MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History Office

COLONEL WILLIAM A. HARRIS

Interviewed by Susan Conwell

The Governor Theodore McKeldin-Dr. Lillie May Jackson Project
An inquiry into the Civil Rights activities
of
two Maryland leaders
during
the mid-twentieth century

OH 8125

June 23, 1976

Baltimore, Maryland

MA. 5236, 5237 Cassette 236

McKeldin-Jackson Project
Interviewee: Col. William A. Harris
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Date: June 23, 1976
Place: Col. Harris' Office
Transcriber: Garnette Brant
Cassette I Side 1:1

I: I'd like to ask you first a couple of questions about how you got started in Baltimore and, particularly, how you got interested in civil rights. Now, of course, that may be an obvious question, but just generally how you got interested in your own specialty in community relations in working with the Police Department, but also how you started working with the community.

A: You asked about how did I first get started working with the community. Well, I guess I had been involved all of my adult life, and maybe when I was a youngster, I was a member of the YMCA and I always was working with the younger groups there. After that I went away to college and I played football and basketball and all the things that a young man would do. After that, I worked for the Department of Recreation in Baltimore City when I was in college, and that helped to defray my expenses and also working with young people. After that I was a Parole and Probation Officer which meant that my job was to be involved with people.

Once you had been released from an institution, my job was helping to find a job and go back to the community and trying to make a better citizen than you were before you went in. After that, I was a United States Marshal for the State of Maryland. In fact, all of these were "firsts," I guess. So I guess I have the honor and distinction of being the first black Parole Officer in the State of Maryland, the first black

Deputy United States Marshal. So this was a job, and mostly I was involved with blacks. So I guess I was working with my people. And it gave me an insight on what I wanted to do. So my major was sociology with a minor in psychology. And this kept me involved.

I was a National Guard Officer when they had the civil disturbance down in Cambridge, Maryland, and the Adjutant General saw fit to bring me there as a Company Commander to help to work with them during the time. At that time the Adjutant General was George Gelston who was the Adjutant General for the State of Maryland. They moved the National Guard out in about April and left me there until November. There were editorials in the various papers calling me the "One Man Guard."

My job was to go to Washington to work with the Attorney General who at that time was Bobby Kennedy, and I was instrumental in helping to get the Food Stamp Program with the United States Senator from Maryland who was Daniel Brewster at the time. Then we got the Food Stamp Program. We got athletic programs set up. We brought the young people from Cambridge up to Baltimore to see baseball games. I had the Baltimore Bullets Basketball Team come to Cambridge for an exhibition. These are the things that I was doing. The Baltimore City Police Department changed the structure and they had an interim Police Commissioner who was the Adjutant General, George Gelston, whose name I mentioned before. When he was brought in as the Police Commissioner they had a new position which was called the Community Relations Division, and he asked me would I assume this role. So by would mean that you had to deal with

people in the community, go out and let the people know what the police were trying to do and let them know what they wanted that the folks could help with. I had that job for about six years, and while working there the Governor asked me to come on his staff to do just that thing. So they brought me in as Executive Assistant to the Governor to work with minority problems to see what I could do and what the Governor was not aware of that blacks or minorities needed. And since being here, you know, I have not just devoted my time with blacks. I have been working with women and other minority groups and everybody in general. So it keeps me quite involved.

I: How did you--you went through a lot of training generally in law enforcement?

A: I guess I had one of the most successful educations in the field of community relations and law enforcement that anybody could have.

I: It looks like it. Yes.

A: As you can see on the wall here, I have been to all the schools. I have been to the University of Southern California where I finished in the fifth class there in a community relations course. Also, I have been to Ponce, Puerto Rico, and I took a six-week course there. I have been to Michigan State and took the police community relations course there. I have been to the University of Indiana, so I have been to most of the schools.

I: How did you get the opportunity to go to all these schools?

A: Well, I can say that the Police Commissioner, Donald Pomerlau, is a very progressive kind of Commissioner, and he wanted all of his top people to be trained in the field that they had been assigned to. Mine was Police Community Relations, so he exposed me or had me attend all of these ~~groups~~ schools. After that I became the Chief of Traffic for the Baltimore City Police Department, and then he sent me to Northwestern to the Traffic Institute. So that's how I got an education, I guess, free, in all these things. In fact, I almost had a Master's in one of these other fields. I have a Master's. But I could have gotten one in Traffic if I had pursued the course and I could have gotten one in some other fields, too, because I have a lot of involvement in things I have been doing. My background is very extensive in so many fields. I have covered police community relations, in traffic, in social work, and that kind of thing.

I: In the 1950's in Baltimore, we've spoken today with [David] Glenn, and he said that the Urban League was the cutting edge of the civil rights movement at the time. Now, at the time you were just beginning or were working harder in the middle, however. Would you agree with that statement and were you at all involved in some of the public accommodation drives? Those were later, but the job push?

A: What he is saying is true, but it was not just the Urban League. It was the Urban League, the NAACP, and a lot of people within the community were working together. So you can say, I guess, that at that time there was a man by the name of Furman Templeton who was Dave Glenn's boss. So I guess you can say they

were the prime movers of it. Because that was the organized professional agency. But there were a lot of people in smaller groups, but that was the only agency with any credentials, I guess, that was well known. I'm sure that they did a lot, but there were a lot of people that helped the program also.

I: Were you a member of the NAACP at that time?

A: Well, I guess most blacks who have, you know, if you are not a member you are a working person working with it. Yes, I was a member. In fact, I have always had a membership in the NAACP. It was a must. When you are talking about Dr. Lillie Jackson. She would pick up the phone and tell you to bring your money over, or "I'm going to pay it for you and you get the money over here to me." So she was that kind of a lady.

I: What kinds of things were you working on at that time in this general field of civil rights?

A: Well, I guess I was working with most of the youth. In fact, when you say the field of civil rights, I go back much farther than that you're talking about, since you are talking about Mrs. Jackson. Mrs. Jackson was head of the NAACP at the time and then we, in fact, I walked in a picket line back in 1936 and '37 and '38. All during those times we were trying to break down the barriers of the A & P Stores and other stores within Baltimore. So, to answer your question, they had a Youth Movement so the young people of ~~Atomic~~ Tommy Tuckers, which was a store up on Pennsylvania Avenue (I don't know what year this was in)--but as young people, Mrs. Jackson would always come out and give us signs as we were walking in front of these places.

I: Could you tell me about that early period? What kind of things were...?

A: Yes. Well, in that early period there were not too many people concerned at that time. In fact, the civil rights movement did not get popular until recent years. And I guess Mrs. Jackson would pool the resources that she had. Any young lawyer that would finish law school, like your Judge Watson, Judge Harry Cole, Judge George Russell, these kind of young men worked free for the NAACP. Just as soon as they became members of the Bar, then she solicited their aid. Any young man or woman who was finishing high school or college who was out here doing social work, they would work with Mrs. Jackson. So to answer your question, we all worked together for nothing to help to get this thing off the ground.

I: And that work at the time was mostly picket lines?

A: It was mostly picket lines and meetings, and meeting with the various state and city representatives. Now you're talking about during the time of Mayor McKeldin, Governor McKeldin, and Mayor Tommy D'Alesandro. These were the times when we actually had the problems.

I: Where were the meetings held at the time?

A: Oh, mostly at black churches. The ministers have always been a part of the movement in Maryland. I guess around the country it was. You know, Dr. Martin Luther King, all of his staff people were ministers, you see. I guess the ministers had more time than anyone else.

I: So the early meetings, during the depression that would be, were held in the churches and then...

A: In the churches. They have always been held in the churches. They would branch out into some homes and things of

that type. But the churches, they were the places where most of the meetings were held.

