Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee:	Ms. Gloria Hayes Richardson
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Interviewer:	Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer:	John Bishop
Length:	1:32:37
Note:	Ms. Richardson asked, subsequent to the interview, that she be identified in all CRHP records as Gloria Hayes Richardson (rather than Dandridge), since she was known through most of her Movement activity as Gloria Richardson.

John Bishop: Okay, we're going.

Joe Mosnier: Okay, let me start with just this announcement. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern – am I miked up? – Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am in New York City in Midtown, or I guess Lower Midtown, or West Chelsea. [Laughs]

Gloria Richardson: Yes, this is – yes, West Side.

JM: Flatiron District?

GR: No, the Flatiron District, I think, is further – is on the East Side.

JM: Technically, a little east of us, okay. Um, with – I'm with videographer John Bishop, and we are here to do an oral history interview for the Civil Rights History Project,

which is a joint undertaking of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. And we're just delighted and very honored today to be with Ms. Gloria Hayes Dandridge [Richardson] to talk about all of the work, Ms. Dandridge, that you did and have done over the years, uh, in the Movement. So, thank you very much for coming to sit down with us today. We appreciate it.

Let me, uh – I think in our hour, hour and a half that we can spend together today in conversation, I thought I would start just having you talk a little bit about your experience at Howard [University], where you, uh, enrolled in 1938, I think and –

GR: Yes.

JM: Yeah.

GR: Um, I went to Howard. My cousins had been there before me, and so it was kind of like – I was young. I think I was, like, barely sixteen. And, um, and for me, it was comfortable knowing my cousins, you know, I had grown up with, were there. But I went to Howard and I think that first year – they said I was shy, but I think it was just a lot going on, and I had come from a small town, my first time away from home. But it worked out well, in terms of friendships, and my family knew people in Washington. They had children there.

Um, I happened to have gone there when they had some really great minds, um, and I don't – I have no sense of what they would be now, but then were considered very radical. And, um, you know, they published – E. Franklin Frazier and, uh, who was a trip in class, because he thought I was too shy and naïve and he was always explaining his raunchier comments [laughing] to me and embarrassing me in front of the class, but, anyhow, and Rayford Logan.

So, it was a good time, and we did – um, my first demonstrations, really, were there, first against the university because of curfews and things. And secondly, um, there – and I'm a little

confused about what organization started that, but we did some demonstrations, I think against Woolworth's in, uh, probably in my junior year. So, I went through that and came out, graduated, worked in the government, took a government exam and worked in the government for a couple of years.

JM: Let me interrupt. May I interrupt just to have you – I want to ask a little bit more about your, your Howard years. You have written that you protested at, um, at Woolworth's, and I think, I think that was picketing rather than sitting in –

GR: Picketing, yes. Oh, yes. No, it was picketing.

JM: But you, um – I'm really interested in how your perspective was emerging as a young adult in those years on – and you've also mentioned your protests on campus over curfews, which was kind of related to the gender notion of women's roles – rules on campus.

GR: That's true, and student rights.

JM: Yeah, student rights.

GR: It was. It was, yeah, student rights.

JM: So, what was your sense of the world you wanted to create, the world you wanted for yourself as a woman, as an African American?

GR: I don't think I thought of creating a world. I think I was just passing through it. I had – knew I had to make the grades, you know. I had friendships there. Uh, I would have – I think that it was other people around me that convinced me to go on these, uh, demonstrations, you know, demonstrations or picketing, and, uh, and I went along. Because even in the Movement, people were writing me, saying, "Is this, is this – are you sure you're the same, very shy, you know, girl, woman that was at – are you sure that's who you are?" And so, I guess I projected – and probably *was* – because when I, the first press conference, when the outside

press came, they had to push me out the door of my house. And the only reason why I did it was because I was the only one there, that they said they wanted one voice through which to speak [0:05:00].

But I had a good time at Howard and I learned a lot, I think because these professors were radical – you know, that came through their lectures. Um, E. Franklin Frazier was really against what he called the black bourgeoisie. And, uh, some of those people, some of those models, you know, I had come across in my family and their relationships in various towns across the East Coast.

JM: Sure, yeah. Let me ask – I want to ask about your family, um, and if you could situate your family in Cambridge. I know that's a long story, but –

GR: [Laughing] No, that's not a long story, but I – um, well, I guess, actually, although I wasn't raised that way, um, I guess they were the, in terms of the black community, the first family in Cambridge. My grandfather had been on the City Council for years. He wasn't the first black man. I think there were two other black people that had been on the City Council, and he was the third.

Um, we didn't really know until – my cousins and I – we were married and had children that we were supposed to have been wealthy. I can imagine going downtown, even when it was segregated, and saying, "Oh, I don't know which sweater." You couldn't try it on. You know, "I don't know – I like that sweater, but we can't afford it," and the clerk saying to me, "Why don't you go home and ask your parents if you can afford it?" Because I think they knew better than we did. And because we were in business, you had to speak to everybody on every porch on every street, and, uh, it became almost, you know, automatic.

Uh, my grandfather was not particularly religious, but he gave money and land and stuff to the church. My grandmother – in the winter, because we had seasonal workers, uh, or seasonal work, rather, then the packing companies would send food out and the Red Cross, although segregated, would send whatever clothing they had. My grandmother would distribute that, sometimes by going out into the poorer communities and sometimes, you know, from our house. I think we mainly kind of were in the family. Most of the family houses were like within a block of each other, and you ran back and forth. My grandfather was insistent that you come back and help the town and the community. And I think most – and most of us did.

JM: Yeah, you moved back after, after that government job you mentioned and, and, um, you had a family. Can you describe the basic arrangements in Cambridge, racial, uh, geography of Cambridge?

GR: [Laughs] It was –

JM: In the late '50s, say?

GR: It had been – it was totally segregated. Uh, the shopping – there was, uh, one room reserved in the hospital, one maternity room, and, of course, if they got overloaded with white people, then that went. And so, you had your baby in the hall. Um, I think they used my grandfather for, you know, "should you give this person credit?" And, in terms, he got a lot of people out of the Maryland penitentiary and the jails and stuff. Um, even though he sat on the Council, when they had their annual banquet – which would infuriate my grandmother – they would bring the meal out to him.

JM: Because he was not allowed to join them.

GR: To join them, that's right. So, in that respect, I was – and that's true of Washington, too, so that was true my life. However, *within* that framework, and because, I guess, we were

restricted to one ward, then your daily life was within the confines of that. People that had to go outside of that, that bubble and work – that was a different thing. I just probably fully realized some of that when I just read the book *The Help* out of, uh, Mississippi during the '60s. And it didn't occur to me – it occurred to me that they didn't treat, may not treat their help well, but it didn't occur to me that they would have separate bathrooms. I mean, that – I just did not imagine that. When I read it, I believed it, but I did not, you know, conceive of that.

I think black folks in that town, and people wonder, "Why Cambridge?" But I think their history there [0:10:00], they were – and I don't understand this at all – my grandfather was, in the census when he was twelve years old, was in school, in a household where they said "in school." But there were also slaves there, so there seemed to be a combination of slaves – how, I, you know, I don't understand that. I know that during the Movement very elderly people told me that at one time people in Cambridge intermarried. And then something happened [claps hands], and it was a total separation. I don't know whether that had anything to do with the Civil War or whatever, but at that time – I'm sorry now I wasn't having these conversations with the older people in my family, but I didn't care at that point.

So, um, I think I grew up probably in a, in a protective atmosphere, although knowing that all of that was going on.

JM: And the boundary, uh, dividing white and black Cambridge was –

GR: It's in the Charter.

JM: Yeah, and was Race Street.

GR: [Laughs] Yes.

JM: Yeah. And, um, I have read that –

GR: And until the Movement, that didn't occur to me. I think the people that came and started saying, "The street you can't go beyond, Race – it's *called* Race Street?" And I thought, "Well, yeah, that's true." I always thought, because they used to have, um, sulkies and things riding, racing up and down there.

JM: Right, right. Um, the black community in Cambridge around 1960, I think was about four thousand people.

