfare department, the pay—I was the highest paid woman in the state, but it was a low salary compared to standards now. And my salary was put into the health department salary in Baltimore City. But then along the way somewhere, the health department wasn't—far exceeded my salary. And I think it was because I was a woman that I didn't get the same salary. Now I would have, you know, as a woman—on the difference between, you know, a feminist and as a woman—I didn't really play up that part, you know, in the discrimination that was against me as a woman salary-wise and in other ways, and I think that's the difference. And I feel, myself—I told you, I'm involved in the Woman's Organization, and in 1970—this has nothing to do with McKeldin or Lillie Jackson.

Paul [00:48:23] That's fine, really.

Lazarus [00:48:23] (laughs) In '74 two women and I—another social worker and the trained psychologist—developed a new organization, Women in Self-Help: "WISH." It's an anonymous telephone call for women in stress. And I've learned a lot in that organization. You know, when you think women, the thing gets focused in an entirely different way, you know. And this is a whole force of our, you know, service, that women call us because we are a women's organization and what we focus on is what's involved for them as women. And that's what I was trying to bring out, the difference between where I was when I was fighting for welfare, you know, and—

Paul [00:49:06] And it's surprising, too, because everyone was so concerned with not just Black civil rights, or not just housing, not just one aspect or another, not just welfare, but everything all together. And that got left out—women's rights got left out.

Lazarus [00:49:19] Mhm. Yeah, that's why I said that, uh—

Paul [00:49:20] So now it's our turn (both laugh).

Lazarus [00:49:23] It's late for me too (laughs). Okay.

Paul [00:49:26] Okay?

Lazarus [00:49:26] Mhm.

[00:49:26] *end of recording*