I: While you were picketing in this early period, there was so much wrong. Again, I guess that's a loaded question, but were there specific grievances?

A: Yes. I guess it was mostly then for jobs. You see, how can I buy a house or how can I buy a car if I don't have the background, the education and training to qualify myself for a good job? At that time, that's why I always have said that the older black teachers in Maryland are much more qualified than the older white teachers because we could not pursue a Master's Degree in the State of Maryland. Now we have had friends of mine (who are in my age group) have degrees from the University of Wisconsin, New York University, the University of California. So the State of Maryland did give us money to go other places to pursue an education. So most of the white teachers during that time only went to the University of Maryland. So we had a wider education.

I: Were there other leaders as influential and with such a drive as Lillie May Jackson?

A: Yes. At that time you had Dr. Carl Murphy who at that time was the President of the Afro-American, which is the black newspaper here. And you mentioned, well, Dr. Furman Templeton of the Urban League. I guess they were about the top three people that you could mention.

I: What about in the forties then? Did the same kind of action occur?

A: Yes, but other people came in. I guess, when you say in

the forties, most of us were going away to the wars at that time. So when you say from '40 to about '48, I was not involved in that time and I don't think anybody in my age group was. There wasn't very much done during that time because there was a war to fight.

I: That's right. It seems to me that Dr. Jackson as a woman was rather exceptional in many ways. Were there many black women involved in the movement?

A: No. I don't think so. Not during that time. No. She was one of a kind. You had some people in education and other fields, but Dr. Lillie Jackson ran the whole spectrum.

I: Could you tell me a little more about what she was doing and how you were involved with her?

A: What she was doing, she was concerned about the involvement of the total black. In other words, equal opportunities as far as jobs are concerned, as far as housing was concerned, and education. These were the focal points. But those are the three things that are important now--jobs, education, and a nice place to live. And this was her thing. I guess she could walk into any top official's office in the state unannounced and say she'd like to see him, and walk right in and she was accepted. You hear of the open-door policy. Well, she opened the doors.

I: In the early sixties after the main push, shall we say, for jobs in the fifties, throughout the fifties and, of course, continuing through now, say if we go back to what seems to be a crucial year--'62, '63, '64--with the passage of the Omnibus Civil Rights Bill, disturbances in Cambridge, and general disturbances, could you tell me something about that period if

if you--now at this time you were in Cambridge, is that correct?

A: I was in Cambridge. Right. That was '64 -- '66. That was before the riots. Right. I was in Cambridge then and that's when we had the problem there, at that time. You know, it's the same thing. The blacks in Cambridge are living the same place that they were living during, well, before the disturbances. There were five wards or four wards or something there and the blacks lived in the second ward, and that was all that they had. They had the Elks Hall, was in the second ward, the American Legion Hall was in the second ward, and all the bars and the taverns were in the second ward, all of the black churches, the A.M.E. Churches and the Baptist Churches were in the second ward. So they were put in that position. The black policemen patrolled only the second ward.

I: How many black policemen were there patrolling at that time?

A: During my time there was only three--three black policemen. And one, his name was Jews. He was the first black policeman in the State of Maryland. He has since retired and he is still living in Cambridge. He is still staying on Pine Street where he stood when he was a policeman.

I: How large a population did the second ward have at that time?

A: Would you say, what? About two thousand, I guess, if it was that many.

I: Could you tell me something about how the riots started in Cambridge, or the disturbances, and what kind of feeling the community had with respect the passage of the Civil Rights Bill and to McKeldin before and during, particularly?

A: Well, see now, we're talking about two different areas. I was there during the time with Governor Tawes, and then Governor McKeldin was there prior to that time. What I started saying was that what caused the riots in Cambridge was the same thing that caused the riots other places. You know you had people that want jobs, they're expanding, the people have, the housing situation was very bad which is still bad there. Well, I think the thing that caused it was Gloria Richardson, Rap Brown, Stokeley Carmichael. The civil rights people were coming and telling the people. You see, what always starts riots as far as I'm concerned is that maybe you can't see the trees for the forest. But people living there don't see what's happening. Then you get people from out-of-town coming in telling them, "Are you living in these kind of situations? Why can't you have this and why can't you have that?" They feel the leaders are developed in the area.

These people who get an education from national figures--Gloria Richardson lived in Cambridge and she became part of the movement by meeting Rap Brown and Stokeley Carmichael. So when she became a leader, these people from out of state started coming into Maryland. And this was it, man, they were demanding to see members of the Town Council and they wanted to see why don't blacks have equal opportunities as far as schooling is concerned. Why can't they move out of the second ward? So these are the things that kept on building up, and at that time there the Chief of Police was very dogmatic. He was very strong. His name was Kimmelman, and, you know, he was not going to see any black get anywhere in Cambridge. And the Mayor of the town was

the same way. They wouldn't even speak to the black leaders, and I guess most of the problem was there. And then the National Guard--I'm talking about before '68--once the National Guard was brought in, then General George Gelston opened up a lot of doors. He was able to bring these factions together. He could bring the whites and blacks in, and my role--it was an odd situation that General Gelston was able to relate to the blacks and I was talking to the whites. In fact, he spent most of his time on Pine Street and I was up on Race Street. And then we would have a meeting of the minds at the end of the day to see what could be done; and then we were responsible for bringing them into the meeting place sitting across the table discussing certain problems. This, I think, helped a lot.

Then after that, then it goes back to the Rap Brown ~~area~~ era. I wasn't there in '68. I was here in Baltimore as a Baltimore City Policeman. But when the riots broke loose there it was just when Rap Brown came back and made his famous statement that, "I spoke in Detroit and I spoke this place, and I burned down this place and I burned down that place. Now let's burn down Cambridge." Or words to that effect. And that's when they ran wild and burned up everything on Race Street. But what they did, the blacks didn't hurt the white area at all. They burned down everything that they had. They burned down the Elks Hall and they burned down the school which was a portable school at the time. They burned down the bars and everything, the dance halls.

I: Well, we see that today in South Africa.

A: Right. It's the same thing.

I: To go back to the first series or the first set of disturbances, I guess, you mentioned the national leaders and the local leaders meeting and educating the people in the area, what really triggered, though, the...?

A: Well, let me tell you something here. In 1966 CORE had its national convention here in July. This was when you were talking about Dave Glenn. This was when Dave Glenn and I became involved. I was a member of the Baltimore City Police Department. Dave was either with the Human Relations or either on the Mayor's Staff, one or the other. I don't know where he was at that time, and then we became very close. And the national leaders, once they came here, CORE's people remained here in Baltimore, set up an office here in Baltimore. This was when the Baltimore people started to--a guy named James Griffin was the first local President of CORE here in Maryland. The ones that came out of town was a white fellow by the name of Stu ~~Wetzler.~~ Wechsler. He came into town. A man named Danny Gant came into town. Walter Lively came into town. Walter Brooks came into town. And all these people were members of CORE; and then they were having meetings with the power structure and some of these local leaders started to joining this group. And this is how we got started, I guess, it must be around 1966 or '67.

But I can say, during the riots some of these people that were members of CORE actually worked with the Police Department in trying to put down the looting and the burning and things of that type. There were times when I picked up some of these civil rights leaders and rode them around town in my car and

asked them to go out and talk to them, trying to keep the people off the streets. These were the things, I guess when you're talking about your Dave Glenn's and your Joe Smith's and these kind of people, they were working with the City Government or the City Fathers and I was working with the Police Commissioner. I guess the Police Commissioner just let me go and do my thing my way and then the National Guard became part of it and so it was like a series of things that happened, but my main job was to work--in fact, I used to go every morning. I had a staff of four whites and four blacks, and we would go and sit in CORE's Headquarters. I even had one go and sit in the Black Panthers' Headquarters, and we would relate that way to them. Also, the Ku Klux Klans, they became part of all this, too. We had men that had infiltrated into that organization.