GR: Um-hmm.

JM: And at that time, I wonder if you'd recall, um – one of the aspects of segregation in Cambridge that would be so, uh, terribly consequential for your family was that health care and opportunities for health care workers were segregated by race.

GR: Oh, yes, I think so. And the doctors did not have privileges, black doctors did not have privileges in the, I mean hospital privileges.

JM: But your father and uncle I'm thinking about.

GR: My father had a drugstore. Uh, my cousin, Carol, was the doctor, but he didn't have hospital privileges. If he did, it must have been late, after I was grown. But I know that that was an issue. I think that the doctor that came in after him did, and that was a big thing. You know, he could send you to the hospital, and you didn't have to go through another doctor. Uh, the doctors – you had to sit – they had separate – white doctors had separate, uh, waiting rooms for you.

Most of the time in our family, we went to Baltimore, to Provident Hospital there. My father had started out there as – he used to be the druggist for the hospital, and I think Carol did his internship there. But usually we tried to get to Provident. Some people in the family went to Johns Hopkins, but the thing with Hopkins at that time – and I guess the book on Henrietta Lacks

[*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot], which I have never read, but probably proves that, because some of us in the family just thought they were using blacks as guinea pigs. They, too, had separate medical facilities.

JM: Yeah. When did your father have his heart attack?

GR: I don't know. I think now he's – sometime in his fifties. I'm very bad with years.

JM: That's okay.

GR: But he did – no, but he could not go to the hospital. They – because, I guess, of whatever kind of respect they had for my grandfather, one of the white doctors came out to the house back and forth. We wanted to move him to Provident Hospital, but by that time it was too late.

JM: Yeah.

GR: But he worked very hard, till twelve and one o'clock at night. You know, it was not only the prescriptions but patent medicines and a full range of, uh, I guess, like Duane Reade [drugstore chain] and stuff.

JM: Right.

GR: And the soda fountain.

JM: Yeah. You – in 1960, you were running the store.

GR: Yes. He had died, and we were looking – I don't remember during that time, but at times we had problems, uh, finding a black pharmacist that wanted to come into a small town. Uh, and in the meantime, Craig's Drugstore, the white drugstore, filled our prescriptions for us and was very helpful, in fact.

JM: Hmm. What did you, um – what was your feeling about your role running that store and being in that position? Did you enjoy that work? Did you –?

GR: Well, I used to help out. We used to have excursions that came from Baltimore, and hundreds of people would come. My grandfather would get – they would fix up the crab house down by the wharf, and they would eat crabs and things and then come uptown and, you know, go into the Elks' Home [Ms. Richardson means her Uncle Fred's home] and buy stuff. So, I used to have [0:15:00] to sell little things, uh, cosmetics and things and help out, you know, along the way, both there and in my grandfather's grocery store.

But, that was kind of because I was just really devastated about my father, and it was difficult getting people to come in and, and manage the drugstore. My, my, uh, then-husband – my father had been sending him to Howard Pharmacy School, and then, after he died, that just kind of went awry. I don't think he was real interested.

JM: Yeah. Tell me about, uh, you mentioned before we started today –

GR: But it was a good place to hear what everybody in the community thought once the Freedom Rides and the Movement started, and I could carry information back and forth. And actually, actually, the Freedom Riders and the SNCC field workers had been there almost a month before – in my uncle's house – before I knew anything about it, because I was working until twelve o'clock and coming home. Until one day they came and said that, uh, my uncle had said that I had a daughter and that a lot of people her age gathered there on Saturdays to make cookies. And so, I said, "Sure, you can go back and ask them." And that was the beginning of –

JM: The SNCC folks wanted some local –

GR: Yeah, guys to take them around the community when on the weekends the – yes.

JM: And that was December, I think, late '61 by then, when SNCC took –

GR: Late '61, running over into January, yes.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Um, you mentioned that you sort of began, uh, in that first phase as an observer, and students and younger folks, including your daughters, were –

GR: Oh, yes, they would have what they called adult observers so that they would have somebody that, if something went wrong, you know, that was seasoned enough, you know, to say what went on, right or wrong, and to, you know, to warn people. And then, once or twice, I went on the picketing line. I finally decided to do that. And my daughter had to put me off the picket line, because for whatever reason, as a grown woman, I thought I could, you know, walk some kind of way and trip these people that were spitting at you and stuff that's going down. [Laughing] And so, she put me off!

JM: Because you were not –

GR: "Ma, get off!"

JM: [Laughs] Because she didn't see you adhering perfectly to nonviolence?

GR: Oh, yeah! Yeah, yeah.

JM: Right.

GR: So, I thought, "Well, I don't think I'm cut out for this." So.

JM: Yeah. Tell me a little bit about how you were drawn into a leadership role.

GR: Oh, yes, they were – they had, uh – my cousin, Frederick St. Clair, who had been providing with his father the bail as the Freedom Riders went up and down the Eastern Shore, said to one busload, "What you all really need to do, and the place that really needs to be fixed, is Cambridge, Maryland, so why don't you all stop off there?" So, two of them did.

JM: Yeah.

GR: And then, they talked – SNCC – yeah.

JM: SNCC folks, yeah.

GR: Yeah, Bill Hansen and Reginald Robinson. So, they did and stayed at my uncle's house and they started having, calling in community people, and, uh, who – I wasn't part of that either [laughs] – that, you know, supported the young people and whatnot. And then, uh, Donna was involved. She claims this isn't – she doesn't remember this, but anyhow.

JM: You're talking about your daughter, Donna?

GR: My older daughter, Donna.

JM: Yeah.

GR: She was one of the organizers, became one of the organizers of, uh, of the high school students. And so, uh, both high school and grammar school kids went – they practically stopped the town. And then, the ministers went down and agreed that, "Well, if we have peace – uh, we can't make an agreement with white folks – unless you have peace, you can't negotiate." So, one week passed, two weeks passed, three weeks passed.

The parents that had gotten emotionally involved with the kids and that when they had a big mass meeting and decided to send people down to SNCC and ask if we could have an adult group. And in that process, they asked me if I would take a leadership role there, because they felt at that time we didn't – we weren't talking about violence. They thought that financially I would not be jeopardized, because there would be somebody there to take care of me and my family. And that's really – and my cousin and I went down. And SNCC agreed. And we came back and started, you know, going into laundry – uh, laundromats, the churches, the bars, and sending out little [laughing] badly put-together newsletters and organizing throughout the county.

JM: Yeah. Let me ask you a little more –

JB: Let's stop –

GR: And then, initially, it was –

JM: Excuse me just a second.

GR: Oh.

JM: Excuse me just one sec. We're going to pause for just a sec.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back.

JM: We're back after a short break. Please.

GR: Oh, okay.

JM: You were saying?

GR: Uhh –

JM: Well, let me ask this, if I could.

GR: Oh, our first thing was on voter registration, but I didn't really believe in that. I just thought people had to be shown that it – because we'd been voting still since 18 – for one of the places on the Shore – that even though we voted and were adhering to all the things, still had segregated hospitals, housing, jobs, the whole –

JM: Right.

GR: But we thought that, in general, people – that had to be brought to their attention. They may have realized that on some subterranean level, but in terms of in their daily consciousness – and that gradually happened. Once we picked the people and won, and they thanked us very much for our support, but it's nothing we can do about the streets and stuff, whatever, just minor things you were asking for at that time.

JM: I want to take you back to that spring '62 trip to Atlanta to go down and meet the SNCC folks for the first time.

GR: Yes.

JM: You've written that, um, you went down with, I think, white gloves and a very lovely skirt on.

GR: [Laughing] Yes!

JM: And you encountered the SNCC crew. And I'm interested in the transition from sort of that early experience to the – you would build, you would very much build your own movement in Cambridge.

GR: Yes.

JM: Even independent of SNCC folks in many, in some leadership [word uncertain, perhaps "circles"?]

GR: Yeah, I don't think I real – quite – I mean, looking back now, I can see that.

JM: Yeah.