We were not the Intelligence Division of the Police Department. We were Community Relations. I am sure that the Police Commissioner had people infiltrating all of these organizations, but I did not know them. My job was a part of a different involvement, I guess.

I: At this time--this is about the time that the Target City Youth Program, the Target City Program was set up--the way you're talking, it sounds like there are many layers and you were more or less involved either implicitly or explicitly in first the community and then the Police Department, and then the Mayor's Office, I would assume. Did McKeldin cooperate? You said the Police Commissioner at that time had a free hand.

A: At that time McKeldin was the Mayor, but Tommy D'Alesandro was President of the City Council; and I dealt more with Tommy

D'Alesandro than I did with the Mayor.

I: Was D'Alesandro cooperative?

A: He was very, very--right. You know what happened? He inherited the ~~morality~~ mayoralty after that and only served one term, but he was the Mayor of Baltimore City during the riots. He had the most involved time for anybody to be in office. So when you said McKeldin, McKeldin was not here when the big impact hit, the riots and stuff. Tommy D'Alesandro was here then. But, then I always worked with Tommy D'Alesandro. In fact, a number of times we tried to reach the Mayor and we couldn't reach him, and Tommy always was on the scene.

I: And he was cooperative and very concerned?

A: Oh, yes. He would go out of his way to try to help me. He rode to Washington on the bus to try to get federal funds. He did those kind of things. Whenever you called for him, he was always on the scene.

I: At this time then, McKeldin was really almost behind the scenes or...?

A: Yes, he was there. You see, I'm trying to figure out the situation. Dave Glenn was the Assistant to McKeldin. A guy named Joe Smith was the Assistant to Tommy D'Alesandro, so I worked; and when Tommy came in I think Dave Glenn had the Community Relations Division. So I worked closer with that group. I didn't work that close with Tommy, I mean with McKeldin. But then McKeldin was--I go away back much farther than that. When I became the first black Parole and Probation Officer, the Republican Administration was in and he was the Governor at that time. McKeldin was. So he made me the first black Parole and

Probation Officer. McKeldin. This is my relationship with him. Then when I became the first black United States Marshal, he was the Governor at that time. So that's my involvement with him, but not doing any of these civil rights things. I had very little involvement with McKeldin.

I: We'll just hit one more question on McKeldin and then I'd like to move up.

A: I know your interview is mostly on McKeldin and Mrs. Jackson, but my involvement with McKeldin was not as much involved as I was with Tommy D'Alesandro. When was McKeldin in office as Mayor?

I: '63 to '67? I think that's right.

A: That's right, because when the riots hit, Tommy D'Alesandro was the Mayor in '68.

I: Right.

I: How would you assess the feeling in the black community toward the passage of the Omnibus Civil Rights Bill in '63? When I spoke with Frieda Coleman she said that people thought it was great until it wasn't put into action and that there was a tremendous surge of feeling and excitement, and then a big let-down. How would you assess that? Now you were on the other side.

A: Frieda was an activist. She was out there running around with the people and we became very close friends. I think she was working for the Children's Society or something, on Lafayette Avenue?

I: Yes. Family and Children's Society.

A: In fact, she was instrumental in having me put on the Board over there at that place. But we were very close. We used to see each other and I used to always tease her. I would say, "Frieda, when I lock you up, I won't put you in the patrol wagon. I'm going to put you in my car, because you're my friend." But to answer your question, I think we expected too much at the time, and nothing came through. In other words, the law was passed, but nothing was done to provide the people with the things that were promised them. And we had to still fight. Just like now. When you say that you live in a city like Baltimore, we don't even control our own destiny as far as blacks. They try to give you all kinds of things. I guess statistics can be twisted any way you want, which way you want it to work. But when you look at it, say, like this, like Baltimore, we don't even have a black Mayor. We are very

proud because we have five members in the City Council. I live in the Fifth Councilmanic District, and we couldn't even elect a black Councilman the last time. So I'm saying, you know, I don't think we have gotten anything. We're still fighting. Oh, yes, we moved into a few more homes which we were able to buy in certain areas and we have better jobs. Oh, yes, we have a whole lot of jobs in education; a whole lot of jobs in Welfare; but there are a whole lot of spots where we don't have positions. You know, we haven't broken the barriers there yet. So I think we have gotten some things, but I don't think we can say, "Well, we have arrived," or "We have gotten what we're supposed to," because we haven't.

But Baltimore should be almost a black town like Atlanta. I've been down to Atlanta and those people are much farther ahead than we are. You see, blacks in Baltimore have become too complacent. If you had a few people that would get out there and fight, then you'd have some sit back and watch the ones who are fighting and just say, "Nothing's going to happen." But something can happen if we all will put our forces together.

I don't think we have any one person we can say is a leader. Maybe you can say the whites don't have a leader either. But at one time when you had your Dr. Carl Murphy's and your Dr. Lillie Jackson's, they could pick up the phone and call all of the black people that were the so-called leaders or representatives of black people and say, "Come down to my office at the Afro-American." And you look around at the fifteen or twenty people there--this department aide, that person, and that person. But we don't have that kind of thing now. But we do

have elected officials. We have five State Senators in Annapolis who are trying to do something for us. We have members on the House of Delegates there. We have one black United States Congressman. What I'm saying is, we don't have the strength with the amount of people that we have in the city. And just say, I'm sitting up here, O.K., I'm a token, you know. I'm the Executive Assistant to the Governor of the State of Maryland which means a lot to a lot of black people.

But what can I do? The Governor gives me free reign to operate the way I want to. He allows me to come out and bring back the problems that we have. But he can't do it himself. He has to have a staff of people, just like the various Secretaries that we have--Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of Health and all. They're not complying with the Government's Code of Fair Practice. When you look into the Agencies, they don't have an equal number of blacks according to what they're supposed to have. But the Governor has been a strong Governor. He has insisted that things will change, but as long as you have people under you who don't see fit to make changes unless you are forced to make changes, then I think that the members in Annapolis are doing the best that they could. But what kind of strength do you have when you are a minority in Annapolis? You've got to work out various kinds of deals with others. We have the largest area in the State of Maryland--Baltimore City--and I'm saying we're supposed to have the largest number of black elected officials in anywhere in the country.

But they are not getting things that should be given to them as members of the State Delegation.

It's nice to say that you have a black person sitting in the Governor's office and I have no hang-ups about his involvement. All I have to do is pick up the phone and say, "Governor, I'd like to speak to you about certain problems that we have." He will say, "What can we do about the problems?" He will bring them in. But this is after the fact, you know. What are we doing before the fact? There were hang-ups about should the appointing authority in the Baltimore City Police Department be given to the Mayor. Some people were saying, "How can you control an agency that you don't have any authority in appointing the Number One person." Then some would say, "Well, if it goes to Baltimore City, it becomes too political, because everybody will want his friend, or his sister or his brother appointed to a higher position within the Department. As long as it stays in Annapolis, the Governor has no ax to grind. He is just appointing a man, so you run the Police Department." And it worked good for years that way, and it was not as political. I don't know. Now the appointing authority is with the Mayor, and I don't know what's going to happen. But it has worked while it was in Annapolis and there were no problems, but now it is changed. I don't know if it's good or bad. We have to see. And I still say that we've got one of the better, if not one of the best, if not the best, Commissioner of Police in the country, Donald Pomerlau. He changed the whole Department around. The man that commands more policemen within the Department is a black man. He is a Colonel. Colonel

Robinson is the Chief of Patrol. That means every uniformed policeman in the Baltimore City Police Department is under his control. So he did that. Before he came to Baltimore in 1966, there was only one black top-ranking police officer. He was a black Captain. Only one. And then we were about two or three percent. I'm saying we're about fifteen or eighteen percent now. I came in as a Major. I was the first black field grade officer in the Baltimore City Police Department. Now they have about five or six of field grade people. So I'm saying progress has been made in some fields. O.K?

In the Department of Education things have moved. O.K? Fine. Going back to that time, there was a white Superintendent of Schools, and then we got a black one, then a black one succeeded him. So I'm saying in the education way, maybe we are moving, but we don't have enough money involved in education.

In housing we can live anywhere we want to live in the State of Maryland. The same old thing. But how in the hell can you live anywhere if you don't have a good job to get money enough to buy that home in an area where you want to go? We have too many black students going away to college taking courses in education and sociology. Those fields are filled, you know. And you can see them now. My secretary can show you. You have no idea. I have resumes of people who are finishing up college with all kinds of degrees who can't find employment. I guess it's all over the country. But the ones who come back home. I have two daughters that are away in school. One is at Seton Hall, and one is at a school called Chaney in Pennsylvania. They will be finishing up this year, too. They will be coming back to

Baltimore looking for a job. One is majoring in government and one is majoring in special education, but those are two fields where you can find employment. And, also, the high schools are not counseling right. Don't send all of them into one field, you know? I feel that the counselors in the field of education should advise these young people. Don't flood the market with school teachers. If you have any special talent, go into something else. If you are good in biology or chemistry, try to be a doctor or try to be a research chemist.

I: If we could go back again just a little bit--in the late sixties, then, I don't think we have covered that, there was another series of disturbances.

A: That was in 1968. That was when Martin Luther King was assassinated. Right.

I: Well, generally, I would like sort of another picture of what happened, particularly in Cambridge or any other areas that you were involved in then. What really happened. You mentioned H. Rap Brown.

A: Right here in Baltimore it was a thing that happened. King was assassinated and then it was a chain reaction. We knew he was coming to every area within the country, Watts and every place else. So when he reached here, we knew he was coming. We tried to work with people like CORE and them, and this gave them a chance to jump off and become involved. This was when the Administration got together with the black leaders and the white leaders in varying groups. In fact, I was here in Police Community Relations at the time and I set up a group of men, and they were ministers, white and black ministers, and I had

them go around and ring bells and tell the parents to keep the young people in the house and don't allow them to come out and cause disturbances. At that time they were burning and looting and everything else; and I had about twenty-five ministers. The ministers walked through the areas that they were known and that kind of thing. We talked to members of CORE and other agencies, and CORE was saying, "We don't want it this way, but maybe this is the way that it has to be done."

There were some people saying that people had to be shocked into reality, but we as part of, I guess I had to be a part of the establishment because I was working at the Baltimore City Police Department. But,also, I am black so I know what's happening. But what they were doing, and if you can look at the City of Baltimore, they burned down all of the conveniences that they had, mostly the things that were in the black areas. Then the white business people--the merchants--became involved and they gave monies to help jobs. In fact, some of the merchants downtown created jobs for young people in summertime and gave money to the Department of Recreation and other Agencies to send kids on picnics and outings in the summertime. You know, you're talking about a long, hot summer. But this was the thing we were trying to keep down, this kind of thing. And I feel that the whole City of Baltimore became involved--the Junior Chamber of Commerce and everybody from all sides of this, because we were telling about our city. We have a lot of people from out of town but once you become a part of Baltimore I guess you just become wrapped up into the mainstream and everybody became totally involved. The police were not out there shooting and beating people up because we

did not have one person shot or killed in the State of Maryland. We were talking about down in Cambridge. That's one thing, the National Guard didn't fire one shot. The Baltimore City Police Department didn't kill anybody, but there were some rough times on the streets walking the streets. You met Mr. Glenn, was walking with his counterpart who might be white. And we were sending white ministers down by Patterson Park and areas where the whites were. And we were sending black ministers out in the black areas trying to tell them. We had meetings and rallies in the churches.

You see, this thing lasted for a long time. We even had to bring the federal troops into Maryland, because what happened, when the Baltimore City Police Department could not contain it, the Police Commissioner asked the Governor to bring the National Guard in. Then the Governor brought the National Guard in, and then the Police Commissioner and Adjutant General both got together and said, "We can't contain this. You've got to bring federal troops." So they had to fly troops in from North Carolina, I think, one of those airborne units. They came. We had reached that stage.

But while that was happening, you had people working behind the scenes. This is where your Tommy D'Alesandros came out with his staff and your Police Commissioner Pomerlau and your George Gelston, the Adjutant General. All factions were working. Your ministers. Your lay people. Everybody. That's when I had my little group of people, ministers and also civic leaders. I brought them in to try and talk and squash it. We even got the hoodlums off the streets and brought them in to try and work

on these kind of things. We brought in guys that were dealing in numbers, number backer's writers to bring them in because they knew some other people and said, "We know you're all operating out there." I'd say, "I have nothing to do with this. I'm a policeman and we want you to help us." We solicited the aid of everybody in this community, the young as well as the old.

I: At the time, and afterwards, I guess, there were charges of police brutality. Were they justified?

A: This might be funny to you, and this was the case, and this is actually the truth. When you say police brutality, an officer was trying to make an arrest. He grabbed this woman. O.K.? She bit his finger and held his finger in her mouth. He took his hand on his stick and hit her on the head to release his finger. And this might sound like a joke--he was brought up on the charges for police brutality. I was just using that for an example. Sure, I'm sure that there were some cases where some officers over-reacted, and yet, some of the people just fell out and screamed and did things to cause this kind of thing. So when you say were they? When you say police brutality. What is police brutality? A police officer is supposed to just use enough force to make an arrest. O.K.? If you are refusing to be arrested and you stretch out on the street, and the police has to drag you or pick you up or something of that type. They will call that police brutality, too.

But I don't know of any incidents where anyone was brought into a police precinct where he had been beat up or his face was beat up or that kind of thing. Frieda Coleman will tell you. They were going out. She was out on the streets. I guess

she will tell you. They'd go and the police had to pick them up and carry them in, you know. And those kind of things. So not much. Officers, police, are human like anyone else. You're going to get some police that will over-react. I'm not saying that they wouldn't. I'm sure they'd do it. There are good police and there are good activists. There are bad police and there are bad activists; and there are good people and there are bad people. But, no. No. Human emotions will become involved. So, I would be a fool to stop and say that there was no police brutality. I'm sure that there was some. But it might have been brought on by the circumstances.

I: What about once people went to the police station? Mrs. Coleman mentioned that, I believe it was Walter Lively claimed that he had been hosed down in the police station once he had been arrested.

A: O.K. What you're saying is true. We heard that these things were happening in some of the areas, some of the precincts because Walter Lively was one of the worst activists we had here in the city. We never could pin nothing down on Walter. Well, I guess you read the other day where he got picked up in the supermarket. But what I'm saying is, Walter was always on the scene where a building was on fire or something had been looted and we never could put him, you know, there. We would find him there. If I was the first one on the scene, there was Walter Lively standing there watching. So we never. And then you asked if he was hosed down, I don't know. But the Police Commissioner did send out a memo to all Captains at that time telling them not to do anything to these

people that were arrested and allow them to have the representatives or the Counsels to come and visit them in the cellblock to see that we had not done what they were saying. And that's one thing that Pomerlau insisted upon, that every time one of these people were arrested to have the--what are these attorneys that you have going around helping people?

I: Legal Aid?

A: Not the Legal Aid. The other group. They were activists, too. They're still involved around the country.

I: ACLU?