GR: We supported them, but we had moved away from the, the, uh, public accommodations. People would say to me, which was true, "Those are sleazy restaurants!" I don't care what level, economic level the person was on, "That sleazy restaurant! What do we care about whether we –" so, except for that you should have – your right to go in there should not be abridged.

But when we did the – when we, uh, uh, structured the survey and what we called Junior CNAC [Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee], which were the grammar school kids, took it, took it throughout the community and brought it back. Volunteers from Swarthmore [College] took it back to their professors, and they did the write-ups and the correlations from those stacks of cards. And then, it became clear that public accommodations was really at the

bottom of their list, and housing, as was housing, jobs, you know, health issues. And we structured the demands around that.

JM: Describe that – you launched a survey, which was very, um –

GR: [Laughing] Thanks to E. Franklin Frazier! I took a graduate course under him. And I don't think *he* thought I had the skills, but anyhow, at whatever level, you know, I learned, and we did that. And the questions on these cards were geared in those, you know, those main issues – the executive board decided these – and to see what people said about that and how they felt about it.

JM: Yeah, so you surveyed, you sampled – I think, uh, the same children who were – high school students and others – who were active in the community in the Movement –

GR: That's true.

JM: Took the survey cards to high schools across the Second Ward.

GR: Took the survey, and it really was more the grammar school kids, because in the summer the high school kids were out working, picking up jobs.

JM: Yeah. And your card, you had – so, on the whole series of questions on the card: your priorities in the Movement, aspects about your – the condition of the house you live in, are you employed, all those things.

GR: Yes, the plumbing, the – yeah.

JM: So, you really did a, in a sense, a basic solid systematic survey of conditions in –

GR: I know. And then after they, after they, uh, wrote it up and did the correlations at Swarthmore – actually, I think that's what, I think that's what changed Robert Kennedy's mind, was it was perfectly clear that it was just abysmally poor people, that most of the component to them being poor over generations was racism. And I think he got involved more because out of

his Irish – and what they had done to the Irish when they came over, that he was more sympathetic to the, uh, to poverty.

JM: Tell me about – I want to ask you, um – [0:25:00]

GR: And so, when we took that to him, and then that's when he started sending us around to the commissioners – do they have commissioners at that level – secretaries of housing and, and, you know, various agencies that fed into that.

JM: Yeah. By '62, especially '63, the [word uncertain – cross talk at 25:22] was –

GR: Yeah, just before and just after the agreement was signed.

JM: Yeah.

GR: And, of course, Weaver, who had been a friend of our mother's, said, "We aren't – we're doing the housing. But as long as you all are in the streets, we aren't going to put a shovel in the ground." So, that was – we didn't *promise* that we wouldn't be in the streets, because we had these two kids in the, on the Western Shore, but – and, of course, passing the law desegregating housing.

JM: Sure. Yeah. Let me ask about, um – I want to get all the more close detail about this, because it's just so interesting, the – one part of the reality of lives for many people in the black community in Cambridge was that housing was so poor that I think many people refer to it as – the phrase was used "chicken coop housing."

GR: No, they were actual chicken coops. They had –

JM: Can you describe that?

GR: Oh, [sighs] that may, I may have totally blanked – they were chicken coops, like, you know, and one on top of another, and people were living in them. And I forget their names now – white folks were collecting rent on it.

JM: And, um, I think your survey showed unemployment in the black community was sixty percent.

GR: Oh, yes. Yes. Well, for some, it's that today.

JM: Well, right. Yeah.

GR: When you disaggregate the figures, it's high. But, no, and that was even with seasonal work, and, and because the City Council, except for one guy, uh, and the aristocrats in town, you know, had very low opinion of black folks. And it was, it was Granville Hooper who owned a whole fuel complex that he eventually lost for being – trying to be fair, and they tried, they – the city ordered him not to send his fuel trucks out that winter. And he said if he had to get the Maryland state police, he would sent them out under guard, because although black folks only worked part of the time of the year, they caught up with their bills with him when they worked. And, of course, when we had the urban renewal thing, the first thing the city fathers did was tear down his, you know, his business.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Let me take you, let me take you to the question of, um, how after the survey your relationship would evolve with, say, folks at SNCC and at the NAACP. You knew what your community's goals were and you had built a local movement, but oftentimes there were pressures from, especially from, say, NAACP leaders.

GR: Um. Oh, yeah. Well, we just ignored them after a while. By the time they decided that they weren't going to support this or that, people in Cambridge, you know, had solidified, and it didn't really matter. Because they were trying to push ahead, and the NAACP was trying – in the beginning, you know, they were helpful, and I really think that's because in those first weeks when SNCC came in, uh, they went around and urged people to join the NAACP and have the memberships. Then there was a period of time when people thought if you got in

trouble with the law and were in jail, because you were a member of NAACP, you could ask one of their lawyers to come down and represent you. No, no, no, because the NAACP was too class-conscious in the first place. Uh, they didn't want to represent anybody unless, "Are they middle-class? Well, what does their mother or father do?" So, that was out.

Um, I think almost everyone – they brought me up here to a concert at Carnegie Hall because Martin [Luther King Jr.] was supposed to convince me on the, uh, referendum initiative to vote. So, unfortunately, although I like Frank Sinatra and Lena Horne, I had to leave, because I was fast losing it. [Laughter] Uh, and it's not that we didn't go out and support the southern [0:30:00] movement to get out the vote. But they tried a lot of stuff. I got letters from people, the few black folks that worked in the Maryland government, you know, "You're wrong, please reconsider this," and da-da-da. Uh, offered – the governor wanted to back me as a senator.

JM: State senator.

GR: Which I was – state senator, which I was not interested in in the first place. And, and a variety of things –

JM: Yeah, all these efforts to deflect you from your leadership role in Cambridge.

GR: Yes, and I think misjudged the Cambridge movement.

JM: Right, right. Let's pause for just a sec.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: And we're rolling.

JM: We're back on, and [clears throat], John, I think you wanted me to mention that we're now, uh, recording without the cards.

JB: Correct.

JM: Okay. Uh, Ms. Dandridge [Richardson], let me – you had mentioned the pattern of efforts to sort of deflect you from your leadership role in Cambridge, because Cambridge had – it was so close to Washington, D.C., had become such a very, very active movement, a lot of national press coverage, so there were job offers, there was this –

GR: Oh, yeah. I forgot that. That's true – from the Feds. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah, the federal government offered you jobs. The state government offered you jobs. They offered to back you as a state senate candidate. They brought you to Carnegie Hall and had Frank Sinatra and Lena [Horne] and other folks try to persuade you.

GR: No, not them.

JM: I'm sorry –

GR: But they had Martin [Luther King Jr.], yes.

JM: Yeah.

GR: Martin and the guy from, uh, Johnson's guy from, uh, Texas – Hobart, Hobart Taylor, I think.

JM: Ah, yeah.

GR: Yes.

JM: Yeah. Uh, and that all puts me in mind of, uh, how rooted the Movement was in Cambridge and how, how thoroughly well organized the community was in support of the movement in Cambridge. And I've read that you've written, um, that there were probably ten, a dozen, fourteen core members –

GR: Um-hmm.

JM: Uh, who helped throughout the community that had come together as the heart of CNAC [Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee].

GR: That's right. It was probably on my grandfather's model, every – whoever the leader was in every neighborhood, or who exactly, you know, people we looked up to.

JM: Yeah, so you –

GR: Whether it was a man or a woman.

JM: Right. And I wanted to ask about that point in particular.

GR: And in the county.

JM: Yeah. Right. So, you found the people in all these different neighborhoods, across the black community and county –

GR: I don't know whether "found" is a good word. I think I knew – because Cambridge is small, I knew they were always there.

JM: Right. I'm very interested in your experience at the head of the Movement, um, as a woman in relation to, in relation to your fellow Movement, uh, leaders, in relation to communities, the press.