A: ACLU. ACLU always was on the scene. Always. And we always made a point, in fact, I knew all the top people there. In fact, I used to come and speak to their groups and they were very helpful in helping us in what we wanted, because we would always call them and ask them to come on the scene to see that none of these things were happening. You know, what I am saying is that I was a policeman during this time, but we had a good image. My Division, the Police Community Relations Division, had a good image with these people. In fact, they would call me. The ACLU would call me and say, "Major Harris, will you come down? We have a problem." And we would relate to them. And the Commissioner would always tell me, "I want you out there. I want you out there on the.".and I wore my uniform the whole time because I was the top black official in the Police Department then. I was a Major so I had to respond to everything. But, no. No. We did not hide anything. I'm sure what you said might have happened. I could not say that it did not

happen. But once we learned--you see, a lot of things we did not get until after the fact, and then once we'd do that, we could do something about it. I could do something about it. If I would receive a report that this had happened to Walter Lively, then I would go and one of my men would go on the scene and we would talk to the Precinct Captain. And if it happened, we'd say, "Captain, don't let this happen again because we don't want to have to do it." That kind of thing.

I: Did you work at all--well, of course, you must have worked with Dr. Jackson at the time as well?

A: See, she was older then. You know, and then--I have to say this. Dr. Jackson could not function during the riots. You see, Her job was prior to that. She did not fit. In other words, she was from the old school and the old school made it possible for guys to be sitting here like I am sitting here today. But during the riots, no. They were not doing anything. Now her daughter, you know, she was a civil rights attorney so she was involved, but Dr. Lillie Jackson--I think in the last six or seven years--she worked up until the end. She always was out there. But she never was out in the streets for nothing like this, because you couldn't expose her to this kind of thing. These were young people rufning wild, and I guess she wouldn't have fit into this kind of a situation at all.

I: Did you work with her at all in the setting up of Freedom House?

A: In fact, I was her--right here. Here's an award which was given to me.

I: I can see it from here.

A: Here is the plaque, Freedom House. I received the highest honors that Freedom House gave. You name it and I've been involved in it. Yes, I helped her. In fact, I'm on the Board. If you look on the left-hand side of the stationery you will see Colonel William A. Harris' name on the Board at the Freedom House. Oh, yes. I worked very closely. In fact, the Heritage Foundation gave her a plaque, or put a plaque on Freedom House last week, and I presented an honorary thing from Governor Mandel naming that day as Dr. Lillie Jackson Day. So I've been involved with Dr. Jackson all down the line.

I: How did that start, Freedom House? How was it begun?

A: I think Freedom House was an off-shoot of the NAACP. What happened, after Dr. Jackson retired from the NAACP she still wanted to be active. Then one of the former school teachers in Baltimore City became the President, Mrs. McMillan became the President of the NAACP. And being the kind of person that Dr. Jackson was, she started Freedom House where she still could keep involved. She was doing the same thing on the local level rather than going national with the NAACP, because her time was limited and she was getting older.

She had a Major Watkins at that time with the Baltimore City Police Department. They started a drug program and that kind of thing. She would have people in the various positions in the community to come and talk to the people in Freedom House about what could be done. Like housing. She would have the Housing Inspector to come to tell you what you could do to improve your housing. She had a member from the Baltimore City

Police Department to come. She had a man from the Sanitation Department to tell you how many days a week your trash would be removed. It was that kind of thing. It was more of an informative kind of thing, information seeking agency, Freedom House was.

I: Another drastic switch. Lillie May Jackson and the NAACP, and CORE, and the Urban League seem to have been moving in one stream, what you called the old school. Or some, many members, shall we say, and many of the leaders. Could you tell me something about the rise and fall, its causes, reasons, effect of the Black Panthers here? Then, perhaps, also, mention Mr. Young, who I believe two years ago you recommended his release from prison. Could you tell me something about that? What role they played, say, in '68. Of course, they were set up in '66.

A: O.K. The Black Panthers had a man by the name of Warren Hart. He was the Captain of the Black Panthers. He was the foremost employee with the Maryland National Guard. Warren Hart joined the Panthers thinking that they could do some good for the community.

On the national level, the Black Panthers' image was not very good, so he could never get a foothold here in Baltimore. In fact, the thing that they stood for nationally was not recognized by the NAACP and Urban League or other organizations. They all had refused to identify with the Panthers, and the Panthers were talking about the white man and I guess you know the Urban League and the NAACP have whites on their staff and also have whites on their various committees and things. But the Panthers, they were all black. So the thinking of the

power structure and the thinking of the smart blacks and smart whites felt that when you say you want to relate to all black, ~~and an awful lot think~~ and my philosophy is that anything all white or anything all ~~white~~ black cannot succeed. You need a combination of both.

Cassette 237

McKeldin-Jackson Project
Interviewee: Col. William A. Harris
Interviewer: Susan Conwell
Date: June 23, 1976
Place: Col. Harris' Office
Transcriber: Garnette Brant
Cassette II Side 1:31

A: It was always in East Baltimore, and they had a house over there some place. There were never more than eight to ten people that you could actually identify with the Black Panthers. When they would come out on the street, they would try to solicit some of the young children in the area to carry signs and do things. But very few people were willing to identify themselves with the Black Panthers. CORE, yes, people joined. Also, that was an outside agency. So you see these agencies came into town from 1966 on. NAACP has been well established here. The Urban League has been well established here. So this was an outside group and all of the people came from the outside. So, in Baltimore your Frieda Coleman's and your James Griffin's joined CORE. So that gave them a base here in Baltimore which was some people that they could bring to work with them. And they were doing a lot of things.

They were trying to set up educational programs and trying to have development of two or three garages or filling stations. So they were trying to create job opportunities for black people. But the Panthers always were against this and against that. In other words, they did not come up with any recommendations to do constructive things. If they did, nobody would pay attention to them.

I: They didn't try and set up any of the kinds of programs that they set up.....free breakfasts, free lunch?

A: Oh, yes. They had a food program at this church up on Eager Street. They had this food program and that ran for a

little while. But that didn't last.

I: Was that in the first couple of years?

A: No. That was in later years, I think. That was after the riots, I think, when they had that. I think they were just trying to hang on. That was the only constructive thing that they ever did, that free breakfast thing. And that did not work because the kids that should have gotten it didn't come, you know, and they were throwing the food away.

Well, you see, they could not get the identification with anyone here in Baltimore that would pick it up and say, "We're going to help the Black Panthers here in Baltimore." All the support they had was coming from out of the state.

I: Were they involved in the riots?

A: Well, we could not say they were. We figured that they were. We feel--when I say "we" I'm talking about Maryland and Baltimore City Police. We feel that they were quite instrumental in a lot of things that happened. But you can't accuse a person until you have the facts.

I: Could you give me any specific examples of where--you thought they were behind the scenes, but there was nothing.

A: O.K. We feel that they were partly responsible for burning of the stores over on Gay Street. That was one of the things. That was the main one. There were various things where they were seen at different spots, but nothing concrete. In fact, none of them were. We had guys there that we knew like--and then you had another group, too, called the Soul School. They were here during the time. This was with a guy named , Shotgun Green and all these kind of people. But we could not actually pin the Panthers down, but we thought

that they were responsible for some things. And I am sure that the Baltimore City Police Department Intelligence Division had a dossier on each one of them. But that was not my thing to become involved with that. Mine was just to work with the community and bring them close together. But anything of that type, the Intelligence Division--up to about two years ago they had a record on everybody then, but I think all records had to be destroyed. They were destroyed. I think the Attorney General said you could not keep a file on any of these organizations any more, and I understand the Baltimore City Police Department destroyed their files. In fact, I know that they said that. I called them since I've been here to try to get information on some guy that I knew had been part of the Panthers, and the man in charge told me that they did not have any more records. but he knew something off the top of his head.

I: What about Mr. Young?

A: O.K. Cheeky Young, to me, was a victim of circumstances. I feel that old Cheeky was part of the group. He was quite involved with the group, but the murders and killings that they had claimed that he was involved in, they did not have any facts showing where he was actually involved. The man went back to school, pursued an education and that's when I became involved with him, that's what he was trying to do. I felt that he would be more, I guess, he could do much more of a job out here in the community and helping people than by remaining in jail. I have a warm feeling for people trying to help themselves, and there was nothing on his record showing where he was

that bad. He was just part of a group that was bad, and then this murder over in Leakin Park where he was part of, they don't have any concrete evidence that he killed the man. And everybody else was released. He went to jail.

I: How many other people were originally arrested?

A: It could have been three or four, I guess, and the other three got off and Cheeky went to jail.

I: Has anything been done? You made the recommendation two years ago and he's up for parole.

A: Oh, he's out. He's out now. He's been working with the various agencies within the state. I think right now he could be working with the--you know, there was a woman, a professor at Morgan College who used to write me letters all the time about old Cheeky. That's how I became involved. And he was on this program where they allowed him to come out and go to school, and he won his degree from Morgan College. I don't know what he's doing now. I just lost track after he came out of jail. He did call me a little while ago recently and said he was looking for another job. He worked at Morgan College for a little while. (Excuse me, what job did Cheeky Young have at Morgan?) Oh, yes, they had a program out there called "University Without Walls." He worked with that program.

I: What was the Soul School?

A: The Soul School was a group of men and women. They were down on Fremont Avenue in Baltimore. It was an activist group, and they always would show up on the scene, and they were hollering and screaming for--any time there was a case that they came upon police brutality whenever anybody was arrested

they always would show up on the scene with cameras and try and take a picture of the policeman making the arrest, that kind of thing. They called themselves more of a protective organization for the black people, and they were out involved with housing for black people. You know, everybody had the same thing. But when you talk about, see, all these groups, like I'm talking about Soul School; you talk about CORE; you talk about the Black Panthers; all these were groups that just came about. In fact, they all have gone now. I understand that CORE still has a group of people here. I understand they have problems right now, too, because they are calling on people trying to solicit money for some kind of program that they are having. I've gotten calls from people, you know, but I understand it is a recognized operation. They also were trying to recruit people to go to Angola, weren't they? I think at a time.

But none of the national leaders that we knew in the sixties are on the scene any more. Rap Brown is in jail. Stokeley Carmichael is going around making speeches and promoting. George Lewis was one of the founders of ~~SNICK~~ SNCC. They had offices here in Baltimore, too, and that didn't last long.

I: Did they have the same problems as the Panthers did?

A: No. ~~SNICK~~ SNCC and CORE were in a different classification than the Panthers and the Soul School. ~~SNICK~~ SNCC was George ~~Snick~~ Lewis was a young guy that started in college, he and Stokeley Carmichael, all that bunch. You see, ~~SNICK~~ SNCC, CORE were made up of young college people. Right? The Panthers had no college or school background. When I say background, I am sure there

could have been some people there with Master's or Doctor's Degrees, but I am saying they did not have a start in a school. Most of these organizations started in the schools had chapters on various campuses of schools, but not the Panthers. The Panthers to us was a, well, the picture to us in the Baltimore City Police Department were a bunch of guys with guns and rifles and that kind of thing. CORE and ~~SNICK~~ SNCC and those others, they didn't have that kind of background. Even the Soul School people, there were no guns and that kind of involvement. But every time you raided a Panthers Headquarters you would find guns and dynamite and those kind of things. That's why most of the people here did not pick up with the Black Panthers.

I: What kinds of problems did ~~SNICK~~ SNCC, particularly, have here?

A: Well, the same thing that CORE and all of them had here. They couldn't get a foothold or a base. You know, Lincoln Lynch,(I don't know if you know him) he was a national figure. O.K. James Farmer. They both told me. They said, "Major Harris, look, this is the only town where the blacks don't want nothing to happen, and we can't got a damn thing started here in Baltimore." He said, "Every time that we try and come here and say that they need more black people working in the Phone Company, and we come to your office and say we are going to demonstrate in front of the Phone Company, you pick up the phone and call Mr. Mercer Smith (who was head of the Phone Company) and he will say, 'Come down and we will show you what we have.'" And there was a black man by the name of Roland Henson that worked for the Phone Company. Roland Henson would say, "Sure,

send them over." And they would relate. Or they would say, "There are no blacks in the Gas and Electric Company." At that time I knew who was the Chairman of the Board, and I said to him, "We're having problems." And he said, "Well, tell them to come down." And we were always resolving. They said, "God damn it. Will you stop talking to us? We don't need no damn help." So that was the kind of thing.

Everybody in Baltimore, just like,you know, Dave Glenn, we all jumped on the bandwagon to help them with things that they were saying that were wrong. See, you can come in and say things are wrong, but if you don't have any knowledge other than what you heard, if you get a chance to see what's going on--oh, I'm not saying that we've got the best system here. We've still got a whole lot of problems. Still, the Phone Company has got a lot of problems.

But they were saying that there were no switchboard operators or there were no call or whatever you have in the Phone Company. And they went down there and talked with the people and they were satisfied with what they saw. I guess they tried to be equal opportunity employers like everyone else. But when they have problems they could talk to the people, and I think they would try to adjust with what they were saying. Members of CORE would go down and talk with the Phone Company people. They came out very much satisfied and did not throw any lines around there.

So this was what I thought was my role because once they became involved with the police and then arrests would have to

be made. So that's why the Baltimore City Police Department became so involved in the whole movement, because if any fights or riots break out it would be our responsibility, so we can turn the thing before the fact. So it was my position to find out who were the top people in various positions, who was the Chairman or President of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, who was the President of the Kiwanis Club, who was the President of the Lions Club--all these kind of things, to let them know what was happening in the city, and any kind of aid I could solicit from them.

Each head of a religious organization here in Baltimore was involved in this. The Cardinal of the Catholic Church was involved. The number one man in the Presbyterian Church, the number one man in the Baptist Church, all churches were involved. In fact, they had people working with me. Each one of the top people would have. I had Catholic Priests working with me. I had Baptist Ministers working with me. I had Presbyterians working with me. I had Lutherans working with me. Everybody became involved. That was the thing that helped Baltimore a lot, because they became involved, and Tommy D'Alesandro (I'm talking about in '68 now) became totally involved himself. He gave his whole staff the responsibility of working with the people of the community.

I: Were there other people? I mean there were lots of people involved, of course, but what about the Mitchells--Clarence and Parren?

A: The Mitchells have always been involved, just on account of the grandmother. But you look at that family right now, I

guess they're the only family in the country that has representatives in every facet of state and city and federal government. Clarence, Senior, is called the Hundred and First Senator, because he's in Washington with the NAACP. O.K. His brother, who is Parren, is a United States Congressman. O.K. His son is the State Senator from his district. His other son is a Councilman, you see. So what I'm saying is they have been involved all along. When those boys were young kids growing up, they were walking around with picket signs because Grandma had them out first, then people like me, Harris, and other people come out. But the Mitchells, they were always on the scene. The Jacksons. Ma Jackson would bring everybody out, and those young boys were out making speeches when they were young kids.

I: What about the judges? You mentioned a few of them earlier. What...?