GR: Uh, I actually – I think, in the first place, I was the only grandchild for a long time. Black folks had to use whatever they had. So, within my family, there was no sense of "you can't do this because you're a woman, you can't," you know, even the relationships with my grandmother and mother with the men in the family. After that, um – I think that was the basis of it. But even people in SNCC tell me when they – and I think it, I think it was very silly of me, but they say when they would mention things about, "well, men aren't going, the men aren't going to want us to do that," that I had no concept of how that would affect your behavior. Somebody just said that to me this year, and I can't even remember it.

I remember at some point some lady called me from out in the Midwest and asked, "Well, how are they treating you?" And I asked her, I can remember asking her, "What do you

mean 'as a woman'?" Because by that time, I think, in Cambridge itself the, the – there, there was – they may have been before, they may have been afterwards – they were not. Men went to work and came home and had to lay in the fields and around their houses and keep them from being firebombed. The women were conducting the business in the day because they were available. So, it was almost a division of labor. The men went to work. If something happened, the women could shoot, too. So, [someone coughs] for that period of time at least – I don't know what goes on now or what was before – there was not that division.

One night when the state police were marching up and down, and I had just begun to be involved, women were on the streets, saying, "If you all can beat us on Saturday [0:35:00] night, don't you let these cops come through our community!" And *they* were slitting tires, and I thought, "What?" But I think – and I think that whole thing grew. Now, people like to say Cambridge was just a woman's movement, but that was not true.

JM: Yeah, no.

GR: I mean, it was a division of roles by necessity.

JM: Right. You mentioned the, um – you mentioned the necessity of black men and others, at times, women, even your daughter and mother at times, um, guarding the black community from [word(s) uncertain, crosstalk at 35:35 – probably "night riders"].

GR: Oh, yeah, she did. Well, the worst night, yes, no. And Donna had to go through the, as we called it, the "field part" that led into people's yards. And because there was this secret – the men really organized themselves – secret whistle. If she had not known that, or been like me and not been able to whistle, then she may very well have been shot. But she was trying to make it back, because my mother was in the house alone. But they had, because it's a hunting

country, and so they both had been out hunting at one point or another. And so, she went up there, and they got on the guns and on the second floor.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Let me ask about, um –

GR: And we were lucky because General [George] Gelston was fair, and once he investigated, he court-martialed those guys that had come in, yeah.

JM: Right. You're referring to, um, some National Guardsmen who weren't in –

GR: They were in, uh –

JM: In a different location.

GR: Yes, in Den – I think they were from Denver – anyhow, yeah.

JM: Who had come through, shooting up the black community –

GR: Yes, they had!

JM: One night. And they were fired – black men and others in the community fired back.

GR: Oh, yeah, I was in the street – [Laughs]

JM: Can you describe that?

GR: Yes. I understand – I wasn't on Pine Street at that time, but they drove through shooting. Somebody had brought a submachine gun home from the Army from World War I or II – II, maybe. In any event, they were protecting that street. But they drove through the community. And when I was standing outside – I think I just recently read, but that is true – even people that were not involved, heavily involved in the Movement, you could hear the clicks [makes series of clicking sounds], going down point –

JM: They're pulling hammers back on their guns?

GR: Yes. And every time they came through, they shot. The press was in my uncle's house under the tables. It was a bad night, because in the morning at five or six o'clock it was filled with that smoke from guns, ozone. What – the streets were just – fortunately, nobody was hurt or killed. The press was on Pine Street hiding out, but they had their cameras and stuff and they caught the car coming through. And so, when Gelston asked, they told him, "If you subpoena us, we'll bring – you can have the pictures." And he then court-martialed the people from –

JM: Right. This is the National Guard commander in –

GR: Yes. Black folks in Cambridge loved him, yes. [Laughter] They think the government killed him when he went out – because he didn't go to Walter Reed [Army Medical Center]. Something was wrong with his leg. I think they think till today – I don't know.

JM: Yeah.

GR: I mean, he did his job and he was fair and he was going to arrest you and do whatever. But he wasn't malicious.

JM: Yeah. You had something – over all these weeks and several months, you developed something of a relationship with him across this Movement activity.

GR: Yes.

JM: And I – there's one irony, and you've touched on this in things you've written, that, um, you were both aware, separately, that your phones were being tapped.

GR: Yes, he told me. When I went back there after the Rap Brown incident, he told me, yes, and that that's why he used to send his Number 2 guy back and forth to CNAC [Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee] with whatever messages and negotiations or whatever we were

doing, because he didn't trust – he said they would send it all the way down to Fort Belvoir [Virginia], read it, send it back, and then send it as if it's coming though, uh, normally.

JM: Yeah. Um, let me ask about your principal position in relation [JB coughs] to the referendum on public accommodations. That was where so much of this pressure was brought to bear on you, personally, and on CNAC to support a referendum. Can you talk about that whole experience and describe that situation?

GR: Well, we didn't ever think we were supposed to vote on whether [0:40:00] we could go into a restaurant. We were born here. Blacks in Cambridge had been there for three hundred and some years, a mixture, slave, free, freed. They had been restricted in certain communities but had run businesses, run churches. In Cambridge, my grandfather and his brother set up the school system. And I think there was some self-assurance you may not get in a strictly urban area where you're working for other people. And – I forgot where I was going with this. You asked –?

JM: Up to the referendum.

GR: Oh, up to the referendum. So, as I said earlier, people thought most of them were greasy spoons, because occasionally they did get to the city and go to, you know, a decent restaurant. And, um, men had just come back from fighting. So, I thought it was a normal position, and so did everybody else, except the NAACP, the CORE, the Baltimore ministers, just everybody outside of Cambridge. And I don't know whether it was because they were pressured and thought against the Deep South that it made more sense, but we never were pushing that.

JM: Yeah.

GR: I just saw, I just saw in *The Crisis* – I didn't know it was on the internet – the article in *The Crisis* magazine about it, and their field secretary, even after the agreement was signed, was talking as if the public accommodations was the big thing. And I guess it was for them.

JM: Yeah. But your position was –

GR: But then, yeah, because what – if you're born here and been here and you know what.

JM: Let me ask, the Kennedys invited – well, the Kennedys – Robert Kennedy invited you to the White House.

GR: [Laughs] Yes. I think that was because I was in – I think I was having – we were having a conference with the governor in Baltimore, but something happened while we were out of town and about two hundred blacks and two or three hundred whites almost came together on Race Street, um, and everybody got scared. Um, the guy, Stanley Branch – and Phil Savage – Branch who – I don't know what about Savage, but Branch turned out to be an FBI informer. Uh, when I got back they were all upset, and da-da-da, and, "Oh, it's going to be a Civil War," and da-da-da. And I thought, "Was it really that bad?"

But anyhow, whatever happened – I don't know whether the press called Robert Kennedy. They claimed that Robert Kennedy called there. But that started this – the whole meeting, meetings. Now, we – there had been a relationship between CNAC and the White House through Gelston and, and, and – oh, Maria Shriver's father, Sargent Shriver – were friends, and, uh, and then the friend of my family that had been in the Civil Rights Division, Maceo Hubbard.

JM: Yeah.

GR: But it had not gotten to that point, and so they told us we had to come up there. And, of course, it may have been, because Gelston tells me that there's stuff going on that if we knew about our hair would have been white then. But anyhow, I remember distinctly and I thought, "Gee, was –?" Almost every cross thoroughfare from Cambridge to Washington, there were police cars stationed, and they turned us off. So, I thought, "Gee!" But then, subsequent, subsequent conversations they said that, uh, you know, it was just simply too dangerous.

And, in fact, on that meeting they had of women at the White House that my uncle took me to, what we thought was backfire apparently was a shot over a viaduct. And we kept on going, because we said, "Oh, gee, that's backfire." But when I got back that night, because we went to visit some people in Washington and, I guess, disappeared from some radar [0:45:00], when I got back, the press was in my living room, and the word had gone out we'd been killed.

JM: Is that right?

GR: Yeah. And I had, you know, reflecting back now, I think what – but at that time, my whole reaction was, "That's crazy! What are you all –?"

JB: This was just going from, um, Cambridge –?

GR: Cambridge-Washington and back, yes.