A: Well, you see, most of the judges were legal representatives for the NAACP. Now if you want to go back, Thurgood Marshall was one of the first. He is from Baltimore, you know. He is a judge on the Supreme Bench. Starting back with him, then you had the Judge ~~Hasty~~ Hastie * from Washington. So these are your prime movers--but here in Baltimore City, Judge Robert Watts, Judge Harry Cole, Judge George Russell, Judge William Murphy, and I can go on. All these young men served free of charge. In other words, whenever there were any problems that blacks had, Dr. Lillie Jackson would call one of these young men. Oh, yes, you had another one, Milton Allen. He's a judge now, too. And then there are a lot of others. A lot of

*Judge William H. Hastie, (Ed.)

them still practice now, like Attorney Tucker Dearing. He's still out there fighting. But these are the kind of guys. The rest of the guys ascended to the Bench. All of them have become judges. These young men, when they finished the University of Maryland Law School, the first thing they did was work with us, Dr. Jackson.

I: I understand--I'm not sure--I guess it was in the late sixties (I'm not sure whether it was before or after the riots) there was some kind of shake-up in City Hall. Now it was mentioned to me was a man,who is not on your list, by the name Joseph Howard, I believe?

A: Joe Howard won an election. Here's what happened. All judges are appointed by the Governor of the state. O.K.? All of the legal people usually go for Sitting Judges when they have to run for election. Joe Howard was an outsider and ran against the judges; ran against the Sitting Judges, and he won the seat. And Milton Allen ran against the State's Attorney and won, and a fellow named Paul Chester won the spot as Clerk of the Court. So these three black men ran on the ticket, ran against the establishment. The establishment had those judges who were sitting in the spots who had been appointed by the Governor. Joe Howard won a fifteen-year term.

I: When was that?

A: I don't know. I guess he won it in 1970. And Milton Allen won as State's Attorney and Paul Chester. And when you ask about Joe Howard. See, Joe Howard came here from Des Moines. Then he became a Probation Officer when he came. Then he went to the University of Maryland Law School.

I: How were their elections viewed?

A: What's that? Joe Howard?

I: Yes. And Allen and Chester? Was there a big support block for them?

A: You see, what happened when Milton Allen ran for re-election this time, he lost. Were you here in Baltimore when this was happening? He ran this past time, and he has since been appointed to the Bench by the Governor. But the establishment ran somebody against him this time. It was Swisher. They ran Swisher against him as State's Attorney. Oh, yes, what happened, you see, this was unheard of. You know, you don't beat the Sitting Judges because you have all of this support. You have the Baltimore City Bar Association. You have the Monumental Bar Association. You've got the Maryland Bar Association. And once a judge is on the Bench and he runs for election, why, everybody rallies around him. But they fought the system and they beat the system, all three of them. So that was a remarkable feat. That had never happened and won't ever happen again!

I: How was that accomplished?

A: Well, because everybody, in fact, the total black community worked together to bring these guys in, with the help of some whites. And then the whites had split up their people. You see what happened, the whites ran three candidates, and the blacks ran one candidate. That has always been a fault of the black community. We run four or five people for a job and the whites run one person. That's what happened in my area in the Fifth Councilmanic District. I told you before. We ran too many for a seat. If we had one man we could have won.

I: How does that happen? I mean, it happens all the time.

A: Right. But what happened at this time, we were supposed to have a unified ticket and we would come out for one man. But they had a breakdown in communications between some of our elected officials, and some wanted to have one man and some wanted another. So they couldn't come up with one name. So we ran two people and we did not come out and vote the way that we should. That's one thing about the City of Baltimore. The Jewish people vote. They're out there. The blacks don't vote en masse like they should.

I: Have you ever considered running for office? Or do you feel that what you're doing is the most important or the most interesting...?

A: I've been asked a number of times, but once you become a politician then you have to choose sides. My philosophy has always been to walk the middle of the road. If a Republican is in, I can work with him. If a Democrat is in, I can work with him. Now, I'm a registered Democrat. Yes. But I still believe in the two-party system. When I say two-party system, I mean I'm willing to work with Republicans as well as with the Democrats. And whoever is in, that's the man, or woman, I want to work with. I've been offered jobs during the Republican Administration. In fact, McKeldin appointed me--he was a Republican--appointed me the first black Parole and Probation Officer and the first black United States Marshal.

Mandel appointed me to the Police Department and also here. So I'm saying that I have been able to work that way. I have no ambition to become involved politically. I've had

whites as well as blacks say, "You're a good candidate. We want you to run." I say, "I can do more this way." I don't know what my next move is. As you say, I serve at the pleasure of the Governor, and the Governor goes out in 1978. I don't know what's going to happen then.

I: O.K. It's again going back a little bit, but it just occurred to me, so I'll ask it anyway. When I was at the Sun Library the other day doing all my research, I read about a case that I think occurred in 1966--the Veney brothers? And there was a sweep of the black community. Could you tell me something about what went into that? Now you would have just become directly involved in Community Relations.

I: I was with Police Community Relations. What happened, it was just what you said. It was a sweep. Some black homes were broken into by police officers. Some black people were manhandled and pushed around by officers. You see, what happens when a police officer gets killed, or when anyone gets killed--it don't have to be a policeman. If you are associated with someone, each man reacts that it could have been him or her who had just been killed.

Yes, there were some problems there. There were some things that the police did. And then they had no reason to go to white areas because the Veney brothers were black, so the main involvement was in black areas. And they did over-react at times. I agree with that, and I think Commissioner Pomerlau would also agree with that, that the Baltimore City Police Department over-reacted in that. But they were trying to find a man who had killed a policeman, and they were not leaving any stones unturned.

I: Which areas were involved?

A: East Baltimore Area. And most of the people with names of Veney and anyone who was closely associated with the Veney

brothers, their homes were broken into at that time. But most of the times they had warrants when they went to the homes looking for these guys. But there were problems during that time, yes. And they were justified in some of the things that they said.

I: Did you play any role in this?

A: Yes, I did. Mine was to go out into the community to try to tell the people that, "If you know where these men are, they have just taken the life of a police officer who was out here to protect you. Give us any information that you have and you won't be held to this. We won't let anyone know that we got this information from you."

I: There was, unfortunately, no follow-up that I could find. Were they found?

A: Oh, yes. All of them. They found them all. And I think one or two of them are in jail still doing time. There were about two or three of them, I think. Was it three of them? Maybe it was two.

I: I can't remember. I thought there were two, but I could be wrong.

A: Two, I think.

I: How did you react at the time? You went out into the community? Immediately?

A: Yes, because I was a member of the Baltimore City Police Department. It could have been me. I was just as up-tight as anyone else. You see, what happens, police are a cave breed. They have their own closed society. Everybody looks at you in

one way or another. If you come to a black area and you see a lot of police cars on the scene, the blacks might say you over-reacted. The whites would say they don't see enough police cars. So I'm saying, either way that you want to look at it, you know.

I've had people call me and say, "Every time I look around a helicopter is flying over my house." I said, "Ma'am you're getting protection." "I don't want that. Every time I look around the neighborhood, the police are in my block." Whites would call up and say, "Major Harris, we don't see enough police protection in here. Why don't we have more police protection?" So I'm saying, these are the things. You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. And the people had mixed feelings. Let's face it. I always have said that people always say, "I don't want to see any police," but they call when they have problems. "The Pigs! Get the Pigs off the streets." Sure. But the Pigs are the ones that you want to come and save your life when you have a problem. And they have a job to do just like everyone else. And they are home men. They are fathers and mothers, and they are part of the community. They go to mass and they go to the synagogue. They go to church on Sunday. They go to market like you and anyone else will do. But then they have a job to do. That's their role. They are police officers.