JB: Ugh.

JM: Did you – what were your strategies and mechanisms for dealing with all that pressure and fear – well, pressure?

GR: I don't know. I think – I mean, I'm not saying that I was never afraid. I don't know. I always depended – I always thought, "Well, if they get me, those people in Cambridge will get them." And then I used to recite this thing from Claude McKay, you know, "If I'm pinned –" I'm paraphrasing now – "If I'm pinned against the wall like a hog, let me not die like

one." And although I'm secular, and the part of the – "though I walk through the shadow of death," I used to repeat that when I was going down the street.

JM: You went to jail for a couple of weeks in the spring of '63.

GR: Yeah!

JM: Yeah, um, and, uh.

GR: Plus Gelston arrested – no, who? Somebody arrested me in the Armory, and I had to go over in the barracks and stay.

JM: Yeah. They took you in the Armory, yeah. Can you, um –?

GR: Well, the week, yes, because I think Donna and my mother both were there. And what happened was my mother could not believe that some little corner Coca-Cola place was not going to serve *her,* who had grown up in Cambridge, and Coke in some little cheap store. [Laughs] And so, she was going to go to show that it could be done and got arrested.

Donna and the young people also got arrested, but they – it was right after – whatever happened, happened suddenly, and they weren't in jeans and stuff. They were in their school clothes. So, when they got in jail, they decided among themselves that they would go out, go home, put on jeans, and go lay in the theaters there. Did not tell us. I thought, "What on earth is wrong with these children? Are they turning into Uncle Toms?" So, they – and, of course, by that time, the, the, uh, jail process, people were asking, "You have kids thirteen and fourteen in – what are you doing?" And so, they were anxious to get them out and keep us. And they did that. And when they laid in the theaters, after they had changed their clothes, the police went back and picked them up and beat them. And the adult advisors on the street saw it and went back, house to house, knocking on doors, "They're killing our kids!"

And then, the whole town poured out, I think, about twelve o'clock. And we kept thinking, "What is this roar?" It's this big roar. And we peeped, got on our toes and peeped out through the jail cells. And I said, "I think that's people!" And it was, in their nightgowns and everything, just pouring. This was way, way away. We used to say, "Don't go too far from the Second Ward because we can't get out there, you know, and help you. So, don't –" like that whole thing with the Army, "Don't get too far ahead of your supply line." That's why I thought they were going to mess up in Iraq, but anyhow.

JM: Um.

GR: Um, and then they filled the jails. And then, when, when, when Cambridge started asking surrounding towns to take them, they wouldn't do it. "No, we aren't going to have that mess over here." So, they eventually had to free some people in order to make space for other people. But that's, um, you know, that's when I think the entire town came together.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Your trial would result in a one-cent fine.

GR: [Laughs]

JM: Can you tell that story?

GR: Yes, the judge was Laird Henry. And we went through the trial and testified. I was really surprised. I didn't know what he was going to do. But I think he was conflicted. I'm not sure why. I know what the rumor is, but I think – he formed a committee, and we refused to come out of jail 'til we saw what they did. But he did form a committee, you know, based on our demands. So, the rumor was afterwards that he for a while [0:50:00] had to go in a rest home – I don't know whether that's true or not – but I think he was conflicted, because that, dismissing charges and a penny fine, was – and he did it very seriously, you know. We were like, "What?! What does this mean?" And, of course, he gave me [sighs] a five-minute lecture on my position,

my grandfather, what was I thinking about, what did I have to demonstrate about, wasn't Cambridge fine, and so on.

JM: Um, can you recall the night when, uh, the Citizens Council brought George Wallace to town?

GR: [Chuckles] Yes. Almost everybody up and down the East Coast, black, white, priest, whatever, came into Cambridge. Um, some of the SNCC people didn't want to march. But Wallace had been all over the state of Maryland, and with some people in Cambridge backing him – I'm not sure that all the articles about the fire department – but not only was it segregated, but they had been out in the black community, and black folks had contributed two or three thousand dollars to the building of that thing, and then they were told they couldn't come in. So, that was a big sore. And that Wallace would come and use that place to give the speech was like, you know, a tinderbox. And then, they used that gas – what was it, $(CN)_2$ or something?

JM: $(CN)_2$ gas?

GR: Yes, they used that gas. And, um, the baby they talked about, we – the local doctor went, and they did an autopsy in Baltimore. Now, I don't – I don't know whether it was actually true that the gas did not do it, or whether because of the situation. And we kept questioning that, but that's all we got, that it was not, you know, due to the gas. But that was – and I think Gelston joked afterwards that the wind changed, and the gas blew over on the other side of town and on the soldiers. But they had sent Tawes' brother [Commander Tawes was Governor Tawes' brother] in there.

JM: Whose brother?

GR: Uh, General Tawes' brother. He was not in leadership, because when they put us in the Army trucks and I said to them, "Oh," you know, "we want to talk to General Gelston." And

it was just a perfectly cold blank three or four times. I thought, "What the hell is wrong with them?" And, uh – but I did not know that it was only this, the Tawes guy there. And I think that he was, among other things besides being mean, just scared to death.

JM: Yeah. That use of $(CN)_2$ gas was, uh, was reported at the time to have been the first ever instance of civilian use of that gas.

GR: It may have been the only time because – except when Hilary Clinton made the mistake of apologizing to – oh, what's the guy's name – about them using it over there.

JM: Meaning in –?

GR: In, uh – in, uh –

JM: Palestine?

GR: Palestine, yeah.

JM: But that night you were earlier alluding to the fact that an elderly, one elderly man and an infant died.

GR: Yes. Yes.

JM: And it was believed that their conditions had been so seriously affected by the gas.

GR: Yes. Yes.

JM: Yeah. Um –

GR: And they said people were crawling on the ground. They had taken some of us out. But it made us sick, because the people they arrested with us had it in their clothes, and when they took us over to Baltimore County, you know, you could smell it.

JM: Right.

GR: And then, of course, they didn't know what to do, because they didn't know how to try us. So, there was all that after all this, you know, stuff went on.

JM: Sure. Yeah. Let's, um, spend a few minutes talking about the March on Washington, which would be a very interesting day in so many respects.

JB: I'm going to stop for just a minute.

JM: Okay, let's take a break here for a sec.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JM: Okay, we're back after a short break. I want to ask about the March on Washington.

GR: Okay.

JM: Yeah. Um, I understand that a few weeks before the event, um, you were asked to come and participate, and then some very interesting –

GR: I don't think that was of their free will. I think somebody must have said, "How can you do this?" I don't know who or what, but for a long time –

JM: "Let's add some more women to the program."

GR: Probably. [0:55:00]

JM: And then on the day of the March on Washington, you, uh, you had to think very carefully about what you would wear, what you would say –

GR: Oh, yes, because they called me and told me not to wear jeans. So, then I went all across the Eastern Shore of Maryland – well, we weren't shopping in Cambridge; we shopped in Salisbury [Maryland] by then – looking for something in denim, which isn't like today, that was a skirt or a dress, but still would be – uh, we called them dungarees – still be that material. And finally, in one store I found this skirt with the straps.

Then, when I got there – also SNCC had made us coordinators for organizing people of the Eastern Shore. But I wasn't really – I mean Malcolm's right. I wasn't – it seemed to me it was turning into a big party, when a lot of us were out in the streets, you know, very threatened,

when you're going to have all this music and – and a picnic. But, in any event, everybody seemed to want to do it and da-da-da. So, we – and some people in Cambridge and the union supplied the buses and, um, packing house union, not the one near Cambridge.

And so, we went. When I got to the march tent, there were these women there, Dorothy Height and Rosa Parks, whatever. Briefly talked, and I sat down. Then, one of them got up and said, "Well, we're going to the ladies room." "Oh, okay." So, I sat there and waited for them to come back. In the meantime, somebody from Europe somewhere was doing a satellite thing. I went and did that and came back, and I thought, "Gee, this is a long time."

And Bayard Rustin popped up. And he said, "What are you doing here?" So, I said, "What do you mean, 'What are you doing here?'", I told him. "No!," he said, " out there – out there they've marched to – ." I thought, "Oh!" So, he took me through the crowds and took me to the stage. And when we got there, it was either, um – the two of them were singing together – I think it was, oh –

JM: Are you thinking about Lena Horne?

GR: It was Lena Horne and – but the, uh – I can't believe this – uh, the European dancer and she went as a spy in the war. She couldn't work over here.

JM: We'll get it.

GR: Get it, yes. It will probably come back. I can see her now. They said to me as soon as they brought me, she said, "They removed your chair! You need to go and cuss them out about that!" So, when I looked, all the chairs were filled. And I said, "What do you mean?" "They took your chair!" Then I knew the whole thing was planned, not accident or, you know, this just happened.

So, I said, "Well, forget about it." And I saw Robert Ming from Chicago, and there was some legal thing that we had going on in Cambridge, and I wanted to talk to him about. So, I said, "No, let me go in the back of these people here, because I want to talk to this guy." And that's what I did.

So then, when they called – they called me, I came from the back. And my – I was going to tell people to sit there till they passed the law; don't leave town. And as I said, "Hello," the NAACP guy snatched the mic. Then they took me and Lena Horne, because she had gotten Rosa Parks and was presenting her to the international, uh, satellite and things.

JM: Media, yeah.

GR: Media. And when I found that out, I went to help her, because there would have been no Martin [Luther King, Jr.] if there hadn't been Rosa Parks. So, I think they were annoyed at both of us. So, before Martin spoke, they put us in a taxi and sent us back to the hotel.

JM: And what was the rationale they gave for that?

GR: They didn't want us to be crushed.

JM: By the big crowds.

GR: Yes.

JM: Yeah, getting out.

GR: Well, the rest – everybody else on the platform was okay.

JM: Yeah, yeah. How about your, um –

GR: And then, in the meantime, my daughter was out there being interviewed. And she said, "Well, I don't understand this. It's a picnic." So, that was the position of people from Cambridge at that.

JM: Yeah. Um, can you reflect a little bit about John Kennedy [1:00:00] and Robert Kennedy? You touched on that a little bit earlier, but ultimately how your views about those two men and the –

GR: I liked Robert Kennedy. I think there are probably three people I don't like to watch on TV today, or it's difficult. That's Adam [Clayton Powell], Robert Kennedy, and Malcolm.

JM: When you say Adam, you mean –?

GR: Powell.

JM: Yes, okay.

GR: Adam got that food into Cambridge and a lot of stuff.

JM: I don't know that, don't know that story. "Adam got that food into Cambridge." Can you describe that? I don't know that.

GR: Well, yes. We had applied for the – even Gelston admitted that they needed food. It was surplus food before it went into food stamps. And Adam had arranged for that to go on. The City Council in Cambridge and the governor said, "No. Nobody was starving. Nobody needed food," blah-blah-blah. And he fought that fight and he got it in. And, in fact, Cambridge was so [sighs] whatever that the Guard had to offer to distribute the food.

And then, white folks on the other side of town started calling us, saying they had been threatened to be thrown off of welfare if they showed up at any of those sites where they were distributing it. So, the black men, you know, they, because they worked with them and stuff and they knew who needed food, so they loaded up their vans and stuff and took it out to them.

JM: To white people, to poor white folks?

GR: Yeah. That's in the middle of all this other stuff. [Clears throat]

JM: So, you mentioned –

GR: [Clears throat] Also, the union was trying to organize, and in the middle of all the fight, blacks and whites met at a black Rod & Gun Club to process – uh, the union was here from, I mean, it was here in New York. Uh! The stuff they made in Cambridge went all over the country and world, and now I can't think of the name.

JM: Apparel, wasn't it?

GR: Huh?

JM: Garment workers, wasn't it?

GR: Yeah, it was the garment workers union, but I can't think of the –

JM: Rob Roy?

GR: Rob Roy! You're right.

JM: That was an apparel company. Yeah, and they were paying lower wages for the same work in [Dorchester County].

GR: Yes, to everybody. So, the issue was not jobs, but we *all* that work in this industry want better wages.

JM: Yeah. That was – you know, it's something of – it's kind of ironic, isn't it, that at the same time all of these tensions had divided Cambridge on race –

GR: Yes.

JM: That in the very near term you have black and white union groups working together.

GR: Not near term – right in the middle of it!

JM: Yeah, okay, and trying to build a sort of interracial union effort to achieve better salaries.

GR: Yes. And they blocked, they blocked them, uh, from meeting in any, in their American Legion, whatever their facilities were. They would not let them meet.

JM: No white facility?

GR: And so, the board on the Rod & Gun Club decided, "They can meet here if they're, you know, if they're okay with it." And yes, and I went to one meeting with some of the CNAC people, and they – it's like they tell me happened in Appalachia when SNCC went there. They actually asked the black guys to voice their complaints to these people from New York, because they were afraid, I guess, of the people that controlled Cambridge.

JM: Oh, I see. The white men at the meeting –

GR: Yes. Yes.

JM: Didn't want to speak up.

GR: No, they didn't. No, and they asked some of the black guys to do it.

JM: Sure, yeah.

GR: But they say that happened in Appalachia. Some SNCC people went there, and they said, "Well, you'll have to speak," not because they couldn't speak, but because of the – [sighs].

JM: Yeah. Flowing through all this history we haven't, we haven't, um, yet talked about Malcolm X, and I know that, um, that that's an important part of this story and your sense of this history unfolding.

GR: I had heard about Malcolm from people who left Cambridge and went in the Army and were living in Philadelphia or Baltimore. I had not heard him myself. And I went *and* I didn't think very highly of Elijah Muhammad and whatever that was. But, anyhow, I went to Chicago. Reverend [C.L.] Franklin was having this big thing with SCLC. SCLC was trying to move into the cities. And when I got there –

JM: Detroit.

GR: Detroit. When I got there, several people said to me, "You're in the wrong place." And I said, "Well." They said, "You know, Malcolm is going to be over at Albert Cleage's church, [1:05:00] Reverend Cleage's church. That's where you should be." And I said, "Well, who is Reverend [Albert B.] Cleage [Jr.]?" And they explained. So, I said, "Well, I really would like," yeah, you know, I thought to myself, "I'd like to hear him speak." So, I went over there, and then they asked me up on the stage. And then he spoke. I thought, "Oh!" I thought then he was going to leave.

JM: Nation of Islam?

GR: Nation of Islam. There was something – oh, he said, "Honorable Elijah Muhammad", da-da-da-da – but there was something in the tone that I thought, "I don't think he's going to be there very long." But, in any event, the guy from Cambridge, uh, Bob Bennett, [laughing] who had a clinic there, he almost turned his head totally around. He couldn't get over it! And so, that was my first, uh, you know, personal meeting with Malcolm.

JM: I'm sorry. Mr. Bennett couldn't get over what exactly?

GR: He couldn't get over Malcolm X. He just turned his head around. This is a wealthy upper-middle-class black in Detroit, who has a medical clinic and da-da-da, that came from Cambridge, you know, just full of success. I don't think he was arrogant or anything like that, but he just never heard this before. And he said, "My God, I've never –" I think he talked all the next day. And then he invited some of the SC – some of the SCLC people over to dinner.

And then, after that, I don't remember too clearly. I think we invited him to Cambridge, but he was going to Africa, and then, uh, at ACT, because the men – we invited him there, and he came. I'm not really sure if that – because he was doing the "ballot and bullets" thing.

JM: Right.

GR: And I thought that before the election he should make it clear, if [Barry] Goldwater was running, that it should not be ballots, and he agreed.

JM: That it should not be ballots, right?

GR: Yes.

JM: Right.

GR: So, we, you know, went through the, uh, the ACT thing. And then, actually, the night he was killed – I had been up to one of his things at the, uh, Audubon [Ballroom in Manhattan where Malcolm X was assassinated], but I was also supposed to be there the day that he was killed, and I heard it on the radio. I couldn't believe that.