The laws are put on the books by you people and they are just there to enforce them. Police don't make any laws. The people make the laws. I'm not defending them. I'm just saying

that they have a job to do. It's a shame when you have the firemen and the police have got to come out there and demonstrate and picket for a raise of salary, like is happening in Baltimore right now. The firemen talking about they might hit the streets. I feel that if anyone needs more money, it's these kind of guys. Because they put their lives on the line every day, you know. Maybe you'd say the school teachers are putting their lives on the line, too, man. I mean the picture's like a Blackboard Jungle and those kind of things. You know, when you walk out the door, your life may be laid on the line. But I'm saying these guys are facing it every day. When they go to work they don't know if they are coming home or not.

We have the most underpaid law enforcement agency in the country, one of the lowest. And the Fire Department, too, yet about a year ago, or two years ago, we were supposed to have the best Fire Department in the country. It was all over the papers, Baltimore City Fire Department. But when you look at the salary, we were away down the scale.

I: This is, I guess, in a sense a rhetorical question, but what about discrimination within the Police Department? You said it was a close society and you must have had...?

A: Right. When I came into the Department, yes. There were some white police officers that refused to ride in cars with blacks. But when you have a partner with you on the street and your life is in jeopardy, you don't care if he is red, white, or blue or green, you want him to protect your back. Some of them did't want to be on the same shift with blacks or that kind of thing. But to answer your question, as I have mentioned

before, it's much integrated now. You find blacks riding in cars together. You find whites riding in cars together. Then you find black and whites riding in cars together. You see, you must realize that I get all kinds of questions from black people. They say, "We don't see enough of black policemen." When you are fifteen percent of something that's a hundred percent, it means that black officers have to have time off like white officers. They have to go to inservice training like white officers. They get sick like white officers. So what I'm saying is, when you have fifteen percent, it might be maybe five percent off at one time. And when you have a city as large as Baltimore with almost a million people, you can't have them every place, but you try to put them where they are most effective.

Now, you don't send a black policeman in some white areas. No. Because they're not needed in those areas. They are needed in black areas where you have some of your social problems. And the black guy is black twenty-four hours a day. He wakes up in the morning in black. He goes to sleep at night--he's black. So he can relate to some of the people. Just like some of the questions that some white will ask me, I might not have the answers because I'm not white. And some blacks are saying, "How come blacks don't...?" This guy says, "Well, I'm black myself. I can relate to you." What I'm saying is that a black police is more than just a policeman, or white either. He is a social worker and a father and mother and everything else. Because you have to be involved.

I: How were assignments made during the disturbances?

A: During the disturbances. All right.

I: It wasn't fifteen percent eight years ago?

A: No. It wasn't. During the disturbances they tried to put as many black police as they could in black areas, because the white officers, they'd be putting their lives on the line.

I: Were there some white policemen who refused?

A: No. When you say refused...

I: Refused to go into an area and said, "No. I don't want to."

A: Oh, yes. Well, see now, there was an area down on Gay Street where black as well as white police refused to go, because the Panthers had a headquarters there. And word was out that they were going to kill any Pig that would come in that area. And orders were given by the Police Commissioner that no police cars would patrol that area.

I: When was that? Was that in '68?

A: That was in '68. This was on Gay Street. This was the Panthers Headquarters at that time, and no police would patrol that area. And then if there was an emergency call, if someone called and said they were having problems, because they did this once or twice, then no single car would go--a shotgun squad. A heavy task force would go into it.

I: And did that indeed happen?

A: Yes. They were. These people were taking pot shots at people. A couple of police cars drove through the area and they were shot up. Nobody was hurt. And that's when the order came not to send anybody back. And the Commissioner would not allow anybody to go in there at all.

I: We've talked mostly about Baltimore City. Were you at all involved sort of on the periphery when you were involved with the National Guard and what about the....?

A: I was wearing two hats, and I guess my National Guard hat and my Baltimore City Policeman. I still have a National Guard hat and being a member on Governor Mandel's staff. So, in Prince Georges County, there was trouble, but we didn't become involved there. It was a local thing which they were able to take care of. The National Guard didn't have to go there.

In fact, the National Guard didn't go any place else beside the Eastern Shore and here. Now when it's the Eastern Shore you're talking about, there were Cambridge and Salisbury. But they patrolled the whole area. In Easton, Maryland. But the Eastern Shore is where the Guard was at that time, but not in Baltimore City, not in Montgomery County, Prince Georges, nor anywhere else was the Guard called out.

I: Now you have sort of hinted around how you feel things are going today, and obviously these organizations have changed leaders and changed goals, in a sense, or at least changed what they perceived as immediate and necessary goals. Who do you think, or what group do you think is really working now? Or is there one?

A: O.K. Let's start from the national level. Roy Wilkins with the NAACP. I think he has served his usefulness. I think he has been a great leader of his people, but he is getting old, and I understand he is going out sometime this year. And

I'm sure some young person will be coming to take his place. You see, I believe everything that has happened during my lifetime had to happen for a reason. You had to have your Dr. Lillie Jackson's. I say there was a place for your Stokeley Carmichael's and your Rap Brown's because they made the world aware of what was being done to the black men and women. I'm not saying that they had to burn or destroy. My philosophy is to build on the foundation that you have, and then just move ahead. That's the thing I think about it, and I believe that you will be getting younger people, because after all, this country is going to be taken care of by these young people; and it's going to be theirs.

Each time you look at the Administration, the establishment is getting younger. Look at the Democratic Party, to show you what's happening. It's starting from the top. Younger people are taking over, and I think they have a different feeling and a different outlook about what's going on. I think they have their heads on straight. I don't feel that they feel that you have to destroy or do away with things. You can join the establishment and become part of the establishment. Because you look at young people becoming more involved in federal government and state government and Baltimore City Government and find more young people on committees and commissions. Right here in Maryland in Baltimore City, the School Board, they have two young high school students on the Board. So, in other words, the older people are asking for the thinking of the young people, but you just can't write

the older people out, because certain things have happened during the period of time which have caused us to be where we are today. So I'm saying, "Don't just go out there and kill all the old people." Because they have some input to make, but I think you should listen to something that they have to say. No, this is a young man and a young woman's world and I have no qualms about releasing my seat to a young person. And I feel we all must realize when our youthfulness is over, because you can go but so far and then you find yourself going down hill. Just like a fighter who wins a championship and then retires, then comes out of retirement and starts losing everything. My philosophy is to give a young man and woman a chance to relate to see what he or she has to say. And they have to listen to us; we listen to them.

But the civil rights movement, as I said, something had to happen and it did happen, and I think it happened for the best. Because in the beginning, sure, there were problems, and anything that you go into there are going to be some good moments and some bad moments. And the people that were primarily responsible in the civil rights movement, none of them have ever been able to get anything, but they made it possible for people like me to be sitting here. If this was not brought to the attention of the establishment or the power structure, what would we need with a black man sitting up there? They made a point that you needed black. Now I'm not saying that blacks can relate to all blacks, because I can't. I can't say whites can relate to all whites. But I feel that a black man has to be sensitive, or a black woman, sensitive about their thinking because he or she wakes up black every day and they

go to sleep black at night. So I have to know something about what black think. It's just like whites used to say, "Yes, I know how black people think. I was raised by a black woman," or "We had a black woman in our house who used to be our maid." That's a different kind of thing. It's like I can't relate to them. I can say, "Oh, yes, I know white people, too, because I have a white secretary." But I'm just saying that these are things that have changed in time, but I think you need a little input of both. I don't think that nothing can exist today without a total impact, young, old, Jewish, Catholic, black, white, whatever you can ...And that has been the thing that has made this country succeed. Just on the involvement of all people.

And when you look at the platform of the Democratic Party and Republican Party, they are bringing more women in. They are bringing more minorities in. And this is how it has to happen. No one can win today without a total involvement with everybody.

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