JM: Is that right?

GR: Yeah. And plus the fact that, actually, we had – my mother had agreed, once that first bombing of the house happened, she had in the parsonage in New Jersey, she had an almost totally complete third floor that his family could go over there and stay.

JM: So, your mother offered –

GR: So, we – huh?

JM: Your mother offered housing to Malcolm X?

GR: Yes. And so, we were going through arranging that, and did he really need it, because also before I left Cambridge, the, uh, the – I have a picture with the, uh, *Muhammad Speaks* [newspaper of the Nation of Islam] photographer from Baltimore. He came to me and told me, "The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, uh, told me to tell you, 'You need to stay off of the stage with Malcolm X.'" So, I told him [laughing], "You – well, Elijah Muhammad has nothing to do with me."

But I think that was a warning. It was after – he was trying to – was the Nation of Islam trying to wiggle out of that "chickens coming home to roost" stuff. But now, this was like, what, six or seven months later. My timeframes are sometimes off. So, no, we were trying, so – so then, you know, that was like a shock. I don't know what Marable said about that, because I can't get past page 62.

JM: You're referring to Manning Marable's new biography on Malcolm X?

GR: Yes, something in there. He sounds – I've heard him before. My union had him. But I think he's kind of, uh, patronizing. I thought he was patronizing there talking about the Civil Rights Movement, although he may have had historical facts right. And I think he – I sense that in the book that I have at my son-in-law's, but I haven't been able to get past 62. And now they tell me there's someplace in the book – I don't know whether it's true or not – where he says his biggest mistake was appearing on the stage with me. Some review said that. But I think the – I just, I just, I doubt very seriously if he's caught [1:10:00] Malcolm. The very fact that he says he reinvents himself – I think "reinvent" is a poor choice of words. I think he grew.

JM: Yeah. I have to ask. So, someone at the time observed of Malcolm X that his most significant mistake was appearing on the stage with *you*?

GR: Yes, one of these reviews. I think I just, I think I just sent it to, uh, to, uh – I'm going to look in the book. I have the book, so I can look at the book, at least the page.

JM: But can you say a little bit more about, um, that would have been a mistake because you were –?

GR: Oh, I guess I was a bad figure for him to be on the stage with. [Laughs]

JM: Because you had become, you had become identified – how would you sum up how you had become known and recognized? What did people understand you to represent by that time?

GR: At the time, I don't know. I was just glad the press was there, because they picked up the issues. They learned while they came in. They didn't know what the hell was going on at the beginning. And, of course, they were meeting with the ministers and the town fathers and stuff. But the longer they stayed, they began to – that was true of the Guard. We thought the Guard was there to keep us in. White folks thought the Guard was there to – I mean, we thought the – they thought the Guard was there to protect us, and we thought the Guard was there to keep us in. And then, they started fighting the Guard and spitting on them and throwing things on them, which made the Guard, as Gelston said, probably didn't care one way or the other.

But they fell on – the little ladies, ladies in our community, when they were standing guard on the corner in the hot summertime, would go out and carry them lemonade and stuff, you know, so these guys kind of got, "Oh, we're being treated nicely!"

JM: Yeah, yeah. Let's take a little break and then we'll come back.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: It's on.

JM: Okay. Uh, Ms. Dandridge [Richardson], let's do a final five or ten minutes to wrap up a little bit.

GR: Okay.

JM: Um, you had emerged as a figure recognized nationally, I think, across the Movement as someone who really had, through her efforts and her position in the community, through the strength of your local movement, had really emerged as a uniquely independent

movement leader. And, um, I'm interested in your thoughts about that and how, um, how you thought about managing your relationship with not only the folks you worked with in Cambridge, but all these national figures who reached or interacted with you in these different ways, oftentimes with a lot of tension.

GR: I think that's probably a good question, but I had been raised, I think, from my family, both parents and grandparents, to look at people and judge them not by titles or whatever surrounded them with that title, and for good or bad, judge them. So, I really did not have a kind of awe of what are normally important people. And also, I think my independence came from the people I was representing and their determination, because I always knew that they were there and maintaining kind of a creative chaos for months and imbalance there that, in the end, we should be able to achieve something or else nothing was worthwhile.

And I think that's what happened. The Guard had to come in and out from each county and rotate. They didn't always have jobs when they went back. The state was spending more and more money. The Kennedys were representing themselves as lifesavers to Africa and emerging countries. And here you have, within an hour and a half or two hours, you know, what is this [1:15:00] and what are you doing about it? And I think a combination of that and maybe – I didn't think that then, but maybe now – because I was a woman. But there were other, you know, there were other women in SNCC that – and also, I have to say, with SNCC they let local people decide what and who, and they did not interfere. I think [James] Forman was a little upset when I – when he asked me about Malcolm. But, actually, he couldn't order me to not have anything to do with Malcolm X. And asked –

JM: Forman asked you to – tell me –

GR: Oh, yes. Well, the thing was, "Do you think – you know, he's very – he's not nonviolent – he's very –." Yes. No, he called me. [Laughs] And I said, "Okay, fine. Y'all don't have to be connected to him. Just let us, you know, we'll do it." But he didn't push it. He just, you know –that one phone call. That's why I was always amused that after SNCC met Malcolm, then they, you know, that's when they had tried all this other stuff and were moving it in another direction.

Uh, I sat in, uh, in – I think it was Burke Marshall's office before Kennedy's office one day while they waited to see what Roy – everybody – Roy Wilkins was going to say and da-da-da. And then, in the end, you know, I had to tell them they had nothing to do with this. They don't have the people in the street. So, for better or worse, you're going to have to deal here. And we're not members of their organization. And, actually, uh, even CORE, who was known to be activist, except for Brooklyn CORE, was not too happy with it.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Uh, Maceo Hubbard called you once and tried to talk you into, uh, into changing your position, I think it was –

GR: [Laughs] I know. This is a guy that used to – when he used to visit on the weekend parties in Cambridge – would send me and my cousins out and give us a penny if we went to the store and bought three cigarettes out of a package for him. No, he came down there, and they offered a job at the head of the, uh, Jobs Training – what did they call it then – for the, uh, Eastern Shore of Maryland.

JM: Um-hmm.

GR: And talked to my mother. They were friends. I know they were – a friend of his wife. But, you know, that was not relevant. He may have been surprised, but right while he sat in my house, almost a riot erupted [uncertain words, probably "with CORE", at 1:18:01]. He ran

out and called for the Guard and called for this and called for Washington. But I think he had come in and out of Cambridge as a young man, going to school with my uncles and cousins, and had a relationship with their family, I think *they* thought that that might have –

JM: The Kennedys?

GR: And my mother, I think, was half falling for it, but anyhow, [laughs] because I had these children, I was getting divorced, you know, what – she was going to have to support me, and so.

JM: Yeah.

GR: But I said no. No, no, no, no.

JM: I'm trying gently to lead you up to that point, because you had a choice message one time that you conveyed to President Kennedy, and I thought it was worth remembering.

GR: Oh, through Maceo Hubbard, yes. Whatever it was – I told him the Kennedy brothers could go to hell, but now I don't remember what it was they wanted.

JM: Yeah, I think they wanted –

GR: If I've said before, that's probably what it is, but I can't –

JM: Yeah.

GR: I remember where I was sitting in my uncle's house, sitting on a step with the telephone. It was something we were either getting ready to do or – [sighs].

JM: They wanted to put a lid on Cambridge, huh?

GR: Oh, yeah, no. And it probably would have been – I think it probably would have been more people shot and killed if that, uh – why can't I remember his first name – if the Tawes guy – he was really, um, Gelston's boss. Gelston was Adjutant General, and he was General. If he had been there over the Guard through all that time, I think things may have been messier.

JM: Yeah, yeah. On balance, Gelston kind of managed to keep things –

GR: Yes. I think, um – I remember when I first saw him. I was with, uh, [Phil] Savage and, um, [1:20:00] [Stanley] Branch at the City Council having a meeting. And he just walked in and sat down. Of course, Savage and Branch jumped up and down, "Who is this man? He has no business being here." Instead of Gelston getting upset or insulted, he just said, "Fine, I'll leave." And I thought, "Oh! He must have a lot of power with somebody," because he didn't do the ordinary thing, "What do you mean? I'm staying!" And it proved that he did.

JM: Yeah, yeah. You mentioned earlier in the interview that, um, I think you mentioned – was it Branch or Savage was later determined to have been an FBI informant?

GR: Branch.

JM: Yeah. What can you tell me about Branch?

GR: Parren Mitchell's papers must have that. He – well, Branch, when the Swarthmore kids came into Cambridge with the kids from the other colleges, Branch had some kind of civil rights organization, and they had been from Swarthmore back in Chester [Pennsylvania]. And then – well, I was really stupid, because I think he had been a detective in a store. But anyhow, he started coming in and out of Cambridge, and he was connected also with the NAACP. But he was really in and out of everything, and when they – actually, the people that told me about it were those, were the anti-war – oh, now I can't think of their names. They broke into the Media, Pennsylvania, FBI office. Priests and nuns, the brothers – I can't think of their names.

JM: That's okay.

GR: Right at the moment.

JM: Yeah.

GR: And then they sent me word that, in the papers that they got, that he had been reporting back and forth through that.

JM: I see, yeah. How did you –?

GR: Because he almost shot Stokely one night, who came through there unannounced. And we were – and when I went downstairs, I found him there, you know, with a gun. But we just thought that was accident, because, you know, there were guns all over the house in case somebody came in.

JM: What happened with Carmichael's visit?

GR: Oh, he was just dropping in on his [laughs], on his way to New York or somewhere from the South.

JM: And what happened?

GR: And it was about three o'clock in the morning. He came up and rang the bell. Branch was downstairs sleeping on the couch. Well, the guns were stacked behind the couch, so he grabbed the gun and got up. Now, since I've found out about his connection with the FBI, I don't know whether that was some fake thing or whether it was a natural instinct or fear or whatever. But it was a little, you know, little upset for four or five minutes.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Um, how did you see the resolution to that very, very active phase, '62, '63, into '64 in Cambridge? What was your sense of what you'd accomplished?

GR: I thought we had accomplished what we wanted. I have – I may have made a mistake. There was a space of time after I left that I didn't understand why they were – seems like the SNCC people left there and went to Atlantic City and had a demonstration. And they were asking for help for SNCC. And I didn't – in reading it in retrospect, I didn't understand it and I didn't understand what was going on, but apparently it righted itself, and they desegregated

the schools, and they started the housing project and stuff. But it seems to me, as I look back, there seems to be like six or seven months when something should have been happening. Um, and I just don't know whether that – what that was, incompetence or what. But I did think that, as it moved forward, that it would make a difference. In terms of white Cambridge, I think maybe some of it when the *extremely* racist Dorchester County Council -- Dorchester *County*, um, elected Lemuel –

JM: Elected –?

GR: Lemuel Chester on the County Council. Um, they, they at some point – the main head of the Orphans Court – so they began to make steps in some of their structures. Um, and then, of course, that desegregation of the busing systems and stuff –

JM: Sure, sure.

GR: Now, as I said when I went back the other day, now they amazingly have a black woman mayor. Her father was on my executive board. In fact, in that picture [someone coughs] with the gun where they were getting ready to stab me, he's the guy whose back is to the camera.

JM: Huh, that's when the National Guardsman has a rifle, and you're pushing it – or bayonet, and you're pushing it away.

GR: Yes.

JM: Yeah.

GR: Yes. I think he was going to try and stab me from behind. But anyhow – and that was the time when Gelston was trying to argue me out of having a demonstration, and these *pow-pow-pow!* I didn't know it was – we both, I think, thought it was guns. But it proved it was tear gas. But it was in that excitement.

JM: Yeah.

GR: So, um.

JM: Let me ask this. What were your – what were your motives, all of your motives, in moving to New York City in '65?

GR: Oh, because my husband lived in New York, I mean, the guy I married lived there. Well, we had signed the agreement, there was leadership left there, um, and I had two girls that had to go to school and be raised. I remember this was not a paid position. This was not an organization in the sense of salaries and office and secretaries and stuff, although we had people that volunteered for some of that stuff. So, this – did not spend the rest of my life doing it. And so, that hopefully had accomplished something, and, if nothing else, that people found out that they could at least fight against the system if they decided to.

JM: Tell me – the last thing I want to ask about is, the last question is, um, there was an event in, uh, in Cambridge for you a few years ago, and I'd love to have you just recall that experience.

GR: Oh, you mean when they celebrated – oh, I thought it was simply amazing! It was beyond my expectations. The people who arranged it were very young at that time. I didn't know where the idea came from, or why, but it amazed me that the whole town was involved.

JM: Not just African-Americans.

GR: Oh, yeah! No, that's what I mean when I say the whole town was involved. I didn't realize that when I accepted it, but once I started on that day through there – so it was like really overwhelming. As I said, when I got to the banquet at the Elks' Home that night and got up to make the speech, I thought mainly probably from ex-Movement people and stuff, I saw the mixed audience. I thought, "Oh, my God! I can't – I have to speak to everybody!" [Laughs] So, then, I just had to kind of make up stuff. I don't even know what it was I said now. But it was

overwhelming. And then, the awards came from all kinds of people in government, which, you know, I did not expect. And then, of course, the new mayor had just been elected. It was just, like, overwhelming.

I had been, earlier – was that earlier? The thing at Washington College?

JM: I'm not certain of those dates.

GR: In retrospect, I'm not sure. But I was surprised at that. And the only reason why I accepted that is because, one, it was on the Eastern Shore, two, did not ever, had not ever remembered hearing about it, and because the president said he had learned about Cambridge by listening to Malcolm X's "Grassroots" speech ["Message to the Grass Roots"]. So, I thought that was interesting, but, um – and it was.

But, as I told Baird Tipson [president of Washington College], if I had known they were there in the '60s, we would have been down there, a private – what is it – the fourth school in the country, upper-class school, all white, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. I used to go to Chestertown [Maryland] with my cousin while he played poker with Lloyd Price and stuff, and the guy – [1:30:00] all these bands and things would come through, and had no idea that anything like that existed in Chestertown! *And*, when I got there, I found that they give a certain percentage of scholarships now to those kids that come out of high school in Kent County.

JM: Any final thoughts, things we haven't touched on?

GR: No, I think this country is going to hell in a hand basket, but other than that –

JM: Hmm, what makes you, uh, what makes you discouraged? I know there are many things that might be on that list.

GR: Well, I think that there's an extremely right-wing and fascist Supreme Court, and I'm saying that after considering slavery and their position on that. But I think, I think now that

stuff they've gotten away with with blacks, they're getting away with with everybody, blacks and whites. I don't think some whites, and especially immigrants – I just had an argument yesterday with a – "I put in my civics, citizenship class – they said this couldn't happen – why are they doing –?" No, you know, that's – you better be aware of what they're doing! I think the Republicans are not just right-wing Republicans. I think they're fascist Republicans. And if they get away with this, you know, all of the people in this country are going to have a time.

JB: Can't argue with that.

JM: Yeah.

GR: Yes.

JM: I, uh –

GR: And I don't know – I mean, I watch, and I think it's because in Egypt I saw all those people out in the street that were poor that I watched. I don't understand why, with some of this, except for the Tea Party – but I think they used organizing principles like SNCC did, and they're going to get too far out there, but there's no opposing entity.

JM: Well, um –

GR: Unless it's in academia, but I can't imagine just people in the country – maybe they don't believe it.

JM: Yeah. Uh, Ms. Dandridge, I'm very grateful for your sharing all this great history and your perspective for the series, and it's been a real pleasure and a privilege to be with you. Thank you so much.

GR: Oh, you're certainly welcome.

JM: Thank you.

GR: Who are the other fifty people? Is it a mixture?

JM: We'll chat with that. Let's just –

[Recording ends at 1:32:37]

END OF INTERVIEW